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## **Their Eyes Were Watching God: Critical Analysis**

“Our Papers” is Janie Crawford’s time with Logan Kilicks in several ways. This section has similarities to her relationship with her first husband Logan and what she felt in this time frame.

In this section of the novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie goes to talk to her grandmother. She has only been married for three or four days and is sad. She tries to let her Nanny know how unhappy she is in her marriage with Logan Kilicks. Janie is talking to her Nanny and says, “Cause you told me Ah mus gointer love him, and, and Ah don’t.” (Hurston 23) Janie is explaining to her grandmother how she does not love Logan Kilicks like a married wife should. She does not want to be married to him. Nanny sends Janie home to Logan but is heartbroken and dies within a month. Janie stays with Logan for months and then she is ready to move on. She wanted to get away. “She began to stand around the gate and expect things.” (Hurston 25). This is similar to how Julia’s godmother felt in the essay “Our Papers.” The godmother explains to Julia how she charmed El Jefe into getting the paperwork she needed to travel. She tells Julia, “I didn’t want to go anywhere. I just wanted to get away from the hell we were living in.” (Alvarez 14) She explains to Julia how she was not happy with where she was and wanted to get away. This is exactly how Janie felt with her marriage to Logan Kilicks. Although Julia’s godmother’s situation did not have anything to do with a relationship, they both ultimately wanted to get away from their current life and home. Both Janie and Julia’s godmother wanted freedom, but freedom meant something different to both of them. Janie wanted to get away from Logan and be able to make her own decisions and plans. Julia’s godmother wanted to get away from the Dominican Republic so she didn’t have to live in a dictatorship. In this essay Julia didn’t feel like Janie or her godmother. She was worried that the trip had taken her family away from everything they loved. At the end of the essay Julia felt sadness. She missed the vacations with her large family, especially her cousins. Janie wanted to be free from Logan so she make her own decisions about what she could do and who she loved. Julia’s godmother wanted freedom and didn’t want to stay in the Dominican Republic, strictly controlled by the government. Janie felt the American Dream was to be able to love who she wanted to and not be bossed around by Logan. Julia is sad at the end of “Our Papers” because she doesn’t understand why her parents moved the family to America. She is young and doesn’t realize yet that her parents wanted her to have freedom by living the American Dream.

### **Briefly, A Gardener- Section 2**

There are some similarities and differences in Janie’s time with Joe Starks with Julia’s experience in “Briefly, A Gardener.” While Janie hates working in her husband’s store, Julia is asking her husband for something to do. Janie doesn’t care for her husband, Joe Starks, and Julia is proud of her husband and wants to share his passion for farming. Each of them want and need different things to be happy. Julia says, “Give me a little tiny thing I can do.” (Alvarez 88) Julia wants to be a part of her husband’s hobby so she can connect with him, out of her love for him. While on the other hand, Janie didn’t want to work at her husband’s store and her husband didn’t want her talking. Janie also doesn’t want to wear a head rag as her husband wants her to. Their relationship is opposite of Julia’s marriage. Julia’s husband willingly gives her an opportunity to join him in his passion for farming. Julia wants to show her husband that

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her herb garden can be successful and is upset when she sees him weeding the garden. Janie's husband doesn't want her to have success. He wants her to be a shadow behind him. Both females wanted more independence in different ways. Although Janie was happy with Joey at first, she began to want to do more things on her own. Joe started to tell Janie what she can and can not do/wear. She did not want him controlling certain aspects of her life. He tells her what to do with her hair, and where she can and can not go. Julia doesn't want her husband to help her with the weeding. She wants to show him she can do it on her own, maybe to impress him. Both women want independence ( the American Dream) but they want it for different reasons. Janie wants independence without her husband. Julia wants independence to show her husband she can farm like him. Their lives are different; they want different things. The American Dream is different from person to person because people have different goals in life. Julia and Janie's dreams and goals are very different, yet they both want more independence. Independence to each of them was different.

### **I Want to Be Miss America- Section 3**

"I Want to Be Miss America" and chapters 10 - 19 of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* have certain aspects where Janie and Julia can again be compared. Both females seem to be living the American Dream at that point in their lives. Janie has been with Joe Starks for many years until he died. She is happy he is dead and she loves her freedom from him. Janie met Tea Cake and they talked almost everyday. They soon began to form a relationship. The love she shared with Tea Cake was the love she has been longing for her entire life. She had freedom from a controlling husband; she was in love and had some money so she likely felt she was finally living the American Dream of freedom.

Julia and her sisters must have also felt they were living the American Dream in this essay. Julia's family had gotten used to living in America and they were no longer homesick.

Unfortunately, both women suffered from doubt. Janie fell in love with Tea Cake but had doubts. "In the cool of the afternoon the fiend from hell specially sent to lovers arrived at Janie's ear. Doubt." (Hurston 108) She didn't know if Tea Cake liked her as much as she liked him and was worried he wouldn't come back to her.

Although Julia is a young girl, she and her sisters dream of becoming the perfect American teenager. They watch the Miss America Pageant, and that puts the idea in their mind. Julia Alvarez and her sisters want to look like the perfect American teenagers. "Although we wanted to look like we belonged here, the four sisters, our looks didn't seem to fit in." (Alvarez 39) Julia and her sisters felt like they were too short, their hair was too frizzy and they did not have the curvy figures like the girls in the beauty contest.

Janie and Julia wanted to live the American Dream and both saw irony in their lives as they tried to live that dream. Janie saw irony in the jury who ruled her innocent. "Twelve white men who didn't know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her were going to sit on the thing." (Hurston 185). Julia saw irony in the late sixties when her appearance was appreciated and admired. "Soon ethnic looks would be in." (Alvarez 43) Julia noticed in college other girls wanted to have her look. They wanted to look exotic or foreign.

Again the American Dream looks different, yet similar, for both main characters.

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## Grandfather's Blessings- Section 4

"Grandfather's Blessings" and Section 4 of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* compare easily. Julia's grandfather told her she couldn't go into certain careers because she was a girl. She said she wanted to be a bullfighter and then later said she wanted to be a cowboy and a movie actress. Her grandfather, who she adored and admired, discouraged her. "My, my," he said, "Where does this little girl get such ideas?" (Alvarez 9) He would say it was not possible for her. Janie was also discouraged by her grandmother. In chapter 1, Janie begins to reminisce about her life and the three husbands that played a part in it. We know that this is leading up to the discouragement or lack of support Janie gets from her grandmother in chapter 2. Janie's grandmother does not let Janie find love on her own. She makes her marry Logan. Julia's grandfather and Janie's grandmother both want what is best for the girls. They want the girls to experience the American Dream. However both girls have very different ideas about the American Dreams when compared to their grandparents' ideas.

Julia's grandfather wants her to be something that is suitable for a female. This idea is likely his version of the American Dream. At the end of "Grandfather's Blessing" he does finally agree when she says she wants to be a pilot and a poet. "A poet, yes. Now you are talking." (Alvarez 11) Her grandfather loved poetry and would often recite lines. To Julia, the American Dream is finding something that she really wants to do and will love doing. Obviously, she went towards the direction of poetry, writing. She seems like someone that would also want to please her family. So poetry/writing would be a career that would give her what she wanted as well as making her grandfather proud.

Janie's grandmother wants Janie to marry someone that will take care of her. This idea is likely Nanny's version of the American Dream. Nanny does not realize Janie's version of the American Dream will involve independence and choosing who she will love and marry. In the last chapter of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Janie seems to have gotten her American Dream. She is in her own home and she is independent of any man controlling her life. She is happy with her loving memories of Tea Cake. "Here was peace." (Hurston 193)

Both women had their own versions of the American Dream, just like any people have their own version of the American Dream. The dream could be about the freedom of speech or the right to vote. Fortunately for both of the main characters, it seems they have achieved their dreams.