When Worlds Collide: Feminism, Conservatism and Twentieth Century Authors

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When Worlds Collide: Feminism, Conservatism and Twentieth Century
Authors

by

Madison G. Cooney

A Proposal Submitted to the Honors Council For Honors in English: Literary
Studies

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Entering my freshman year at Bucknell, I was not confident about much except the fact that I wanted to major in English. As I would come to discover later on, I should have been a Political Science major for my love of the discussion of politics. As I tried my hardest to bring politics into my English classes, Professor Siewers took me under his wing to teach me the correct ways to engage with those politics in an English class. I am forever indebted to him for all of his teaching, advice, and encouragement throughout my academic career. He has served as an invaluable resource and a formative part of my three and a half years at Bucknell.

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ABSTRACT

Two streams of literary narratives appearing during the Great Depression grew from personal and historical experiences of their women authors with overlapping but very different perspectives on American cultural history. These were: 1) The accounts of rural frontier Midwestern regional experiences of Laura Ingalls Wilder, as edited and shaped in part by her daughter and writing partner Rose Wilder Lane, in retrospect during the New Deal era; and 2) the 1920s urban African-American experience of Zora Neale Hurston in the context of an emerging national black artistic and intellectual scene. Through a shared feminism emphasizing freedom for women, these authors advanced ideals that are hallmarks of conservative politics today from diverse perspectives.
CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston, author of the classic novel Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), and the mother-daughter writing team of Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane, responsible for the iconic Little House on the Prairie series (1932-1943), shaped literature that helped advance the postwar conservative movement in the United States. These two fictional narratives appeared during the Great Depression and were based on personal and historical experiences and perspectives of women writers living in America in the mid-twentieth century. Both are based on classic but different past experiences in American cultural history: the rural frontier Midwestern regional experience of Laura Ingalls Wilder as edited and shaped in part by her daughter and writing partner Rose Wilder Lane in retrospect during the New Deal era, and the 1920s urban African-American experience of Zora Neale Hurston in the context of an emerging national black artistic and intellectual scene.

These two narratives set forth what would appear to be very different fictional accounts of emerging modern American life, and yet they share a critical perspective, namely that of a conservative worldview. There are many hallmarks of Conservative political thought, but one that stands out is the anxiety that institutions are endangered by contemporary development or by proposed reforms (Muller, 3). This shows up often in the works of Laura Ingalls Wilder. On the other hand, Zora Neale Hurston became known as a prominent conservative African-American intellectual voice in the mid-twentieth century, while Rose
Wilder Lane as editor of her mother’s work and also in her writing career became referred to as a prominent Anglo-American conservative voice in the same period. Both Rose Wilder Lane and Zora Neale Hurston exemplified in their values and writings a type of conservative libertarian feminism that this project seeks to examine by comparing their works, lives, and beliefs. Conservative-libertarianism as defined in this study involves a combination of concern for traditional frameworks of religion and family, or at least suspicion of mass movements and abstract categories replacing them, with a strong emphasis on individual freedom in all spheres (Batchis, 42).

Both Hurston and the Wilder mother-daughter team emphasized personal development rather than revolutionary mass approaches to social problems. They both emphasized learning to work within existing social structures for personal and family development, rather than seeking a utopian overthrow of such structures, as in totalitarian movement around the world at that time including Communism and Nazism. Both of the narratives are based on the authors’ lives and involve looking at how they are willing to do things that they typically would not be doing if they were elite American women of the era. They evoke an ethos of personal growth and development with a disregard of enforced social categorization. They do not emphasize a socially transformative role for the category of women, but rather the opportunity for individual freedom and development. They also looked to the practice of literature as a means of reinforcing personal meaning in life to combat the modern tendency toward what
the philosopher Hannah Arendt has called the intersection of isolation and terror, which Arendt saw as underlying twentieth-century totalitarian movements (Arendt, III).

Hurston, whose novel has become canonical in African-American literature, recognized that the individual is responsible for themselves instead of others being responsible for them. Whether doing good things or bad things, people are responsible for taking care of themselves; others are not liable for taking care of them. This is evidenced by what Hurston said about Thomas Edison: “Must I not also go hang my head in shame when a member of my race does something execrable? The white race did not go into a laboratory and invent incandescent light. That was Edison. If you are under the impression that every white man is an Edison, just look around a bit” (Dust Tracks, 249).

Laced into the story of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s fictional account of her life, which Rose Wilder Lane helped edit, in the Little House on the Prairie series, were new ideas about the value of individual freedom, unregulated markets and limited government involvement in a person’s everyday life. All of these are indicators of conservative-libertarian politics. Throughout the series, the reader becomes familiar with the family’s frontier struggles and encounters views about individual freedoms and a free-market economy, such as, “You work hard, but you work as you please. ... You’ll be free and independent... on a farm” (Farmer Boy, 356). For the American conservative movement, their literary works (and Rose Wilder Lane’s philosophy and polemics) were part of a developing artistic
and intellectual resistance to New Deal politics that had shaped more socialistic
atitudes towards government in the United States before World War II (Miller,
17).

The primary female authors, along with Lane, advanced the conservative-
libertarian movement through the unconventional means of feminism. Feminism,
as defined in a paper by Karen Offen, a gender-studies scholar, is “a theory and
movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means
as an achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted
men” (Offen, 123). Feminism is also often considered to have come in three
waves throughout history, the first wave starting in the late nineteenth century,
however these women do not fit within the traditional wave framework. It is
impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when feminists in the 1960s first
identified themselves as part of a “second wave” of feminism. Likewise it is
difficult to guess what wave of feminism each of the women would have
considered themselves to be apart of, especially considering Laura Ingalls Wilder
arguably was a “frontier feminist” of a form pre-dating or paralleling first-wave
feminism (Hewitt, 2).

The intersection of their literary works chronologically occurred during an
era between the achievement of women’s suffrage, marking in some ways a
hiatus for first-wave feminism, and the post-World War II suburban era that saw
the beginning of second-wave feminism. Laura Ingalls Wilder was acting in ways
that we now could classify as feminist, even though the first wave of feminism
would not have been a group in which Wilder could participate. The first wave of feminism was primarily led by white women in the middle class and the fight for women’s rights was mostly taking place on the East Coast and not in the rural Midwest where Wilder lived her entire life (Hewitt, 3). Even when that first wave did reach the Midwestern states, it would have most likely have taken root in the cities and towns, not out on the farms where women had been helping their fathers and husbands in the field for a significant amount of Wilder’s life. As for Rose Wilder Lane and Zora Neale Hurston, the narratives they were writing fell historically and intellectually in-between the first and second waves, which means that they were feminists within their right but did not prescribe to specific political agendas that were associated with the waves, and instead both women just believed in the overall rights of women to be equal to men.

Both Hurston and the two Wilders reflected Offen’s definition in their lives and work by stressing equality of men and women in status and ability. Throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the protagonist is married three separate times, a mirror of Hurston’s two different marriages. Over the course of the protagonist’s three marriages, she finds her voice and her confidence. The novel tells the story of Janie who, as a black woman in 1937, should be at the bottom of the social hierarchy, but she takes ownership of her personhood and does as she pleases regarding the men in her life. Her first husband is abusive, so she leaves him because she knows that she is strong enough to go out on her own. After her second husband dies, she then marries a much younger man,
again owning herself and her body instead of letting someone else or society tell her what to do, an ideal that the Wilder women both embody.

For Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane, feminism is less overt in their works perhaps more based in their everyday lives. It is not just that the Little House on the Prairie series shows women as capable in a frontier economy, but it is also a feminist work because Laura Ingalls Wilder herself became a pioneering female young adult fiction author. Throughout the series, Wilder’s characterization of herself is as a mostly quiet woman who performs her duties as a wife and mother, and then provider, perfectly. However, by publishing these books and using her voice, she engages in her form of rebellion. Within the novels, there are little acts of rebellion invoking Wilder’s persona’s resentment, sisterly rivalry, and her foolhardy escapades. Her daughter’s influence on her mother’s writing career went in tandem with Rose Wilder Lane’s emergence as a national influential libertarian writer in the mid-twentieth century. Each of the authors exhibits characteristics associated with American Conservative and Feminist movements in their novels and their lives. The combination of these components rarely is seen in the same context, let alone the same novel or set of novels, making this innovative research of the intersection between the two authors, who uphold these characteristics.
CHAPTER 2: How Little Half Pint became Laura Ingalls Wilder: Persona and Politics in Little House on the Prairie

Through the narrative of The Little House on the Prairie series as a hybrid work of memoir-fiction, Laura Ingalls Wilder (with her amanuensis-daughter Rose Wilder Lane) shapes a feminist persona emphasizing independence and self-responsibility, while respecting tradition as related to family life and politics. From the beginning, Laura Ingalls Wilder was taught the value of independence, a hallmark of conservative-libertarian politics and a hallmark of feminism. The first novel in The Little House on the Prairie series, *Little House in the Big Woods*, starts by showing how Pa (the father of the fictional Laura) had to go out and hunt so that his family would have enough food to eat. He could not rely on anyone else to secure the food for his family, so that meant if he succeeded in hunting then his family would eat, but if he did not succeed, they would not have any food (*Little House in the Big Woods*, 4). With such independence comes a sense of responsibility not only for oneself but one’s family as well. Laura, the character, was taught by Pa’s example in the series. Likewise, Laura Ingalls Wilder was the same way herself in real life with respect to raising her child, Rose (who is likewise the fictional daughter of the fictional Laura in the series). It is this independence that is the foundation of the author Laura Ingalls Wilder’s life, her writings, and their influence.
The Little House on the Prairie series has three themes prevalent throughout, which shape the conservative and libertarian female identity expressed by the distinctive Ingalls Wilder-Wilder Lane writing team. The first is the idea of independence from either government or close entanglement of one’s household and personal life with extended family or neighbors. This theme also significantly involves freedom from the technology of the period: “it is the sweet simple things of life which are the real ones after all” (“A Bouquet of Wild Flowers”). This thought from Laura evokes a strain of conservatism in America identified with 20th-century conservationism. The fictional Ingalls family did everything by themselves, mainly without the assistance of technology, for the first five books of the series, showing an independence from the newfound ideas the government had developed.¹

The second relevant theme in the series as examined in this study is self-reliance, which goes hand in hand with the subject of independence, but is distinguished by the fictional family not seeking even neighborly help with their challenges. Instead, they face their problems head-on. The characters of Laura and Pa exemplify this self-reliance more than the rest of the Ingalls family. An example of Wilder’s self-reliance and confidence in herself is evident in her statement, “I believe we make most of our luck without intending to” (These Happy Golden Years, 137). Laura believes that she is self-reliant enough to

¹ The Wilder family has to take a railroad because of Ma’s sickness, meaning that they had to use the technology that had been developed.
make her own luck, instead of relying on anyone else to make things go the way they should for her.

The last theme is the family’s unbreakable spirit, a type of frontier American stoicism extolled in the stories, because even when life on the prairie gets complicated and the family loses much, their spirit is never broken (as portrayed in the books). When the family had to move yet again, both Ma and Mary were still too weak from sickness, so Laura had to make sure that the family made it West to Pa (*Silver Lake*, 35). It was this journey West that solidified Laura’s unbreakable spirit. They face sickness, death, and multiple moves throughout the series but they keep on going, never giving up on their dreams, and very rarely complaining about their circumstances.

These three themes are primary elements in the construction of a feminist conservative-libertarian persona by the real-life writing duo of Ingalls Wilder and Wilder Lane, an ideal that would fit well with mid-20th-century American values. This idea also challenges more liberal political ideologies and their expression in a feminist movement that in many ways became more subversive of the type of alternative or conservative feminist ethos advanced in these books.

Generations of women in Wilder’s real-life family raised their children, specifically their daughters, in such severe conditions, as did many pioneer Americans, defying the stereotyped “cult of domesticity” of an industrializing nation. In frontier society, both men and women had central economic roles that formed a household partnership (Miller, 50). For their daughters to be successful,
they had to be tough, but also self-sufficient. Wilder’s maternal grandmother, Charlotte Tucker Quiner, was widowed during her eighth month of pregnancy with her sixth child. (Fellman, 12). The loss of her father made Wilder’s mother, Caroline, long for stability after years of tumultuous childhood. Although Caroline thought she found a balanced marriage relationship with Charles Ingalls, the neighbor boy next door to her childhood home in Illinois, she would soon find out that life with him meant many moves across the country, away from her mother and sisters, and onto the Kansas frontier. These moves were hard on Caroline not only because of her longing for stability, but also because she had four daughters to raise into competent young ladies who would one day become housewives. The tension between a longing for stability and the desired outcome of independence helped shape both the self-reliance and stoic ethos of the Wilder Lane articulation of frontier feminism.

To instill a sense of responsibility in her daughters, the fictional Caroline (affectionately referred to as “Ma” throughout the series) pushed them to take their share of childcare, housework, and other work around the house to earn a few dollars, similar to Wilder’s real-life experience (Fellman, 14). Laura, both as portrayed in the series and in biographical recollections of her, was a spirited young girl. Many of the activities in which she wanted to participate could have ruined her chances at becoming a respectable married woman, such as taking solo buggy rides and cutting wood by herself. However, Ma and Pa’s efforts ultimately saved Laura from herself. Parallel with real life, the balance between a
conservative nuclear family and a more libertarian daring nature shaped the narrative that became the saga of Wilder’s childhood and in turn an influence on American popular culture.

Through the combined efforts of her Ma and Pa, Laura became independent and learned a sense of responsibility for herself. A sense of self-sufficiency is evident in the first book of the Little House on the Prairie series when Ma and Pa allowed Laura and her sister Mary to explore the woods that surround them on their own (Big Woods, 22). A specific example of learning personal responsibility from a young age is seen in Little House in the Big Woods when Laura and Mary are helping Pa make bullets to take with him when he hunts (Big Woods, 46). The making of bullets took place over a fire, which made the outside casings hot to touch. The bullet was also shiny so, “sometimes Laura or Mary could not help touching it. Then they burned their fingers. But they did not say anything because Pa had told them never to touch a new bullet. If they burned their fingers that were their fault” (Big Woods, 46).

The next book in the Little House on the Prairie series, Farmer Boy, is often not even considered part of the set because it is not about Laura or Laura’s childhood. Instead, the book is about the man who would become her husband, Almanzo Wilder. This book follows a part of Almanzo’s childhood, which is relevant to Laura becoming the independent woman that she was throughout her life. Wilder could never have been as independent as she was if her husband was not supportive of her, so Almanzo’s upbringing helps to show how all the
moves they made during their relationship worked, as evidenced in some of the later novels of the Little House on the Prairie Series. It is in Farmer Boy that some of the first ideas about the free-market economy are shown by Almanzo’s father saying to him, “You work hard, but you work as you please. ... You’ll be free and independent... on a farm” (Farmer Boy, 356)

Free-market economy is an economic system in which the government does not interfere in business activity (Muller, 13). This idea of unregulated business activity is a conservative-libertarian idea, and in modern-day politics, conservative-libertarian politicians fight for laws to be passed that keep individual businesses from being interfered with by government officials. While this happens in modern-day American politics, it happened in the everyday lives of Laura and Almanzo Wilder. Living the independent Midwestern farm lives that they did, they earned the right to non-interference from the government. According to Robert Sirico (25), a modern author on the subject of free-market economy, owning land and having it be free from government interference is a personal right, one that was exercised by the Wilders’. With their right to their property came the right they had to free-market economy, but the politicians on the other side of the political spectrum do not always see it that way. Instead, those on the more liberal side of politics primarily believe that a person has the right to bodily autonomy, but not economic freedom. However, they fail to see

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2 Examples of conservative-libertarian politicians are Senator, Rand Paul, and United States Representative for Michigan, Justin Amash.
what Laura and Almanzo saw, which is that to be truly free, one must be free from government interference in business as well as in personal matters.

The Little House on the Prairie series takes the reader on a journey starting with Laura’s childhood, where, as demonstrated, she learned responsibility and self-reliance. Pa, her father, called her “half-pint” because she was so small, yet so determined, meaning she was only half of something because of her size, but just as capable. The narrative follows her journey into her teenage years where she is determined to help send her sister Mary to college (Little Town on the Prairie, 37). She does not expect that anyone else will help her sister, not even her parents, so she takes it upon herself to get a job in town. Laura works through the poor circumstances that life has given her; to get the best she can for her sister because she knows that it is no one’s job to help Mary. Mary is blind and Laura could likely ask for a handout from someone; instead of doing that, she gets an honest job, consisting of hard work, but Laura believes that it is worth it.

Throughout the rest of the Little House on the Prairie series, Laura has many opportunities to show her political beliefs through her actions and her narrative voice. Laura was a small-town woman, who grew up in rural, Midwestern America, whose self-reliance and dislike of progressiveness show her true conservative colors. Not only did she believe in the free market economy, but she also demonstrated to her readers in The Long Winter her belief in the difference between Americans and foreigners. The narrator says to
The reader “Ma and her girls were Americans, above doing men’s work” (*The Long Winter*, 4). The statement shows that Laura, her sisters, and Ma, were above doing work on the field because they believed that they were better than that; however, they did not think that foreigners were better than that. While the comments from Ma in *The Long Winter* about their status versus the situation of immigrants tends toward nationalism, willingness to help her father with what is traditionally considered “man’s work” shows her feminist attitude emerging even from a young age, and the tendency towards nationalistic views is typical of modern-day Conservatives. These comments lend themselves to exhibiting the combination of feminism and conservatism that exists inside Laura Ingalls Wilder. Researcher Peter Hayes Gries (116) studied the differences in nationalistic attitudes between modern-day liberals and conservatives. According to Gries (121), conservatives endorse American superiority over other nations more than liberals because they value authority over foreigners more, like Ma does, and also because they prefer to be separated from foreigners to maintain a sense of American purity.

Wilder displays nationalistic attitudes that line up with the nationalistic views of conservatives today, but also shows her dislike of the progressive movement in America during her lifetime, which she seems to identify with technological changes coupled with teleological assumptions about historical betterment. “These times are too progressive,” she wrote in *The Long Winter*. “Everything has changed too fast. Railroads and telegraphs and kerosene and
coal stoves; they’re good to have, but the trouble is, folks get to depend on ‘em” (Long Winter, 192). Here Laura shows that she would rather the times not be changing because she fears the dependence of Americans on unnecessary things. Given the period she grew up in and the experiences that are chronicled throughout the series, she knows firsthand what America is like without the invention of all this new technology. While Laura would understand that the invention of railroads would make life easier, she also knows that traveling across the country by wagon is not impossible. Laura and her family moved from Wisconsin to Kansas, a move that would have been easier by railroad, but was made before the invention of the railroad (Little House on the Prairie, 9). The critique of technology as a governing paradigm for life, present in the series, was associated with aspects of modern conservatism negatively with both Marxist dialectical materialism and global neoliberalism, and as in C.S. Lewis’ criticism of “technocracy” in his book The Abolition of Man, contemporary to the authors studied here.

Wilder expresses some attitudes that would be typical of conservatives during the time she was alive and in modern times by expressing her sentiments about the newfound technology. “Progress means movement in a desired direction, and we do not all desire the same things for our species” (Horn, 1). At the heart of this attitude about inevitable progress through technology is the idea of self-reliance that grew so wildly in rural America. This self-sufficiency can be seen running rampant throughout every novel in the Little House on the Prairie.
series. The theme of self-reliance weaves its way through all of the novels, beginning with *Little House in the Big Woods*, where the readers see Pa coming in from the woods with meat on his shoulders for them to store throughout the winter (*Big Woods*, 4). They knew if they did not provide for themselves, then no one else would provide for them. The self-reliance in *Farmer Boy* can be seen through the conversation Almanzo’s father has with him about being free and independent, but it can also be seen through the narration stating “There was no time to lose, no time to waste in rest or play. The life of the earth comes up with a rush in the springtime” (*Farmer Boy*, 124). Even as a boy, Almanzo knew that if he did not prioritize the work, then he would not survive, thus meaning that he had to be self-reliant to survive.

As the series continues, the theme of self-reliance grows even more prevalent. Laura and Mary are waiting for Ma and Pa to return from a trip to town when suddenly they realize that someone else’s cattle are eating the hay that Pa was saving for their cattle. Instead of running to town to get Pa, Laura decides that she is going to take matters into her own hands by chasing away the cattle from the hay. At this point, Laura is only seven years old, but she shows enough bravery and self-reliance at that moment to seem much older. While Laura is afraid that the cattle may injure her, she does not back down, and eventually, she scares off the animals (*On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 70). As the series progresses, Pa learns to do something new to provide for the family, all because there are no schools for the girls where they used to live in the Midwest. He is
self-reliant enough that he can learn to do a new job to provide for them (*By the Shores of Silver Lake*, 30). Laura discovers her self-reliance from Pa more than Ma because, at the beginning of *By The Shores of Silver Lake*, Ma is tired of being sick with scarlet fever and is not as dominant as she was at the start of the series. She used to be a pillar of strength for the girls to look up to, but the fever seems to have taken all the fight out of her (*Silver Lake*, 2). It is from this point forward in the series that Laura becomes more like Pa than Ma when it comes to her independence and self-reliance.

Laura’s freedom regarding the cattle not only shows that she believes in taking matters into her own hands, rather than waiting for someone to help her, it also indicates that she believes she is just as capable as any man. She could have awoken the cattle hand, Johnny, to have him deal with these strange animals eating Pa’s hay, but she did not because she knew that she could drive off the cattle just as well as he could. Her self-reliant and feminist attitudes and actions only grow stronger as she grows older throughout the series. In *The Long Winter*, Laura again is determined that she will send Mary to college by doing whatever she can. For Laura to have such determination before she is even a teenager shows there is a significant strength within her, as well as the self-reliance that is taking root, although her age still gives her some doubt about what she is supposed to do, or the way she is meant to act to be self-reliant (*Long Winter*, 127). Laura surprises Ma with a comment during a storm about living in town instead of living on their own out in the middle of nowhere as they
have previously. “What good is it to be in town?” Laura says. “We are just as much by ourselves as if there wasn’t anybody in town.” Ma’s reply is characteristic of the beliefs that she and Pa have tried to instill in Laura throughout her childhood: “I hope you don’t expect to depend on anybody else, Laura.”

The self-reliant attitude instilled in her at home carries into her interactions with others, specifically her interactions with her classmates at school. During The Long Winter, many blizzards take place, and after a particularly bad blizzard, Laura returns to school and one of her classmates asks her what she would do if she were caught in a blizzard. Laura’s response is a very confident, “I wouldn’t get caught” (Long Winter, 135). Laura believes that she would not be trapped in a blizzard because she would know what to do to avoid being caught. Wilder’s self-reliance appears again in the Little Town on the Prairie at the very beginning of the novel when Pa is building the other half of the shanty that he began building when they arrived on the prairie in South Dakota. Typically it would be a son’s job to help Pa create things, and it would be the daughter’s job to help with housework, but without a son to help him, the duties of helping Pa fall on Laura while she also helps Ma with housework (Little Town, 16). Wilder’s ability to play both roles in the household makes her self-reliant and independent, but specifically doing the role that a man would typically do shows her feminist side.

At fifteen, Laura began teaching school to younger children in a settlement that was twelve miles from home. She was so young, yet so determined to help
support her family, although she still had her doubts that she was prepared to teach school, instead of attending it. Pa again instills confidence and self-reliance in Laura by reminding her, “You’ve tackled every job that ever came your way. You never shirked, and you always stuck to it till you did what you set out to do. Success gets to be a habit, like anything else a fellow keeps on doing.” The way that Pa speaks to Laura, it becomes more evident that not only does Laura do jobs that a son would do, Pa sees her as both a daughter and a son, meaning he believes that she is as capable as any man at doing something (Golden Years, 3).

Though Laura is not always confident in herself and her abilities, she knows that she is as capable as a man at doing things because when speaking to her younger sister Carrie about her aspirations, Laura discloses that she does not believe that she wants to get married. Most women during this period married because they needed their husbands to labor in the fields to provide for them and to build the structures where they would live. By Laura expressing disinterest in marriage, it shows that she believes that she does not need a man to provide for her. Instead, Laura will provide for herself (Golden Years, 40).

Not only did Laura think that she could provide for herself, but she also believed that she could prove this to everyone else. She and Almanzo Wilder went riding together every Sunday, which most would interpret as meaning that they were courting. However, Laura would say otherwise. She instead was just enjoying his company, according to her thoughts. Almanzo knew from the very
beginning that Laura was independent, so he did his best not to rush her into anything that might scare her. He also knew that she believed that she could take care of herself, so he gave her that opportunity. She was allowed to drive the horses when they went riding together on Sundays even though they were an unruly bunch that was not yet trained to be driving horses. In this way, Almanzo complemented her feminist spirit and allowed her to bloom (*Golden Years*, 219). Not only did Almanzo allow her to be independent, he respected her opinions to the extent that before he proposed, he asked her if it would please her to be engaged to him. Asking Laura about marriage before proposing gave her the opportunity to say no if she did not want to marry him, showing how much he respected her as a person (*Golden Years*, 236).

Laura and Almanzo struggled through their first year of marriage because, as Laura says in the very beginning of *The First Four Years*, a farmer’s work is thankless for the farmer and his wife. However, Almanzo gives her the opportunity to help out wherever she can, and he does not limit her to doing only the household chores. Laura learned enough self-reliance at home with Pa that she can complete the housework and still help Almanzo outside (*The First Four Years*, 81). They also have their daughter in the *First Four Years*, Rose, who exemplifies the unbreakable spirit that presents itself throughout the series; when she is born, she struggles to survive, with a doctor being needed to come to make sure she is going to be okay.
The unbreakable spirit of the Ingalls family can be seen from the inception of the series. Pa feels that the Big Woods in Wisconsin is becoming too crowded, so he moves his family West to what is considered to be Indian territory. Making this move involves a common factor of the American dream: risk-taking (Tocqueville, 628). Pa believes that even though he will be among one of the first people to settle in this Indian territory, he will be putting himself and his family in a position to lay claim to the best land when the federal government opens it to settlement (Little House, 1).

The move to Indian territory is hard on the family for many reasons, the most prominent reason being that they are moving away from all of their loved ones in the Big Woods to be on their own. While this is a demonstration of independence, it is also a demonstration of the strength that underlies their spirit to be capable of moving so far away from the only life they have ever known. Laura was given this example at such a young age that she never knew anything else. While their strength as a family may have faltered throughout the series, the spirit that she saw in Ma and Pa never broke, and they passed this spirit on to her.

On The Banks of Plum Creek holds another example of the strength and spirit of the Ingalls family. The crop in the West where they moved was reduced, so Pa decided that he needed to go East to provide for his family. However, he could not move the entire family for such a short period while the crop in the East was healthy (On the Banks, 210). While Ma knew it would be hard on all of them
to have Pa gone, she knew that without the money he would make while he was back East, they would not make it much longer without needing to move again. The Ingalls family trudged on through the months without Pa, and while they were sad without him, the family kept doing the things that they knew they had to do to survive. Their ability to work on the prairie without Pa is another example of their unbreakable spirit. The girls in the Ingalls family were alone another time in the same novel because Pa went to town and then a blizzard suddenly came upon them. He promised Ma that if a storm came he would stay in town for the evening, but this did not stop Ma from worrying about him. Nevertheless, Ma persevered and did all of the chores that Pa would have done if he had been home to do them. Ma was a shining example to the girls of unbreakable spirit until she could no longer be an example because she was too tired and worn out (On the Banks, 304).

Ma ended up with scarlet fever, as did Mary, so Laura had to step up and become responsible for all of her siblings. Laura carried on Ma’s unbreakable spirit throughout the rest of the series because Ma did not have much strength. Although it is not depicted in the novels, in the period to which they pertain, Ma had a son who died of the fever that also took Mary’s eyesight (Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder, 36). While this did not break Ma, it weakened her to the point where Laura needed to take over most of the household chores and help Pa whenever she could. Laura came to be a young woman in By The Shores of Silver Lake. This transition for Laura was quick as Ma got sick and Mary began to
lose her eyesight very quickly. When the family had to move yet again, both Ma and Mary were still too weak, so Laura had to make sure that the family made it West to Pa (Silver Lake, 35).

“Pa and Laura stacked the last load of slough hay on a hot September afternoon” (Long Winter, 27). Stacking hay was a man’s work, but since Pa did not have a son to help him and Ma was still weak, the duties fell to Laura. She helped Pa the best she could even though she was small and she was still only eleven years old. Laura was not scared to have Pa rely on her because she knew that if she did not help him, he would lose the crop that he worked so hard to farm for the family (Long Winter, 28). Her unbreakable spirit came to define her as the woman that she would soon become. Laura longed to be independent and was determined to have a job to help Mary even though Laura knew that having a job and helping Pa at home would be hard for her (Little Town, 36).

Even though Laura was scared to have all the responsibility of a job and chores at home, she asked Ma if she could have the job because she knew that she could help the family. Without watching Ma and Pa when she was younger be strong when struggling with moving, not having enough money and with sickness, Laura may not have had the strength and determination to find a job. However, she had both persistence and an unbreakable spirit, so off to town she went to work a job (Little Town, 38).

It is this same unshakeable spirit that opens the next novel in the series, These Happy Golden Years, as Laura leaves home to be a school teacher over
twelve miles away from home. While Laura struggles in her new setting with the boarder’s wife being unpleasant to her and with her size making her smaller than some of her students, she perseveres through those things to be a teacher (Golden Years, 26). Even though the students give her trouble some days, they still obey her when she instructs them to do something, because they see her strength and do not wish to challenge her for fear they may lose (Golden Years, 32). It is the same indestructible spirit that Laura has that convinces her that she can take a test that she hasn’t had time to study for because of all the help she is giving to Pa at the house (Golden Years, 134). Nevertheless, she passes the test and was teaching school on the family's homestead within two weeks.

Laura married Almanzo even though he was a farmer and she did not want to marry a farmer. Despite that, she was determined that if they could make it a few years, they could make it a lifetime together. Laura and Almanzo lacked resources the first few years of marriage, but things started to flourish after they had their daughter, Rose. However, before she was born, Laura spent days at home by herself while Almanzo went to town to sell things or to find work to make ends meet for them. One of the days that she was home by herself, she was overtaken by Indians who wanted to come into her house, but the doors were locked so they could not get in. Unfortunately, the barn where Laura and Almanzo’s horses were kept was not closed, so when the Indians could not enter Laura’s house, they went to the barn. Laura was not about to allow her horses or her saddle to be stolen, so she followed them to the barn. Without her strength
and personality, she would have been afraid to confront the Indians, and she and Almanzo could have lost their horses. Luckily, her unbreakable spirit allowed her to face the Indians, making them disappear without touching anything that belonged to her and Almanzo (*The First Four Years*, 31).

Her spirit is what helped her make it through the birth of her daughter and the years that followed. When Rose was still young, Laura and Almanzo both came down with a terrible case of diphtheria, which meant that Rose had to go away with Ma until they could recover. Once they both thought they had recovered, Rose came home, but Almanzo tried to return to work too quickly and ended up with temporary paralysis in both legs (*First Four*, 89). From that point forward, Almanzo struggled with using his feet the way he used to be able to, so Laura had to assume some of the work that Almanzo used to do while also raising Rose. Without the independence, self-reliance and unbreakable spirit that were instilled in her at a young age, Laura might not have been able to do all the things that she had to do so her family could survive. However, her independence, self-reliance, and unbreakable spirit made her who she was, giving her the ability and strength to carry on through the hard years. Those characteristics defined her as the feminist and conservative-libertarian that she was, in both her fictional life and her real life.

Though a strong “frontier feminist,” Wilder may have had some help writing and certainly had help editing her famous Little House on the Prairie series. The close trans-generational collaboration between the mother/daughter
team of Wilder and Wilder Lane developed over time, as Wilder Lane tutored her mother in writing her series, and then edited, revised, and assisted with the publication of her mother’s books. Meanwhile, Wilder Lane was able to draw upon stories about her mother and father in writing and translating them into some of her own solo novels and short stories (Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane, 20). While both women gained something from the collaboration, it appears that Wilder learned more literarily from her daughter than the other way around, as Wilder Lane was the one who was trained in writing and publishing, and Wilder had only gone to school until her preteen years (Becoming Laura, 12).

The collaboration between the women first began as Wilder Lane pushed her mother to write about her pioneer experiences to make money to help save the family farm. Wilder wrote her original novel, Pioneer Girl, as a non-fictional account of her life as a pioneer woman who grew up traveling around and continued that life on the frontier through her adult years (Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane, 24). Wilder Lane then tried to help her mother publish the novel using the literary connections she had obtained through her own career as a writer, but was not successful in her attempts to publish Pioneer Girl. After the rejection of Pioneer Girl, the literary collaboration began to take place because Wilder Lane got a recommendation from an editor to turn the books into more romantic, fictional accounts of what happened. Thus the writing collaboration was forged between mother and daughter (Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder
Lane, 25). Some scholars, such as John Miller, researching the lives of Wilder and Wilder Lane, believe that Wilder Lane only edited the book (25); others, like William Holtz, (379) believe that Wilder Lane ghost-wrote her mother’s famous series. Regardless of which is true, the simple fact remains that Rose Wilder Lane played a role in the writing of the Little House on the Prairie series, thus making Wilder Lane and Wilder a mother/daughter team.

Rose Wilder Lane, as well as helping her mother write the series, grew up to be a famous conservative-libertarian writer. Wilder Lane was famously known for her individualist politics, which stemmed from her own upbringing in the rural Ozarks with her mother, Laura Ingalls Wilder, after her mother’s family had moved to Missouri from Kansas (Fellman, 14). Wilder Lane’s principal personal, professional, and political goal was to stand on her own two feet and to pursue her ambitions free from a variety of social restraints. Specifically, she wanted to break free from gender ideologies that urged her to marry rather than pursue a career, and the more subtle gender roles that said independent women who had curiosity and desire to travel violated the traditional boundaries of female experience (Ehrhardt, 95). Both of those goals showcase the way that Wilder Lane embodies both feminist and conservative-libertarian ideologies within her personality and actions.

Wilder Lane was a prominent writer critiquing the New Deal because of the way that it conflicted with her politics. The cornerstones of Wilder Lane’s politics are self-reliance, hard work, and perseverance in the face of adversity,
which connects with the pillars of conservative-libertarian politics (Ehrhardt, 96). While Wilder Lane abhorred going home to her parent’s farming lifestyle because she enjoyed her freedom much more, she acknowledges that all of the hardships that she endured while living on the frontier helped her become an acclaimed writer. The adversities she experienced in childhood reinforced her attitude of individualism and self-reliance (Beito and Beito, 555). This individualism not only bolstered her conservative-libertarian politics but it also strengthened her identity as a feminist.

The two sides of Wilder Lane, both her conservative-libertarian side and her feminist side, fit together like two pieces of a puzzle as one informs the other. Her politics inform her attitudes about feminism and women being just as capable as men. The ideas about feminism were first introduced through Wilder Lane’s writings about the war, specifically her essay titled “The Girls They Leave Behind.” This article started off as though it were going to be a typical story about the tragedies of love and loss during the war; however, it took a surprising turn at the very beginning of the essay: “the khaki-clad youth who entrains for the war today carries in his heart the picture of a girl, just as his grandfather did, but he has not left her waiting with clasped hands for his return” (Lane, 32). Wilder Lane went on to describe all the things that the woman can do, such as travel or work, which she could not do during past wars. In this way, Wilder Lane made no effort to hide her feminist views, just as she made no effort to hide her conservative-libertarian views. The combination of independence, self-reliance, and optimistic
spirit evident in the books also meshed well with certain aspects of American culture noted as early as the mid-19th-century by the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville in his famous book Democracy in America. There he described a sort of self-help ethic involving voluntary organizations (including at base families) that he described as typical of the emerging American democracy, resonating with Jeffersonian agrarianism. This background functioned as a context for Wilder Lane’s emphasis on individual freedom for herself as a woman within to some extent still traditional family structures.

Not only was Wilder Lane open about these conservative-libertarian views, she even produced a protege, Roger MacBride, who ran for president on the Libertarian party ticket in the 1970s. Wilder Lane also played a significant role in nurturing of the Freedom School. In 1958, a man named Robert Le Fevre, who had been strongly influenced by Wilder Lane’s novel The Discovery of Freedom, asked her to come visit his “Freedom School,” which he founded to promote the individualist principles that Wilder Lane had taught him. This school taught a few Libertarians who went on to run for President at one time or another (Holtz, 373). While her political views were rooted in individualism that she inherited in part from her time as a pioneer girl, she also believed in limited government and a laissez-faire economy, views that went deeper than anything she learned from her mother (Holtz, 287). While Wilder believed in the things that Wilder Lane came to be passionate about, the way that Wilder Lane wrote about them
displayed the clear difference between Wilder’s passive beliefs and Wilder Lane’s dedication to the advancement of her political ideologies.
CHAPTER 3: Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Literary Persona of Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston was one of the leading authors and intellectuals during the Harlem Renaissance period of the 1930s in American literature. Hurston's literary achievement is one to be celebrated not only because of her rise out of the poverty that she was born into, but also because of the resistance she showed towards being described as a stereotyped African-American woman. As an intellectual and as a thinker, Hurston based her literary work and her feminism upon her independent life philosophy and politics. An unflattering individualist, Hurston believed in personal industry, individual accomplishment, and female self-empowerment (Plant, 35). Instead of thinking that groups were more capable of making a change, Hurston thought that it was indeed persons as a single unit who made the most difference in the world, in part paralleling Rose Wilder Lane’s emphasis on the individual, with less emphasis on family. Her life philosophy that promoted individualism not only spilled over into her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road, but also into her literary fiction, in her best-known novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Zora Neale Hurston was the fifth child and second daughter to be born in her family, and in her words, “if the first daughter born was to be his favorite, then the second daughter was to be his least favorite” (Boyd, 17). Hurston always felt
growing up that her father, preacher John Hurston, never accepted her, as a
tomboyish second daughter, but this lack of a loving relationship between them in
her view helped Hurston to develop as an independent spirit and writer. Also,
without her father deciding to move the family from Alabama to Eatonville,
Florida, Hurston would have missed out on the most crucial years of her
development. Essentially everything that she would grow up to write and to
believe in, had its origin in Eatonville, according to her primary biographer (Boyd,
25). Eatonville is a town in Orange County, Florida, United States and it is part of
the Orlando metropolitan area. Eatonville was incorporated on August 15, 1887,
and it was one of the first self-governing all-black municipalities in the United
States (Boyd, 26). By setting up their own communities, African-Americans there
wanted to ensure that the communities would remain safe because their police
officers would patrol the area, reducing crime within those communities.

When Hurston’s family first moved to Eatonville, she was known as a
happy “mama’s girl.” Unfortunately, her mother Lucy got sick and died when
Hurston was still just a teenager, a loss that would haunt her for the rest of her
life (Boyd, 45). After the death of her mother, Hurston became a seemingly
rebellious young adult who could not accept that the world had treated her so
poorly. She left home due to an argument with her father on the day of her
mother’s death (Boyd, 45). Instead, Hurston found a home and solace in her
writing. After this loss of her family home (she ended up working to pay her way
at a boarding school in Jacksonville, Florida), Hurston would go on to write about
her mother’s death saying that, “If I could have known what that moment meant to him [her father], I could have set my compass towards him and been sure” (Boyd, 46). But she didn’t perceive her father as grieving and bonding with her in grief at their loss. It was this moment that changed Hurston’s life forever. While it is a tragedy that her father could not embrace her and help her understand the death of her mother, she became a better writer because of it. Scholars agree that this moment after her mother’s death was foundational in shaping her authorial persona as a fiery, independent woman.

That transformation across a decade or more led Hurston to participate in the Harlem Renaissance. Hurston was not around at the genesis of that cultural scene, but arrived when Alain Locke, a man who had a Ph.D. from Harvard and was the first African-American Rhodes scholar (Boyd, 90), had discovered her work when she was at Howard University and encouraged her to move to Harlem to participate in the literary movement. It was at this time in her life that she could learn from some of the great writers of the period, like Langston Hughes. She was one of the only women to participate in the movement, and that was in part because of her spirit. Hurston was fiercely independent, unlike many of her female counterparts who were dependent on men for things that Hurston was not due to her early separation from her father and family home (Boyd, 94).

During the Harlem Renaissance, while Hurston was living and working in Harlem, she liked to attend a church that was nearby. When Hurston spoke of the church she attended there was no mention of attending church for religion,
but rather attending the church because “the rousing music and dramatic sermons reminded her of home” (Boyd, 96). While religion was a big part of Hurston’s upbringing since her father became a minister when Hurston’s family moved to Eatonville, she was not particularly religious. She has never been known to comment much on religion, despite her most famous book title containing God’s name. The most that she commented on God was during a speech at the University of North Carolina where she said “You have the mistaken idea that we [African-Americans] are more religious than you [white Americans]. We’re more ceremonial than you. We’re not half as scared of God as you…” (Boyd, 328). Even during this speech, she was commenting on the difference between white and black attitudes towards religion and not specifically on her own beliefs.

Religion may have played a role in Hurston’s upbringing just as family and community did, however. Within the structures of family and community were the beginnings of the formation of Hurston’s self-perception, her values, and her intellectual viewpoint of the world around her (Plant, 35). Hurston’s development of ideas and opinions were not only influenced by her family and community, but also by other intellectuals of her period, and philosophers who came before her. One scholar of her time who influenced her feelings towards what she called “the black race,” among others, was Booker T. Washington. Washington became the leading spokesperson for African-Americans after the death of Frederick Douglass. Washington and Hurston were alike in thinking that they would carry
their weight in this world individually and not the weight of “the Race.” Hurston once said, “I know that I cannot accept responsibility for thirteen million people. Every tub must sit on its own bottom regardless” (Plant, 34).

Another influence besides Washington was the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche whose work exerted a profound influence on Western philosophy (Muller, 403). In addition to affecting Western philosophy, he also changed Zora Neale Hurston’s philosophy, especially regarding individual strength. Like Nietzsche, Hurston believed that religion is unnecessary for those strong enough to face the challenges of life. “I do not expect God to single me out and grant me advantages over my fellow men. Prayer is for those who need it. Prayer seems to me a cry of weakness, and an attempt to avoid, by trickery, the rules of the game as laid down. I do not choose to admit weakness. I accept the challenge of responsibility” (Cameron, 239). This belief that religion is unnecessary for those strong enough to take on life on their own shows not only that she was not particularly religious, but it also indicates that she firmly believed in the strength of the individual to succeed without divine intervention. Hurston was a strong individualist, who respected the influences that others could have on her, while still believing that she could succeed on her own.

Interestingly in light of her youthful traumas, Hurston’s autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road, minimizes discussion of her adult life and the influences that she encountered after the age of thirty. Instead, Hurston focuses on her childhood and how she was changed in her thinking from such a young age. Her
focus on childhood and how childhood can shape you shows that she believes that people are shaped by the that come before, which is a rather a traditionalist approach. This traditionalist approach to her own life shows the impact of tradition on her, an approach that is typical of a conservative-libertarian. In contrast to Laura Ingalls Wilder, who relied on family throughout her life showing how one is undeniably shaped by the generations that come before, Hurston had some issues with her family. However, she found this same sense of family and community within the town of Eatonville, which is why she continued to return to Eatonville after all her family members had moved or passed away (Dust Tracks on a Road, 131).

As explained by Conservative theorist Jerry Muller in Conservatism, to define conservatism, one could begin by listing all of the institutions that conservatives have fought to conserve (Muller, 1). It is in the very nature of a conservative, to believe in the history and the tradition of something, and hope that entity remains the same. In the mind of a conservative, tradition is what helped us get to where we are, so why would someone change tradition? Hurston felt the same way about getting as far as she had in life. She acknowledged that her upbringing and her community are what helped her become the person that she was destined to become. Hurston, like most conservatives, valued tradition and respected that without her past, there could be no bright future.
At the same time, *Dust Tracks on a Road* is Zora Neale Hurston’s attempt to invite the reader into her private sphere and show them how she became the individualistic feminist that she was. This personalized account of her life seems problematic during the first read-through of the text because it appears that she omits some of the most defining moments of her life. However, whatever she decided to tell her story is just as important in understanding Hurston as an author, a political figure, and a woman. In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston spends a disproportionate amount of time on her years in Florida as a child and as a young adult. Her adult life is left much to the imagination of the reader because she only glosses over what she thought were the critical moments in her adult life. However, Hurston focusing on her childhood is important because it shows that she believes that who she was as a person was shaped by those experiences more than any other experiences.

Not only does *Dust Tracks on a Road* offer insight into the experiences that shaped Hurston, but it also provides insight into her beliefs about the world. While *Their Eyes Were Watching God* provides insights about her beliefs as well, those ideas are more nuanced and less readily available to the untrained eye or one not looking for them. However, in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, her beliefs are quite obviously laid out for anyone to see. The best example of those ideas is Hurston stating “I see nothing but futility in looking back over my shoulder in rebuke at the grave of some white man who has been dead too long to talk about” (*Dust Tracks on a Road*, 206). She believed that there is no use in talking
about slavery because even though it happened, now it is over and done. This belief about slavery is just one of the many beliefs that Hurston made apparent in *Dust Tracks on a Road* to give her audience more insight into herself as a person, instead of just as an author.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a novel about an African-American woman's belief in herself and her journey through life. The main character, Janie Crawford, comes back to her hometown after being gone for quite some time and she recounts the story of what happened throughout the time that she was gone. One of the greatest pleasures of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is that the reader gets to experience Janie’s story through her own narrative, through the story she chooses to tell her friend Pheoby after her long journey home, and in a style of African-American vernacular meant to convey personal authenticity. This narrative framework allows Janie’s true desires and experiences to resonate throughout the novel, even when she is unable to express herself through the compelling first-person narration that characterizes her voice. Janie sometimes struggles to put into words what she is feeling, so the story will occasionally switch to third-person narration so that the reader can understand what is going through Janie’s head.

The argument could be made that Janie Crawford is a mirror into Zora Neale Hurston’s own life. The setting of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is Eatonville, where Hurston grew up and spent many of her adult years. Janie is married three different times throughout the novel, while Hurston was married
twice throughout her life, both marriages ending in divorce. Even though Hurston was raised by her mother until she passed and Janie was raised by her grandmother, there are similarities between the fictional grandmother who raised Janie and Hurston’s real grandmother. The most prevalent of those similarities is the way that both grandmothers reprimanded the girls for lying and being too spirited in their storytelling. While Janie moves around within Florida throughout the novel, Hurston moved around the world in her lifetime going places like Haiti and Jamaica, but also moving around the United States. Janie ends up returning to Eatonville where she will live out the rest of her days, and likewise, Hurston ends up returning to Florida at the end of her life, not specifically Eatonville, but she comes close to home. Hurston is best known for her writing, whether that be novels or magazine articles, but she also worked some other odd jobs to pay the bills such as being a maid or a librarian. Likewise, Janie also works odd jobs throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Although Janie is a fictional character, it seems as though Zora Neale Hurston used her own life as inspiration for creating Janie Crawford.

Both the fictional account of Hurston’s life through Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and the actual account of her life through *Dust Tracks on a Road* show Hurston as a leading female political activist. She was not only a political activist in a traditional sense, her literary works also painted a picture of the politics that she believed in and from where those beliefs come. One of the most important personality characteristics of Hurston is that she was a feminist
and believed very strongly in the power of womanhood. She shows this primarily through Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Janie is free from the authority and influence of men for the first years of her life because her father left her mother right after she was born (20). She is a free-spirited young girl living with her Nanny, who is the first one to instill in her the belief in the power of women. Nanny tells her “Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman oughta be and to do. Dat’s one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can’t stop you from wishin’” (31). This idea of feminism and advancing the cause of women is something that Janie’s Nanny had, and she helped instill the idea in Janie, even if she took away her agency by arranging a marriage for Janie. While this seems contradictory to wanting Janie to be a free woman, it does not diminish the hopes and dreams Nanny had for Janie.

Nanny as a character in the novel shows the beliefs that Zora Neale Hurston received from her own mother and grandmother. At one point in the book, Nanny says, "Whut Ah seen just now is plenty for me, honey, Ah don’t want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin’ yo’ body to wipe his foots on" (*Their Eyes*, 27). This is a demonstration of the thoughts that Nanny has towards people who are poorer than her. It is not one of pity and a wish to help, but instead she believed in working hard for oneself to get where you needed to be in life. Working hard for oneself is a conservative-libertarian principle suggesting that the distribution of wealth by taking money from wealthy and giving it to the poor is unfair to the rich (Buckley, 197). While Nanny is not
explicit in saying this, it is clear that she knows what happens if you are poor in America. She is not blinded by an idealism that would tell Janie that she can marry whomever she wants or do whatever she wants for a job. Instead, Nanny is thinking practically in telling Janie that she must marry someone who can give her upward social mobility.

Janie’s first marriage, to Logan Killicks, confines her in a way that she has never been confined before. While Janie at this point in the narrative is comfortable with her traditional place in the house as a woman, she still does not want to be controlled by another person. This is her first rebellion against the general social norms for women at the time. Most women would have been quiet and submissive to their husbands and done whatever they were asked to do, because women then still did not have the same rights as men. The Nineteenth Amendment to the constitution was enacted in 1920, and this book was published in 1937, so Hurston was writing in a time when women’s rights were still a sensitive issue in the United States. Consequently, this meant the character of Janie was still expected to be submissive to her husband, and while she was in some respects, she had her form of rebellion as evidenced by this conversation between Janie and Logan, "You don’t need mah help out dere, Logan. Youse in yo’ place and Ah’m in mine." "You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick" (Their Eyes Were Watching God, 52).
This conversation between Logan and Janie shows that while Janie is content living within the confines of specific gender roles, for now, she also does not just submit to whatever Logan asks her to do. While Janie feels as though the domestic space is her domain, which is confining and limiting to her in respect to her abilities, she is comfortable there where she defines her own rules and boundaries. Logan’s expectation of her to be able to move in and out of different jobs and spaces on the farm is far more confining than Janie feeling as though her place is in the house. The ideas that Logan has are much more restrictive, because, in his mind, Janie’s place is wherever he says her place is, whether that be in the house or the field: whatever he says is the rule. This control of her confines Janie to living life through Logan’s wants and needs, never actually discovering what she wants and needs. This type of restriction is what Janie ends up rebelling against when she decides that she is leaving Logan. Her decision to leave Logan is when Janie truly breaks out of this restrictive life – at least for a short time.

Janie goes on to marry Joe Starks, who resembles the founder of Eatonville, Joe Clarke. Joe Starks is a strong, determined, self-reliant, industrious and productive individual. He is the quintessential individualist who looks like all of Hurston’s other male characters, regardless of the other qualities they exhibit (Plant, 35). When Janie first sees Joe she sees “a cityfied, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle that didn’t belong in these parts. His coat was over his arm, but he didn’t need it to represent his clothes. The shirt with the silk
sleeve holders was dazzling enough for the world (Their Eyes, 47). Joe was dressed to catch the attention of someone because he thought that he was a black man who had worked hard enough to have the status of the white man, which was still something that did not happen in this time. However, instead of being put off by it, Janie was intrigued by it, and even liked the idea that she, too, could be better than everyone else of her race.

This shows a break from ideas of collective “blackness” at the time. Hurston did not believe in what she called “blackness”; instead she believed in people as individuals. In Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston says “If you have received no clear-cut impression of what the Negro in America is like, then you are in the same place with me. There is no The Negro here. Our lives are so diversified, internal attitudes so varied, appearances and capabilities so different, that there is no possible classification so catholic that it will cover us all” (Dust Tracks, 172). While there is a difference in race, one cannot say, “I am black, therefore I am...” or “I am white, therefore I am...” because there is no one word that will fill in the end of that statement for everyone whose skin is that color. Hurston was a big believer that “races have never done anything” (Dust Tracks, 239). By this, she means that the race description of “white” has never done anything on its own. Instead, white individuals have accomplished things and achieved things, as have black individuals. However, the race itself has never achieved anything, so why consider it to be an important part of a person's identity if it does not tell anything about the individual? In this, Hurston’s views as
a conservative-libertarian are set apart in emphasis of those who are African-American nationalists and separatists of her era who may also exhibit conservative tendencies.

The idea that individuals are responsible for their actions regardless of their race is an idea that belongs in the realm of traditional conservatism. When describing the perfect town, conservative scholar Edward Banfield says that the ideal city would “avoid rhetoric tending to raise expectations to unreasonable and unrealizable levels, to encourage the individual to think that “society,” not he, is responsible for his ills” (Muller, 348). The idea of personal responsibility is one that Hurston seeks to present to her readers through her ideas that the black race does not have one collective identity. Thus Hurston giving her ideas about collective identity helps to show that she is a conservative scholar.

Hurston exhibits anxiety that institutions she holds dear are endangered by contemporary development or by proposed reforms. This fear is displayed in her personal life when her dad remarries, causing her to return to Eatonville in a fit of rage. Upon her return, she assaults her step-mother in an attempt to convince her to leave. The institution of marriage is important to Hurston; even though she was married twice in her life, her parents' marriage was an institution to her. The institution of marriage is also something that is important to conservatives. As Justus Moser, an early conservative social theorist, said, “matrimony is always a highly important means to check vice and preserve virtue” (Muller, 73). The idea of marriage being important to check vice and
maintain purity may be an old-fashioned one, but the fact that matrimony was important enough to be written about shows that it had great value. The conservatives during Moser’s time were afraid that the institution of marriage was being diminished by the acceptance of illegitimate children, just as the teenaged Hurston was afraid that her image of marriage would be ruined if her father remarried.

Nineteenth-century conservative social theorist James Stephen also discusses the institution of marriage when considering the moral character of civil law. He argues that all civil laws are somehow based on morality, including the laws governing marriage and property. Examining the laws surrounding marriage provides insight into what a society values. For Americans, the laws surrounding marriage in 1874 show that the legislature recognizes, maintains and favors marriage in every possible manner. The fact that the legislature does this indicates that society believes that marriage is the pathway to having an moral populace (Muller, 143). Not only does Hurston personally believe in the institution of marriage, at least on the surface, so does Janie Crawford in Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Janie, who has the concept that marriage must involve love and happiness, goes on a search for unconditional and fulfilling love which she finally finds with her third husband, Tea Cake. She only finds this love after she has been treated as a laborer and possession by her two other husbands. The fact that Janie does not become disillusioned to marriage even after her horrible
experiences in her first two marriages shows just how strongly she believes in
the institution of marriage. Janie’s dream of marriage is finally realized in her
marriage to Tea Cake, thus showing that marriage is something that can be
believed in, regardless of one’s prior circumstances.

Notably, not only are Janie’s three marriages representative of Janie’s
feelings towards the institution of marriage, they also mirror Hurston’s feelings
towards the institution. Janie’s notion of marriage through the novel is that of
reciprocal love. A male and female complement each other to create a perfect
union. This is why Janie continues to believe in marriage after being disappointed
two different times by her first two marriages. Her idea of marriage also shows
the feminist side of Janie that is presented throughout the novel. The idea that
women are not just supposed to do what their husbands tell them to is a radical
one at that time. It is an idea that comes from a lady who respects herself
enough to know that there is more out there for her in the world. Janie seeks to
advance the position of women through obtaining the right to be equal to any
man, instead of being dependent on one or obedient to one. This advancement is
why Janie continues to seek the perfect marriage even after she failed twice,
because Janie believes in a world where the roles in marriages are equal
between men and women.

The equality between men and women in the institution of marriage is
something that Hurston sought in her own life. The first evidence of this is the
opinions she has about her parents’ unequal marriage. Hurston says, “Of
weaknesses, he had his share, and I know that my mother was very unhappy at times… In fact, on two occasions, I heard my father threaten to kill my mom if she ever started towards that gate to leave him” (Dust Tracks, 10). Hurston is aware that her parents’ marriage is unequal, and she is on her mother’s side of all of the arguments because she feels as though her father should treat her mother better than he does. While he does not beat Hurston’s mother, he also is not kind to her, and Hurston shows whose side she is on when, after her mother dies, she just leaves town. If her parent’s marriage had been equal, then maybe she would have stayed with her father after her mother’s death because she would have loved him or at least respected him. However, his lack of respect for her mother upset her, meaning that when her mother’s time came, so did Hurston’s time.

Hurston also believed in equality between men and women in her own marriage. In her first marriage, Hurston had her doubts about her husband and his faithfulness to her. From their wedding day forward, Hurston was unsure of how to handle herself around him. She wanted them to be equal life partners, but did not know how to achieve this through all her doubts. A few years into their marriage, Hurston got an offer she could not refuse to do research in New York, but her husband would not go with her to New York. Instead of quashing her dreams and staying behind, she told him he could do what he pleased, and she went by herself to New York (Dust Tracks, 183). Hurston believed so strongly in equality between herself and her husband that she refused to be held back by his
inability to compromise. Instead of sacrificing herself and her dreams, she grabbed onto them with both hands without the support of her husband, showing her true colors as a feminist and a believer in equality of the sexes.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston also reveals, through Janie, a little bit about how she feels about giving handouts to people who are below her in social status. Janie is just beginning a relationship with Tea Cake, when he disappears for a week after she gave him some money to help him out. While Janie had no problems giving him the money because she liked him, she does not take too kindly to him running off with it. Janie thinks to herself, “maybe he was around to get in with her and strip her of all she had. Just as well if she never saw him again” (*Their Eyes*, 152). This attitude that Janie has towards giving Tea Cake money without receiving anything in return is another conservative value that Janie displays in the novel. According to Muller, “in the course of the twentieth century, conservatism was defined not only by its opposition to the radical left but by antipathy to the spread of the welfare states and attempts to bring about economic redistribution” (27). Clearly, it is a conservative value to want to keep one’s own money and not spread around the wealth without good faith that something will be received in return. Janie makes those values clear through her feelings about giving money to Tea Cake, thus displaying her conservative attitudes once again.

Hurston further demonstrated her conservatism in saying, “Lack of power and opportunity passes off too often for virtue” (*Dust Tracks*, 206). This quote
represents Hurston’s strong commitment to democratic rule by individuals taking responsibility for themselves, and the effect it should have on social reforms. Hurston believed in the reformation of society but in her own way. In *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston states that “I hope that it [the future] will be full of work, because I have come to know by experience that work is the nearest thing to happiness I can find” (208). This wish for the future shows the hope that Hurston has for the reformation of social policies that make it possible for people not to work and be happy. Hurston believes that work is what makes someone happy, thus everyone would work and then everyone should be happy. This idea about work meshes with the beliefs that Janie holds in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, because Janie does not believe in handouts, which can be extrapolated to mean that Janie believes in the value of hard work, just as Hurston does. With the belief in the value of hard work and not giving people handouts being intertwined, it shows Hurston’s conservative opinions about work and money.

Not only does Janie not believe in handouts, but she also does not believe in being confined by what the period would tell her about what it means to be a woman. Janie is consistently being told how to act by the various men in her life, which could be seen as discouraging. However, Janie overcomes these restraints. At the beginning and end of the novel, Hurston allows Janie to put on the outward identity of male power through wearing overalls. If the traditional end of this story would have been marriage, then Hurston bucks tradition by making the end of the novel the murder of Tea Cake at the hands of Janie. Janie’s
ultimate rebellion changes her and makes her life a compelling model of possibility for anyone who hears her life tale (Wall, 36). This rebellion is not only a literary revolution for Hurston, but is also a revolt of the traditional heroine character. Janie’s deviation from the traditional heroine character shows her inward feminist feelings about her ability to do anything a man can do. Janie, as a character, embodies a movement that advances the position of women, which is perfectly consistent with gender-studies scholar Karen Offen’s definition of feminism.

While Janie fits Offen’s definition of feminism correctly, so does Zora Neale Hurston. In Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston displays her feminism just as overtly as she writes about Janie’s feminism. Throughout Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston holds many jobs. From the very beginning at boarding school in Jacksonville, working to pay her tuition when her father forgot to send it, or her brother offering her a place to live, only if she works for him around the house. Regardless of the situation, Hurston is not afraid of hard work, and she even would prefer to do a “man’s” work. She is hired as a maid for a family and at one point comments that she would rather work in the front of the house (meaning outside) than in the back of the house (Dust Tracks, 86). The fact that Hurston would even consider doing what was traditionally considered to be man’s work shows that she was well ahead of her time. Hurston aims to advance societal thoughts about women’s potential and capabilities to the point that everyone would see that a woman could do all the things that a man could do.
Through *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Zora Neale Hurston displays her ideologies as clearly and unapologetically as possible. Hurston was defined by the feminist and conservative-libertarian views that she exhibited in the fictional character of Janie, who was a fictional representation of Hurston in her real life. Without the upbringing she had, Hurston would have never become the acclaimed novelist that she came to be posthumously. Though her work was not recognized as extensively during her lifetime, Hurston is now widely proclaimed as one of the best female African-American authors not only in the twentieth-century but also up until present day. Hurston is a firm believer in tradition and family shaping the individual, but what the individual decides to do with their upbringing is entirely up to them, thus also showing that she was truly an individualist above all else.
CHAPTER 4: The Influence of Rose Wilder Lane and Zora Neale Hurston on the Development of Feminist Conservative and Libertarian Politics in Society

The literary personas of Rose Wilder Lane and Zora Neale Hurston carried beyond their literary works to their political thought and influence, by which their “frontier” libertarian conservatism and “urban” version of the same, respectively, in its after-life helped shape the conservative and libertarian culture in society on the American right in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. While Laura Ingalls Wilder had much influence on society through her novels, her political activism was far from robust. Rose Wilder Lane and Zora Neale Hurston were both politically active and they were closer in age than Hurston and Wilder were. Their closeness in age and their fervent political activism make the pair more intertwined with respect to their societal influence.

While the list of those whom Wilder Lane and Hurston influenced is rather long, there are some specific figures who went on to prominence, such as the literary scholars Toni Morrison (Als, 1) and Ralph Ellison (Mishkin, 24), along with the literary scholar and intellectual Alice Walker (Pierpont, 3). All three of these famous authors cited Hurston as one of their inspirations at one time or another throughout their literary careers. Toni Morrison, in an interview, once said “Zora Neale Hurston was an example of a black writer who treated dialogue as a transcript to show white people how it really was in the Florida swamps” (Als, 2).
While Morrison’s aim was a bit different than Hurston’s, to educate non-blacks about African-American vernacular, both had the same effect of showing White Americans what life was like for the African-Americans in those communities.

While Hurston’s influence on Morrison is evident, Hurston’s influence on Alice Walker is even more visible. Walker wrote an anthology of Hurston’s works called *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing … and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*. Walker writes, “I realized that unless I came out with everything I had supporting her, there was every chance that she would slip back into obscurity” (Brody, 1). Walker not only respected and learned from Hurston, but without Walker behind Hurston’s work, she may have figuratively dropped out of the literary world. Without Walker’s push for her to be back in the spotlight of American literature, specifically African-American literature, Zora Neale Hurston may not have gained the respect that she still has today.

Not only did Walker help Hurston, but Hurston helped Walker develop as an author. Walker writes that if she were condemned to live on a desert island with only ten books, she would "unhesitatingly" choose as one *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: "I would want to enjoy myself while identifying with the black heroine, Janie Crawford, as she acted out many roles in a variety of settings…. There is no book more important to me than this" (Sadoff, 6). Walker identifies with Janie Crawford of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, wherein Janie practically is Hurston, meaning that not only does Walker identify with Janie as a black heroine, she also identifies with Hurston as a black heroine.
Hurston influenced Morrison and Walker in more ways than one. She influenced them through her literary works, but she also influenced them through her feminist attitudes. Alice Walker is famous for saying “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.” Womanism is a feminist term coined by Alice Walker. It is a reaction to the realization that “feminism” does not encompass the perspectives of all black women (Walker, xii). This is an idea that Hurston, as a feminist herself, would have greatly identified with as evidenced by her main character in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston believed that women are equal to men in every way, and their lives are infinitely rich and worthy of exploration, especially the lives of black women (Boyd, 303). Walker also discusses Morrison’s feminist ideas: “When Toni Morrison said she writes the kind of books she wants to read, she was acknowledging the fact that in a society in which ‘accepted literature’ is so often sexist and racist and otherwise irrelevant or offensive to so many lives, she must do the work of two” (Walker, 8). This sexist literature is not acceptable to Morrison so when Morrison writes, she does so through a feminist lens, meaning that she celebrates women for their abilities and portrays them as strong characters in her literary works, just as Hurston did.

Both Walker and Morrison write through the same feminist lens as Zora Neale Hurston, but not only women were influenced by the great works of Hurston. Ralph Ellison was also influenced by Zora Neale Hurston. Literary critic Tracy Mishkin explored the effect of Hurston on Ellison: “If [African-American writer] Richard Wright represented both protestant tradition and African-American
literature and the adoption of mainstream European and American fictional form, and Hurston exemplified a populist tradition and the derivation of a literary form from the aesthetic of oral culture, *Invisible Man* [by Ellison] contains aspects of both and is the conjunction of the two" (Mishkin, 25). While Ellison failed to see the connections to Hurston’s literary works, other scholars can immediately see the influence that her works had on Ellison’s writing. While Hurston did not influence the portrayal of any of Ellison’s characters, his style of writing in the African-American vernacular is so similar to Hurston’s that his style cannot help but be derived from hers, especially considering that his novel came twenty years after hers.

The influencing of literary scholars and intellectuals was not limited to Hurston as Rose Wilder Lane did some influencing of her own. Wilder Lane is a well-known libertarian, so it should come as no surprise that she influenced two important figures in the libertarian movement: Robert LeFevre and Roger MacBride. The most striking testimony to Wilder Lane’s influence came from the establishment of the Freedom School in Colorado. The Freedom School, an institution teaching about the importance of liberty and individualism, was established by Robert LeFevre, who found confirmation of his beliefs while reading Wilder Lane’s literary work, *The Discovery of Freedom* (Holtz, 347). The establishment of the Freedom School showed just how much Wilder Lane influenced LeFevre and showed that her dedication to conservative-libertarianism
paid off in the end by having LeFevre educate students in what Wilder Lane, herself, believed in.

Another scholar whom Wilder Lane had a large influence on was Roger MacBride. MacBride was in essence the grandson that Wilder Lane never had the opportunity to have during her lifetime. He served as a surrogate grandson and a mentee upon whom Wilder Lane could lavish her thoughts about political theory. Because of Wilder Lane’s nurturing and influence, MacBride would go on to become an agent for change in America, all based upon Wilder Lane’s principles of individualism and liberty (Holtz, 343). It was also because of Wilder Lane’s influence that MacBride would one day run for the House of Representatives, in 1962, in the state of Vermont, but then also would make a run for President in 1976. While his run was not successful, he credits all of his success to being Wilder Lane’s protégé throughout her lifetime and promised Wilder Lane that regardless of anything else in life, he would carry on her legacy of individualism and anti-collectivism (Holtz, 371). The libertarian movement of the 1970s, influenced by Wilder Lane, would also prove to be an influence on what became known as “Reaganism” in the 1980s.

Individualism was one of Wilder Lane’s primary life philosophies, but she also believed in the power and the abilities of women to accomplish anything that men could, something that her mother taught her. Wilder Lane’s strong feminist beliefs were not only prevalent in her own life, but also in the career advice she gave to her contemporary Norma Lee Browning, one of the women she
influenced with her philosophies and beliefs. Browning had a career, not unlike Wilder Lane’s career in the sense that Browning was a ghostwriter of sorts, albeit not a successful one (Holtz, 364). While Wilder Lane always supported her as a writer, she believed that Browning was much too good to be a ghostwriter and that she should write whatever she felt like writing. Browning was influenced by Wilder Lane up until Wilder Lane’s death as they continued to correspond. When Wilder Lane died, it was almost as though Browning had lost a mother figure with Wilder Lane thirty years her senior. Browning attempted to take care of Wilder Lane like a daughter would have until her dying day, both in person and through advice she offered Wilder Lane through correspondence (Holtz, 370).

As important as was the influence on individuals was the influence on society that Rose Wilder Lane and Zora Neale Hurston had during their lifetimes. One way that Hurston influenced society was through her public opposition to the U.S. Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education, the famous case that led to the desegregation of schools. Hurston wrote a now-famous letter to the editor that was published in a local Florida newspaper, The Orlando Sentinel. She famously wrote “If there are not adequate Negro schools in Florida, and there is some residual, some inherent and unchangeable quality in white schools, impossible to duplicate anywhere else, then I am the first to insist that Negro children of Florida be allowed to share this boon. But if there are adequate Negro schools and prepared instructors and instructions, then there is nothing different except the presence of white people” (Boyd, 423). What Hurston cared about
more than the segregation of African-Americans and White Americans was that the quality of education, regardless of skin color, was equal across the races. She did not think that African-American and White American children needed to be educated in the same place, as long as the education was the same, which was contradictory to what many “black leaders” at the time believed (Boyd, 424).

While Hurston did not believe in desegregation, she also did not believe in “race pride,” meaning having pride in oneself just because of the color of one’s skin. Nevertheless, she wanted to show the people who did have “race pride” exactly how ironic it was that they supported this landmark legal decision. To take her opinions on the matter even further than she ever had before, Hurston wrote “it is a contradiction in terms to scream race pride and equality while at the same time spurning Negro teachers and self-association” (Boyd, 424). Hurston highlights how contradictory it is that the people who are proud because of the color of their skin also want to reject those who have that same color of skin for a teacher of a different color skin. Instead of believing in individualism, and the power of the individual to thrive regardless of the environment, certain individuals believed that, in order to thrive, the African-Americans needed to be with the White Americans and vice-versa, but Hurston, being the individualist that she was, opposed this.

Rose Wilder Lane did not have any public opinions on Brown v. Board of Education or any other landmark Supreme Court cases of her era. She did, however, support many different candidates for office who shared some of her
conservative-libertarian views and she opposed those who did not share her views. The first candidate whom she publically threw her support behind was Herbert Hoover. Wilder Lane wrote a biography of Hoover, which she began to think about when Hoover publicly began expressing his opinions about the wartime food efforts, and how not enough was being done to help the farmers, or the “Embattled Farmers” as Wilder Lane called them (Holtz, 89). Wilder Lane was dazzled by Hoover and considered him to be the ideal leader for America. More than once she referred to him as such, and even went as far to say “she was alive to the heroism both of great men who could seize circumstance and alter history, such as Herbert Hoover” (Holtz, 233). With Wilder Lane idolizing Hoover and travelling to the Republican convention to interview him, she showed her true colors as a conservative-libertarian.

Wilder Lane and her protege Roger MacBride, showed their conservative-libertarian side by putting all of their support behind Barry Goldwater, a candidate for President in 1964. However, they both accepted defeat before the race even took place because they knew that Goldwater was a politically weak candidate. It was in that same year that Wilder Lane found another candidate, albeit a few years down the road, that would make her excited for American politics again: Ronald Reagan (Holtz, 345). Ronald Reagan would go on to become the fortieth president of the United States and was a Republican with whom Wilder Lane found much in common. Although Wilder Lane would pass away before seeing Ronald Reagan become president, she would have agreed with his inaugural
speech where he stated, “In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem” (Murray and Blessing, 80).

While Wilder Lane would have supported Reagan’s presidency, she vehemently opposed the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). Wilder Lane very publicly opposed the President and once said “We have a dictator, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a smart politician” (Holtz, 246). It was early in his presidency, during the spring of his first term, that she made these remarks and her misgivings about FDR would not diminish; instead, they would grow in the years to come. Wilder Lane firmly believed that there is not a person who could decide what the “greater good” was for everyone as FDR tried to do. Wilder Lane instead believed that a person had to decide for themselves what was the greatest good that they could do and then do whatever it was they could to achieve the greatest good on their own. Not only was her opposition to FDR rooted in individualism, it was also about his poor treatment of farmers, a culture which she grew out of into herself. After experiencing his treatment of the farmers and his attempt to reduce their production to instead have more grasslands in the country, Wilder Lane said that she would vote for anyone who would stop FDR regardless of their politics (Holtz, 261).

Wilder Lane and Hurston were agreed when it came to opposing FDR as well as the New Deal for which he was famously known. Both women opposed FDR even though many around them supported him - more surrounding Hurston than Wilder Lane. His politics were the most socialist the country had seen and
both women supported limited government involvement, so anything slightly socialist would have been a problem for them (Boyd, 278). Black voters, including Hurston, had been loyal to the Republican party for decades because it was the Republican party that first supported ending slavery. Some scholars would say that is the only reason that Hurston voted for Hoover in the 1932 election, but that is selling Hurston short; she was most certainly an independent woman with the ability to choose a candidate to vote for on her own (Boyd, 382).

Not only was Hurston an independent woman who had the ability to choose for herself, Hoover was not the only Republican candidate she supported. In a Harlem Congressional campaign, she supported Grant Reynolds over the incumbent, who was a Democrat. Hurston was a registered Republican who never abandoned the party for the New Deal politics of FDR and as if to continue to prove her loyalty to the party, she campaigned hard for Reynolds. She was out on the streets at night listening to campaign speeches and passing out literature to the crowds, after having spent the whole day in and out of Reynolds’ office and campaigning door to door (Boyd, 378). While Reynolds may have lost, Hurston used this opportunity to show her beliefs and her politics to everyone around her so that there was no confusion about which side of the political spectrum she was on.

Six years after her campaigning in Harlem, Hurston used a different medium to campaign for another Republican, showing that her political views were unwavering. Instead of campaigning in the streets, Hurston did what she
knew best: she wrote an article about the leading candidate for the Republican nomination in 1952, about why she as an African-American woman would be voting for this White American Republican man named Dwight D. Eisenhower. Again Hurston showed the world that she was proudly a Republican and her opinions of these men running for office showed that her conservative-libertarian values were deeply rooted.

Another such trademark of conservative-libertarian politics that both women spoke about publicly was race and the impacts that race had on an individual as a whole. Hurston once said, “I know that I cannot accept responsibility for thirteen million people” (Plant, 34). Thirteen million people were the number of African-Americans in America at the time of her statement. Hurston believed that each individual should carry their own weight in this world and not the weight of “the Race,” meaning that just because your skin is a certain color, it does not obligate you to act in certain ways or be responsible for anyone but yourself (Beito and Beito, 559). While Hurston had no choice but to address the issue of race at some point throughout her life, being a African-American Republican, Wilder Lane also felt as though she could not stay silent on the issue. Wilder Lane believed that “fame, class, power, race are only externals to the inner meanings which it is fiction’s function to express” (Beito and Beito, 561). By this Wilder Lane is saying that race is only external, but it is truly what is on the inside that is important. Fiction can be used to make someone of any class,
race or power have any personality the author desires, because personality is fluid between subjective labels such as those.

Hurston and Wilder Lane also shared the influence of religion in their lives, specifically in their upbringing, at least more so as young people. Free-expression of religion is intertwined with conservative-libertarian politics and has been since Thomas Jefferson helped to write the Constitution. Jefferson was a Democratic-Republican, meaning he was against large government involvement and supported rights for the states versus the nation as a whole (Buckley, 231). Jefferson, in contributing to the Constitution, was dedicated to freedom of speech, a conservative-libertarian principle, but he was also dedicated to the freedom of religion (Buckley, 235). While Hurston and Wilder Lane do not discuss freedom of religion, the involvement of religion in their lives at all, and their willingness to express it, are markers of their politics. Hurston attended a church in Harlem, and she was raised in the way of the church by her father, a minister in her home church in Eatonville, Florida (Boyd, 159). Wilder Lane described herself as a theist, meaning that she believed in the existence of some form of higher being, but she could not decide exactly what higher being she believed in. She believed in the traditional moral laws of Christianity and had regularly attended a local church, nonetheless (Holtz, 327).

Finally, the preservation and expansion of freedom from government, or more specifically a belief in advancing a laissez-faire society, is something that both Hurston and Wilder Lane supported throughout their lifetimes. This belief in
a laissez-faire economy and reshaping of government is something that is inherently conservative and libertarian in its political origin (Buckley, 211). Wilder Lane famously said “give me time and I will tell you why individualism, laissez-faire, and the slightly restrained anarchy of capitalism offer the best possibilities for the development of the human spirit” (Holtz, 261). Wilder Lane not only supported laissez-faire economies but she also openly opposed government intervention into the lives of hard-working Americans like farmers (Holtz, 247). Hurston wrote, “under our constitution there is no royal ruler. Every American is part of the king that rules over this nation” (Boyd, 406).

By contrast, the Communist Party’s attempt to enforce conformity and to promote economic equality ran contrary to human nature and American ideals, according to Hurston. Hurston instead continued “her drumbeat against Roosevelt’s double standard of fighting oppression overseas but letting it flourish at home.” She was “crazy about the idea of this Democracy””, which is what Americans had going for them in their home country (Beito and Beito, 568). Hurston believed in the traditional democracy of America and did not like that traditions were changing, showing her to be a libertarian advocate of maintaining tradition, especially so as to resist change. Wilder Lane was also a traditionalist in the sense that she believed that “an old-fashioned, middle-class, small-town point of view… created America” (Holtz, 256). Without the town and the people that Wilder Lane grew up with and around, America would not have become the country that everyone in Wilder Lane and Hurston’s time came to know and love.
They were both small-town women who believed in the power of the individual to make change and supported the traditions of America remaining the same.

In the end, not only were Hurston and Wilder Lane conservative libertarians, but they were also strong feminists. As aforementioned, they did not emphasize a socially transformative role for the category of women, but rather the opportunity for individual freedom and development as a woman. Both women believed in breaking what was considered the gender “norm” for the period in which they were living and writing. Hurston was actively involved in the fight against “the apathy of women” and she believed that women needed to stand up and make decisions for themselves. Hurston organized a feminist group called the “block mothers” in Harlem so more mothers could join the workforce, while also making sure that their children were cared for during the day (Boyd, 383). Aiding women in the workforce and providing more opportunities for them is something that most of America was not doing at the time but it was important to Hurston that she support women who wanted to do more than just be domestic.

Wilder Lane did not create any public programs to support the advancement of women, but she dabbled in both the realm of the political and the domestic, the way of a traditionalist feminist in her views. She did not let arbitrary labels define her, which is evidenced by her letters to the MacBrides, Roger and Susan. Wilder Lane advised Susan on household chores when Susan asked for assistance and advised Roger in the ways of political theory that she knew so well (Holtz, 343).
Her ability to do both showed that she believed women were capable of existing in both realms.

While both Wilder Lane and Hurston were married, their marriages were fleeting and to husbands of unremarkable accomplishments. Neither of them believed that they needed to be married to be considered a successful woman, unlike many of their time. Wilder Lane, even from the age of seventeen, would not have married because “I was courageous and ambitious myself, and these men [left in the town] were not” (Holtz, 45). When she did eventually marry, the man that she married appeared to be ambitious, and they were happy for a time but he disappointed her like everything else (Holtz, 71). Wilder Lane felt as though marriage restricted her and tied her down, when she should be free and able to think for herself, as did Hurston. Hurston was determined “not to let marriage change the way she moved through the world - as a woman who was unencumbered, independent and free” (Boyd, 161). Hurston did not seem to fit into the domestic realm of being a wife and to that end she abruptly severed her ties with her first husband, fearing that “her career would stagnate in domestic bacteria if she remained married” (Boyd, 161). This was the way of the world for career-driven women like Wilder Lane and Hurston; they could not remain married and have careers as the driven women that they were. They paved the way for a new generation of women to demand that men support their careers within the confines of a marriage, showing that they led their own version of grassroots feminism.
Even though neither remained married, they believed in equal rights for women both within marriage and outside of it. During their lifetime, women had the right to vote but most women were apathetic and voted the way that their husbands did because that is what they were taught they should do. However, Hurston sought to change that and encouraged women to think for themselves, and vote outside of what their husbands wanted (Boyd, 383). Wilder Lane believed at the center of every modern marriage was a conflict for women between a career and having her husband, and to sort this conflict out for herself, she wrote a series of articles for Woman’s Day magazine. At the beginning of the series, the female protagonist sees conventional marriage as the key to solving all of her problems; however, she quickly learns that this is not the case. However, towards the end of the series, the protagonist marries a struggling attorney who agrees with her that they will have a modern marriage where both partners are in the workforce (Holtz, 76). This was Wilder Lane’s way of engaging with the modern problem that women faced and the series was her solution to it, which was telling women to marry someone who will also support their career goals (Holtz, 77). A man who supported her career goals is something Wilder Lane searched for her entire adult life, and never found, but always remained tied to the idea that marrying a man who supported a woman’s career was the only way to a happy marriage.

Rose Wilder Lane and Zora Neale Hurston belonged to essentially the same tradition melding both conservative libertarian politics and feminism. Each
went her own way, but they both arrived independently at extraordinarily similar conclusions. Their lives show many common threads, as woven together through their ideas about tradition, marriage, race, religion and women in the workforce. As daughters of the frontier and the urban world, they were independent women, who upheld individualism and small government in an era that wanted to turn their backs on such ideas. Today, their insights about politics and feminism still inspire readers with the frameworks for developing their own ideas about such things. While the two writers may have passed on from this world, their influence is as prevalent as ever.
CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Laura Ingalls Wilder, Zora Neale Hurston, and Rose Wilder Lane are three important female literary figures from the twentieth century. While Zora Neale Hurston, and Laura Ingalls Wilder influenced society most through their literary fiction, Hurston and Rose Wilder Lane also influenced society through their informative political writings. The intersection between these three women reveals characteristics associated with the American conservative and feminist movements in their literary works and their lives. The combination of these components rarely is seen in the same context, let alone the same novel or set of novels, and is unique to the focus of my study.

My original focus was to connect the conservative-libertarian politics of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Zora Neale Hurston and explore the connection between the two women. However, throughout the research this became increasingly difficult to do without including reference to Rose Wilder Lane, as it became clear that Wilder Lane influenced her mother's writing in ways that could not be separated. Thus, Rose Wilder Lane became a bigger part of this thesis than anticipated. By examining Wilder's fictional work, against Hurston’s fictional work and then also examining Hurston’s non-fictional work and Wilder Lane’s non-fictional work, it becomes obvious how the three women’s political views, among other views, are interconnected.

The significance of this research is to present Zora Neale Hurston as connected to both of the Wilder women, who were already well-known
conservative-libertarian’s with feminist views. There are some scholars who are unsure of the connections between Hurston and conservative-libertarian politics but the evidence of her beliefs is pretty clear. By combining the rural frontier Midwestern regional experience of Ingalls Wilder, as edited and shaped in part by her daughter and writing partner Rose Wilder Lane and the urban African-American experience of Zora Neale Hurston in the context of an emerging national black artistic and intellectual scene, a new intersection between opposite worlds was formed. The limitations of this research are that it is not long enough to explore all of the different identities that the three women had and by default puts them into intellectual boxes, rather than showing the spectrum of beliefs that they all held outside of their political beliefs.

This research could be expanded upon and improved by writing a project that was longer and more in depth than my current project. While I started a unique study of the philosophically connections between these women, there is so much more that could be said about the connections among them. Specifically, the mother/daughter connection between Wilder Lane and Wilder could be examined further to show exactly what the experiences were in Wilder Lane’s childhood that helped her to become the woman that she became, just as I examined the specific experiences in Wilder’s childhood. Overall, this research project provided an opportunity for a new exploration into a literary connection that has existed for decades with no scholar taking the time to explore parallels between all three authors. My research was able to show that Laura Ingalls
Wilder, Zora Neale Hurston, and Rose Wilder Lane are all women who hold similar political beliefs, specifically conservative-libertarian beliefs, and they all believed in advancing women’s rights. Most current scholars assume that the two ideas conflict politically but through in-depth research of all three women and their lives, I was able to show that they are a significant historical combination in twentieth century literary and political culture, as exemplified by this political triangle between these three women.
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