

Pistols song. But the success of Cash's version was rooted not in the song's novelty but in its integrity.

Johnny Cash seems incapable of singing a lyric that he doesn't mean, and that is both his singular strength and a possible explanation of why country radio has neglected his recent work. Perhaps his cognizance of official Nashville freezing him out led Cash to select the most ambitious slate of songs to cover yet on 2003's "The Man Comes Around." The unlikely specters of Cash versions of lyrics by Roberta Flack, Depeche Mode, and Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails are all on offer here. "The Man Comes Around" very well could be Johnny Cash's last studio recording. Physically, he continues to deteriorate, and the recent death of his longtime wife June Carter Cash doesn't bode well for his continued recording either. That said, Cash's last recording in many ways could be the finest of the "American" collaborations between him and Rubin, or even of his career.

Cash's version of Trent Reznor's "Hurt" pierces the soul, brings the listener closer to God, and fills one with anger if one thinks about it long enough. How is it that a music industry capable of producing such art inundates us with such unmitigated garbage so much of the time? How could Nashville make Johnny Cash work so hard for relevance in his last days, all the while pimping interchangeable performers like Shania Twain, the Dixie Chicks, and a seeming battalion of soft-palmed Walmart Cowboys with brand new Stetsons and commensurately callow and shallow lyrics? The industry spit on Johnny Cash by shoving him into retirement. But he has exacted his revenge, outperforming the lot of them even on his deathbed. He is the best of America, and his music is appropriate for anyone seeking to understand what independence and freedom are really all about. ■

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## BOOKS

[*Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. Carla Kaplan, Doubleday, 880 Pages]

### Harlem's Old Rightist

By Marcus Epstein

ZORA NEALE HURSTON is one of the multiculturalist and feminist Left's favorite authors. Hurston is best known as a leading member of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and '30s, whose books like *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* were considered some of the best works written by a black author. During the '40s and '50s, she fell into obscurity, and her works were largely forgotten after her death in 1960. A 1975 cover article about her by Alice Walker in *Ms.* magazine and a biography written in 1977 by Robert Hemeway revived interest in Hurston. Since then, there have been over a dozen books written on her, and her works have sold millions of copies.

What is largely ignored and forgotten is that Hurston was a staunch conservative. She bitterly denounced Reconstruction, the New Deal, and Communism. She supported Robert Taft's 1952 presidential run, Joe McCarthy through the Army-McCarthy hearings, and even worked on George Smather's controversial campaign against Claude "Red" Pepper. Most perplexing to her leftist admirers is her opposition to the Supreme Court's famous *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation ruling in 1954. Nearly all her articles dealing with these issues, published in magazines like *American Legion*, the *American Mercury*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, have not been republished.

Most of Hurston's admirers ignore these facts or look at them as an aberration

and low point in her career. Robert Hemeway says Hurston was a "talent in ruins" when she wrote about politics and suggested her views were shaped because she was spiteful of her failures—"the politics of resentment" as some would say. A new collection of her personal letters, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, collected and edited by Carla Kaplan, however, shows a very different picture of Hurston's political outlook.

While Kaplan is clearly not sympathetic to Hurston's views, which she dismisses as "reactionary," she admits "that there was an underlying logic to her thinking" and that her "intolerance remained based in the fierce pride that had made her successful." Kaplan notices that Hurston had always resented the way that Communists tried to infiltrate the Harlem Renaissance and use the black artists to further their political agenda. Hurston also avoided making her books into political statements. One can look at all her letters up until the 1940s, and she rarely mentions racism. She wrote, "I hate talking about the race problem. I am a writer, and leave sociological problems to the sociologists." She was, however, very proud of her race and accordingly did not believe in self-pity. She criticized liberals who "seek out and praise characters of the lowest type and most sordid circumstances and portray the thing as the common state of all Negroes and end up with the conclusions that the whites, and particularly the Capitalist whites are responsible for this condition."

This patronizing attitude became pervasive in the New Deal, which she believed hurt blacks. Because of Roosevelt's policies, "crime in Harlem is rampant, and the police are helpless because the New Deal-promoted Negro Politicians immediately let out a scream that Negroes are being persecuted the minute a Negro thug is arrested." An example of this was the 1935 race riot in New York, which she witnessed. Communists instigated the riot, but, according to Hurston, "nothing was done about it because they had all pledged to vote for Roosevelt in the 1936 election. The

blame was hurled at the door of the capitalists who did not vote for Roosevelt."

With her vitriolic wit, she did not even spare Roosevelt upon his death. She wrote, "[T]hat dear, departed, crippled-up so and so was the Anti-Christ long spoken of. I never dreamed that so much hate and negative forces could be

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unleashed on the world until I wintered and summered under his dictatorship."

Hurston's opposition to the *Brown* decision was well reasoned and in many ways prophetic. While she opposed state-enforced segregation, she found the logic of the decision patronizing towards blacks. Because *Plessy v. Ferguson* already established that the schools had to have equal facilities, "if there are adequate Negro schools and prepared instructors and instructions, then there is nothing different except the presence of white people." She believed, "[S]ince the days of the never-to-be-sufficiently deplored Reconstruction, there has been current the belief that there is no great[er] delight to Negroes than physical association with whites." She viewed this attitude as "insulting rather than honoring" her race. To Hurston, "the whole matter revolves around the self-respect of my people. How much satisfaction can I get from a court order for someone to associate with me who does not wish me near them?"

Hurston admired Robert Taft, who, when asked if he would forcibly desegregate schools if elected president responded, "No. The president of the United States is an executive, elected to carry out the laws made and provided, not to make laws himself. There is nothing in the Constitution that would give me the power to interfere and I would not do so. If it was there, I would follow the law." She supported this stance because "if you turn an executive loose to go outside the law in your favor on Monday, you have also given him the

power to go outside the law on Thursday against you."

She believed that it was possible that *Brown* would have a grave impact on the Constitution that many did not realize. While the South was "being frantic over the segregation ruling, it had better keep its eyes open for more important

things." The ruling on segregation launched a trial balloon for those who favored judicial activism: "[a] relatively safe one, since it is sectional and on a matter not likely to arouse other sections of the nation to the support of the South. If it goes off fairly well, a precedent has been established. Govt. by fiat can replace the Constitution."

In her letters, Hurston said she wished to write an article on foreign policy, but there is no record of such an article. She did, however, say a good deal about foreign affairs in various letters. While she supported rooting Communists out of the federal government and academia, she was critical of the war in Korea and American support for the French in Indochina because she did not see the battles in Asia as solely driven by Communism. Rather, she saw the Communists "merely taking advantage of the known anti-Anglo-Saxon feeling in Asia and the Near East." With the Asians possessing modern arms and technology, "just setting to beat them down as in the Boxer Rebellion is no longer feasible, as Korea has demonstrated." The Asians were not going to give up easily, and because "we ourselves have no colonies there is no sense in trying to maintain it for others."

Admittedly, Hurston's views were not always consistent. In some letters she denounced the Fair Employment Practices Committee, while she endorsed Robert Taft for his support of it in others. In November 1945 she heaped praise upon Harry Truman, yet less than a year later she called him a monster

whom she would always consider "nothing else but the BUTCHER OF ASIA" for dropping the atomic bomb on Japan. Despite these few aberrations, Hurston had a clear and well-thought-out political worldview. She consistently stood up for the values of prudence, the individual, and the community against the federal government, demagogues, and victimization.

*Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* deals with far more than just the politics. In the over 600 letters in this volume, Hurston discusses literature, music, anthropology, and often just gossip. She corresponds with such notables as Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, Max Eastman, Franz Boas, and Carl Sandburg. In compiling this volume, Kaplan has done a great service by showcasing the private thoughts of a great novelist and political thinker. ■

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[*Voucher Wars: Waging the Legal Battle over School Choice*, Clint Bolick, Cato, 277 pages]

## School Choice and the Courts

By Daniel J. Flynn

MORE THAN FOUR decades ago, economist Milton Friedman outlined a plan for the government to issue parents vouchers for the purpose of sending their children to the school of their choice. "It would meet the just complaints of parents that if they send their children to private non-subsidized schools they are required to pay twice for education—once in the form of general taxes and once directly," the future Nobel Prize winner wrote in *Capitalism and Freedom*. "It would permit competition to develop. The development and improvement of all schools would thus be stimulated."

Formulating the idea of school choice would prove easier than putting that idea into practice. In *Voucher Wars: Waging the Legal Battle over School*

*Choice*, Clint Bolick details the protracted legal battle to win for local communities the right to grant vouchers to parents who opt for private rather than public education for their children. As an attorney immersed in this decade-plus courtroom war, Bolick is certainly the right man to write this book. Along with his colleagues, Bolick litigated more than a dozen cases involving vouchers. His legal odyssey passed through such diverse locales as Ohio, Puerto Rico, and Vermont, and culminated in a victory before the Supreme Court in last year's *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* decision.

"The road from a Saturday hearing in a steamy Madison courtroom in August 1990 to the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court on June 27, 2002, was a long and arduous one," Bolick writes. In Wisconsin, Bolick represented Polly Williams, a welfare mother turned state legislator. Proving that politics makes strange bedfellows, Williams, who harbored suspicions towards whites, Republicans, and the Catholics running many of the local private schools, "mixed a dose of Milton Friedman and a dose of Malcolm X and came up with the nation's first urban school choice plan." Shunned by tradi-

tional allies, Williams found an unlikely friend in Bolick, a libertarian legal activist.

Bolick's enemies proved an even stranger lot. In Tallahassee, Bolick knew he was in for rough times when the legal advocate for the anti-school-choice forces emerged from the chambers of Judge "Bubba" Smith prior to court proceedings. Smith, who refused to recuse himself after denying allegations of his son's pending nuptials to the daughter of a high-ranking official of the teachers' union, would issue an opinion taken "verbatim" from the teachers' union. Later, Judge Smith's son would indeed marry the daughter of the union bigwig, leaving Bolick to comment, "I guess we had stirred up a romance after all." A higher court would subsequently rule that Smith had become an advocate in the dispute he was supposed to be adjudicating, throwing him off the case.

Just as school choice attracted a peculiar coalition of proponents (inner-city blacks, Catholics, conservative policy wonks), it inspired a diverse opposition (doctrinaire libertarians, atheists, union leaders). While self-interest explains the National Education Association's opposition to vouchers, serious questions have arisen about school choice in other quarters. Will voucher programs make private schools more like public ones? Will school choice drain even more money into a schooling abyss? Will government regulations follow government dollars?

While Bolick largely dodges these important questions, he effectively dismisses the libertarian argument that government disengagement from education is the only solution. "[I]t is more important to get *something* going than to await the ideal," *Voucher Wars* contends. In other words, it is dumb to sacrifice the good for the perfect. Bolick adds, "what really mattered to me was getting kids out of bad schools and into good ones." This common sense approach is what broadened the appeal of vouchers beyond the realm of theoreticians and policy gurus.

While supporters of school choice will find much to cheer about, portions

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