

Re-Membering the Song of My Self— African-American Self-Formation in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

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Abstract

This essay aims to analyze how an African-American self is constructed in Morrison's *Jazz*, with a contextual argument to suggest that Morrison successfully foregrounds Africanist personas in the realm of American literature. The essay proper is divided into three sections: first, the construction of identities in the postmodern era; second, popular music and cultural identity; third, jazz structure and self formation in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*. In the first section, I discuss how critics in the postmodern era deal with the issues of identities, and I appropriate Stuart Hall's theories of identity to analyze Violet's and Joe's self-formation. In the second section, I argue that popular music can be viewed as a platform for the listeners and the performers to construct cultural identity, and I suggest that Violet's assimilation into the urban black community be correlated with her adaptation to the jazz music. In the third section, I discuss how the main characters in *Jazz*, through their improvisatory riffs, re-member their past experiences and

thereby establish a “unified” sense of self, and I also suggest that the defiant spirit of jazz is shown in the character of the ambiguous, self-deconstructing narrator.

Key Words: identities, self-formation, jazz