

“—a collection of family trees [...]” (Morrison Paradise 187).

Clearly personal and group identity is an important theme in almost all ethnic writing. Regardless of whether it is African-American writers, Jewish writers, Native-American writers, Asian writers, etc. the search for or importance of individual identity coupled with ethnic culture is touched upon. The theme of being separate from the dominant culture runs throughout ethnic writings and provides each group its own identity. But even so it is clear that different authors see this need differently and differ on what these identities should incorporate or even what is influential in their makeup.

This paper looks at specific influences to the identity of African-Americans as portrayed in the works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Those influences include perceptions represented by the two writers as to what they appear to believe contribute to the sense of identity that forms and maintains the African-American persona. The relations between blacks and whites cannot be overemphasized as far as importance in how these two writers see black identity. African-Americans are who they are because of enslavement and later discrimination in a white controlled society. Another critically important and emphasized factor for both is that of community. How important is African-American community, or the grouping and inter-reliance of those within it, to the concept of black identity? (The terms “African-American” and “black” are used interchangeably in this paper.) Briefly, the issue of male dominance is also mentioned in connection to the question of whether a feministic bent is also a factor in the two authors’ works. In exploring the writings of these two African-American women writers it can be seen that the importance of these influences are represented quite differently. On the one hand, Morrison clearly concentrates on the importance of community. While, on the other Walker seems put off by community and stresses in her characters the desire for alienation or some form of isolation.

In contrasting these two authors’ works we can see that the idea of black community is not a universally accepted characteristic for black identity. That being black to Walker is more connected with the past and an imagined nature than

it is with the supporting of any perceived racial connection. Morrison appears to believe strongly that black community and group coherence is of utmost importance to what it is to be African-American.

But it is the conflict between blacks and whites that seems to dominate the ethnic writer and Morrison's early work moves first into this and later evolves into her concern for community. Her first novel, The Bluest Eye, recognizes a jealousy of whites that concerns the desperate quest for personal definition. The young African - American girl Pecola longs to have blue eyes. She wants to be beautiful and see her world through the eyes of a white girl. Her self-love can only be found through a deconstruction of her own existence; self-hate. Morrison's first novel indicates the struggle for identity through jealousy and self-hate brought on by the culture of whites which oppresses and restricts black culture. In fact, her first work seems more in line with Alice Walker's works as far as conflicts is concerned.

"The whites had done terrible things to us: [...] But beyond what they were doing to us, as adults, they were destroying our children. Who were starving to death – their bodies, their minds, their dreams – right before our eyes. We fought the white man as we fought pestilence" (Walker Temple 305). In Walker's book Temple of my Familiar, Ola, in Africa, sipping tea, is telling how slavers and whites were fought against and then Fanny later continues to say African Americans "seem to be losing who we are. We don't understand white people; that's the crux of the matter" (306). This dialogue highlights a concept that Walker clearly represents as a major characteristic influence of African American identity: the white man. The words of her character Lynne in Meridian put forth her own views when she says to Truman, "You're like the rest of those nigger zombies. No life of your own at all unless it's something against the white folks" (Walker Meridian 149). "Teach them to hate, if you want them to survive" (Third Life 217). As stated, the identity of the ethnic group is established through conflict with the dominant group. That conflict can take many forms, some of which, as Morrison notes is self-hate as is seen in The Bluest Eye where the girl Pecola traps herself in the illusion that if she had blue eyes like a white girl she

would be beautiful and loved, that her very life would be transformed. As Cormier-Hamilton indicates, “by subscribing to a false white standard of beauty, African-Americans assist the repressive efforts of the majority culture and bury their identities, following an unhealthy path of self-hatred rather than self-love” or acceptance (5).

Morrison, like Walker, continues to point out the resentment of whites as a facet of black identity in her later works but it is more reserved than the earlier The Bluest Eye. “Who would they be if they couldn’t describe the insults, violence, and oppression that their lives (and the television news) were made up of” (Morrison Song 107-8). Such comments in Morrison’s texts, however, are few and far between in comparison to Walker’s. It is Walker that sharply points out the violence that she believes is necessary for black identity to find its true freedom. The character Meridian recognizes this in the last of the novel when she will sing the memory songs to “those who know they must spill blood in order to help the poor and the black and therefore go right ahead – and when they stop to wash off the blood and find their throat too choked with the smell of murdered flesh to sing,” that’s when the past must be recalled for them (Meridian 201). This need for violence to remove oppression seems to be at the heart of this Walker novel as earlier Meridian and Lynne are watching a TV show with a young black man that had just gotten the vote and the ability to stay in a white motel.

Now that he had won the vote, he was saying, where was he to get the money to pay for his food? Looks like the whole Movement for the vote and to get into motels was just to teach him that everything in this country, from the vote to motels, had to be changed.

In fact, he said, looks like what he needed was a gun (173).

Not surprisingly, Walker shows that this TV situation was obvious to the two black women as they realize that the “country was owned by the rich and the rich must be relieved of this ownership before “Freedom” meant anything [...] [This]

was something so basic to their understanding of America they felt naïve even discussing it” (173).

But even if it is Walker who is more outspoken about the violence of the white/ black race relations, it is this characteristic facet of the ethnic novel that both authors embrace to some extent. In a 1989 interview Morrison remarks:

I feel personally sorrowful about black-white relations a lot of the time because black people have always been used as a buffer in this country between powers to prevent class war, to prevent other kinds of real conflagrations. If there were no black people here in this country, it would have been Balkanized. The immigrants would have torn each other's throats out, as they have done everywhere else. But in becoming an American, from Europe, what one has in common with that other immigrant is contempt for me -- it's nothing else but color. Wherever they were from, they would stand together. They could all say, "I am not that." So in that sense, becoming an American is based on an attitude: an exclusion of me. It wasn't negative to them -- it was unifying. When they got off the boat, the second word they learned was "nigger." (Morrison Time Interview)

Obviously the viewpoint of the two authors regarding the relations between whites and blacks are closer than they would seem from their respective writings.

To Walker it is apparent that besides the battle against whites and their actions, it is the past that figures most prominently in the formation and maintenance of black identity. In *Meridian*, the protagonist at the end of the novel realizes an important aspect of her battle for freedom: “I am not to belong to the future. I am to be left, listening to the old music, [...] I will come forward [in the future for others] and sing from memory songs they will need once more to hear” (201). Those old memory songs are the connection to a past that the people Meridian will sing to have not experienced. That past must be recreated for those cut off from it.

And it should be said that this is an undisputed facet of all racial and ethnic groups. A past is extremely important to who we see ourselves as now, our place in the world, and how others should or do see us.

Did I mention my first sight of the African coast? Something struck in me, in my soul, Celie, like a large bell, and I just vibrated. Corrine and Samuel felt the same. And we kneeled down right on deck and gave Thanks to God for letting us see the land for which our mothers and Fathers cried – and lived and died – to see again. (Walker Color Purple 149)

The past, the “place” that is argued to represent the true identity of the African American is that of Africa. Again, it is not people, but influences and ideals that make blacks black to Walker. “The Africans don’t even see us.[...] We love them. We try every way we can to show that love. But they reject us” (243). But the speaker Samuel, a missionary, fails to see Africans are filling a need in his own identity system and trying to change them to be more like him, which embraces the white Christian religion. Africa, like its peoples, becomes a past ideal for Walker that gives a diasporic identity to what she sees as a “lost people” – her own people. Perhaps it is that to Walker, the white man “destroyed and therefore “took” their [blacks] culture, their connection to their ancestors and the universe [...] He took their future” (Temple 308-9). If they don’t have a future, perhaps all that can be looked at is the past. The idea of the past, the connection to a people’s identity is, to Walker, also their very future – one cannot be without the other.

Toni Morrison also shows the same belief in the need for the past to help fashion and maintain identity. Morrison’s novel Song of Solomon is a long journey to find identity by finding a connection with the past. The connection with Africa is made as well as with Walker’s novels. However, it is back in America where Milkman finds his past, not back in Africa, the home of his flying ancestor. However, Morrison maintains that the past is important, after all isn’t it to all groups, but that the past for African Americans is more rooted in American.

The identities expressed by the characters as presented by both writers are those identities gained from an African-American experience. None of the characters ‘fit’ in Africa. They are who they are because of their community, their experiences, even that of their father’s and mother’s experiences – and those are all found in America. “Only a part of him came from there [Africa], after all” (Temple 390). Therefore, it can be said that Morrison recognizes a need for a closer, or more recent past as more vital in forming or maintaining ethnic identity. It is the community that people come from, rather than the far off one that has more impact on what decides a group culture by Morrison’s writings.

It is the shared experience of any ethnic group that founds and stabilizes, or cements, their identities as a people – one definition of culture. The American experience, for good or bad, is the experience of the characters in the works of these two writers. The African movement of the 1960’s and 70’s in America seems to have had more of an impact on Walker than on Morrison. Walker consistently makes the desire to return to Africa a part of the black search for identity; again, the importance of the past as paramount. Morrison’s 1970’s community in Paradise remarks about the young people in town as talking “about how handsome they were while giving themselves ugly names. Like not American. Like African.” But the older woman thinks in regard for herself “She had the same level of interest in Africans as they had in her: none. But Roy talked about them like they were neighbors, or, worse, family” (Paradise 104).

Neighbors and the neighborhood are important concepts in regard to a group culture. In fact, Morrison may believe that the “most serious threat to black culture is the obliterating influence of social change” (Sisson 129). It is community that Morrison hopes to be able to rebuild and regain for black Americans. (129). Therefore, neighborhood is essential to a stable and firm cultural identity for African Americans in Morrison’s view. Walker’s view of black community is more of a racial and sexual perspective by way of individual struggles with oppression and abuse. Morrison goes further than this by showing, for example through Milkman in Song of Solomon, that the discovery of identity is also a discovery of community (124).

But this idea seems contrary to reality to Walker, who, in a 1999 interview replied to a question concerning successful black women:

We integrated [White America] into a system where loneliness is the norm. In the past, we became part of the industrial revolution, and now in the present, part of the corporate era, both of which put money and jobs first. We've sacrificed community (Walker Interview)

The perception of community for Alice Walker may be more individualized because of this belief in victimization of blacks by whites. It is apparently the conflicts that Walker is more interested in rather than the cohesion between blacks.

The concept of black community, as stated, is clearly different for the two writers. Walker gives very little material on the subject outside of general background for her stories such as the town of Chicokema in Meridian. But even this town is not centered on the relationships black residents gaining anything from being together. Her description of Mr. Isaac with the black children emphasizes the mix cultures in the town rather than black cohesiveness (Temple 13-14). Her discussion on blacks living together is generally not a community but family groups. Homes are in many cases away from others. “Good fences don’t make neighbors” according to Grange Copeland. (Walker Third Life 243). Grange liked to live out in the woods “that offered the privacy and quiet that they both enjoyed” (257). Copeland’s comments highlight Walker’s view that keeping separations, and therefore peaceful co-existence, does not ring true in true life. People need to interact to be neighbors; however, that interaction is almost always a road to conflict. Walker who enjoys a calm and peaceful life herself (Walker Interview) mirrors Copeland’s desires of privacy and quiet, but this also reflects the fact that community is sacrificed or denied. Again, the community for Walker is the family and individual homes.

In The Temple of My Familiar, Walker shows the communal spirit at homes like “Big Mama’s house” where there was “laughter and cold lemonade and flowers and always lots of children and older people, too, that Big Mama helped raise” (Temple 167). Another communal atmosphere for Walker is the reference

to a “band” which was “a renegade black women’s church” (299). Again for Walker, the community is small: family groups or people with common rebellious goals.

In Paradise, Toni Morrison paints a picture of a community of blacks that rely upon each other in an almost Zionic way. In fact, some of the names of their streets are references to the bible: *New Zion* and *Mount Calvary*. The African-Americans here interact and help each other at every turn. The novel’s dialogue for the most part is the dialogue of the town’s people interacting with one another. Throughout the novel are terms that are synonymous with community: neighborhood, convent, and congregation.

“Quiet white and yellow houses full of industry; and in them were elegant black women at useful tasks; orderly cupboards minus surfeit or miserliness; linen laundered and ironed to perfection; good meat seasoned and ready for roasting” (Morrison Paradise 111). It seems to Walker houses should be yellow and white since even in dreams there are “the yellow houses with white doors [...]” (Tar Baby 295). And in this perfect town “they denied each other nothing, bowed to no one, knelt only to their Maker” (Paradise 99).

The “boundaries of the elaborately socialized world of black people” (Song 149) recognizes the importance that Morrison places on communities of blacks rather than on a distant past or on splintered ideologies. Walker, who wrote the above sentence, seems to pass over any detailed discussion or description of this “elaborately socialized world of black people.” It seems that she is writing for an audience she assumes knows such things without the need of having had them explained. The background knowledge Walker assumes can be called inherent in her audience. She would rather explore details of oppressive effects and personal struggles resulting from abuse or confusion. All this seems to indicate that she is writing for a black audience more so than for anyone else. Which is of course appropriate if that is her intent, but somewhat limiting if it is not. She says that the “crux of the matter is that we don’t understand white people” but she repays the mistake by not allowing whites to understand her perception of blacks as anything other than a few uniquely written individuals all struggling with the same



resentment.

Morrison treats community as much more central to her plotlines and character interactions than Walker does. Walker makes reference to towns and places where characters live but doesn't explore the interactions of the community except in confrontations. As stated, Walker concentrates on conflict and not on cohesion between blacks. In the town of Chicokema, the only real interactions we see in the town is when the black children (not even all black) want to go to see the circus led by the character Meridian. There is a racial incident where violence threatens but for the steadfast determination of the female protagonist. Most interactions with community are just vague references from individuals in isolation or alienated from others. Again, Walker treats the search for identity much more on a personal level with very few group influences.

Morrison's plotlines interject group influences through community much more often and with more depth than Walker's. In The Bluest Eye we start off the novel with descriptions of the town and neighbors. How people would chat and where they lived were pointed out. The history of buildings was discussed. "At one time, when the building housed a pizza parlor, people saw only slow-footed teen-aged boys huddled about the corner [...] "and before that there was the Hungarian bakery and even earlier there was the real estate office (Bluest Eye 33).

In Tar Baby the family invaded by the outsider lives isolated and away from the community. But this serves quite well to show that they feel cut off from others and the security that that brings. And here the home is the home of whites, which later helps the realization of alienation to the black girl Jade even more. Jade felt more at home in New York around the hustle and bustle of people and action.

Song of Solomon allows Milkman to find his identity through community by visiting two specific community towns, small towns, Danville and Shalimar, where the answers to his past reside in the memories of the inhabitants.

And in Paradise Morrison's entire plot revolves around two places, the convent and the town of Ruby. The girls in the convent and the community of Ruby – the perfect little town that goes bad – are excellent examples of conflicting

identities and how the environment of group versus alienation works to develop those conflicting identities.

Aspects of a community are important in explaining why community is important to any group identity and therefore individual identity. Individual identity can stem from the group as the group can stem from the world in which it exists. In community there are influences like the church, the shared sense of ownership or belonging, friends you can rely on, etc., which gives a stability and foundation that an individual can feel free to emulate and reinforce.

The church as one aspect of community is seen as very important in Southern black lives. And Marie Lauret points out that black gospel music, unlike white church music, is a “mode of creating a Beloved Community by means of active participation” (Lauret 67). But she goes on to discuss how the Blues, which is the music Shug sings in The Color Purple, or “devil music” is “of this world” and not “for this world” like gospel. Gospel is a means of creating “a community of spirit” (68). In Meridian, the preacher gives a political sermon and the church is more like a white church in its lack of participation and the fact there is no emphasis on singing. There seems to be an underlying “righteous anger” (69).

The comment by Meridian that the “church has changed” (69) emphasizes Morrison’s own fears that the loss of community is the greatest threat to black culture and identity. An identity again that stems not from African but from the American experience. Morrison’s depiction of the church very much tries to encompass the idea of community participation and peace as can be seen in Paradise and in The Bluest Eye. “In church especially did these dreams [redemption] grow. The songs caressed her [...]” (Bluest Eye 113).

However as stated, to Morrison the loss of community is probably the most serious threat to black identity. This can be seen in the progression of her community in Paradise. This is a progression that shows a breakdown of the ideal community and how community can become a cancer to itself when it becomes too isolated and too wrapped up in its own perceptions. Identities within the black community mirror that community in her work, in Morrison’s apparent opinion.

The community breaks down in Paradise and the result is multiple murders in the name of righteousness. It begins with the young in town becoming restless and supportive of activism. The older community members see the condition and some understand that “kids need more than what’s here” (Paradise 117). The peaceful identities of the townspeople are further influenced by outsiders coming into town and raising questions of corruption with their bank and therefore their security in life since the bank finances everything and everyone (115). Finally, the events of Martin Luther King Jr.’s shooting and the subsequent laws and commitments by government had left people feeling cheated as there was no visible results for them that they could see (117).

Now the town was like “all small black communities: protective, God-loving, thrifty but not miserly” but somehow with “an icy suspicion of outsiders” (160). With the changes taking place their “glacial wariness they once confined for outsiders more and more was directed toward each other” (161). The community which “used to be as tight as wax” was falling apart (207). Continuing, when the character Pat asks this of the Reverend, he replies, “It still is. In a crisis. But they keep to themselves otherwise.” Pat recognizes the Reverend’s own attitude and asks, “Don’t you mean ‘we’? We keep to ourselves?” (207). Morrison’s words of Ruby becoming like “all small black communities” certainly seems to reinforce the notion that she believes that blacks are in conflict with each other and see other blacks as ‘they’ rather than grouping themselves together; surprisingly like Walker’s own concerns.

All of the influences and doubts begin to erode the sense of community that had been maintained in Ruby. There had to be a reason behind the troubles and perceived signs the people saw. They did not heed the warnings of Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, in his words: “The punishment for not showing mercy or compassion was a scattering among all nations, and pleasant land made desolate” (192). “The breakup of the group or tribe or consortium of families or, [...], the splitting up of a contingent of families who had lived with or near each other since before Bunker Hill” (192).

The reason is found. The Convent with the alienated, homeless girls –

whores and sinners – was the reason for troubles as decided by the growing accounts of the town of Ruby. Therefore, community became the impetus for a group of men, acting to make things better, influenced by the community to kill the girls.

The last of the novel explores the idea that all of this was a betrayal of tradition. The town of Ruby, “unbridled by Scripture, deafened by the roar of its own history” was “an unnecessary failure” (306). And how it would soon be like any other small town where the old was full of regret, children would leave, and no one would connect to the messages given in church to their lives. In fact, the town, though not directly stated as such, would end according to two residents returning: “[...] they were sorting out what looked like the total collapse of the town” (304).

Society, or community, as an influence on identity therefore can be negative on identity if it is perceived that the identity is different from that of the group identity. Dawn T. Turner in her essay concerning the themes in Toni Morrison’s work says that the two personalities of Sula and Nel (Sula) are affected by society in different ways but with negative connotations from each. Nel wants to conform to society and Sula openly indifferent and hostile towards community (Turner 363). Yet neither Nel nor Sula have any “close relationship to the society about them” and it is the community in Morrison’s story that comes up needing Sula (364). Like the town of Lorain needed Pecola in the Bluest Eye, the blacks in Medallion need Sula to give a contrast to their supposed goodness. Morrison seems to be saying that the communities have need for a scapegoat (364).

Regardless of the light that the author depicts community, as one that is good or one that alienates sensitive characters, it is an intimate influence in the identity and personality makeup of that character. Morrison and Walker realize that outside influences and the environment, including the people, around a person help to form that person and his or her expectations. Whether it is to conform and join the group or to despise and ridicule the group the influence is there and therefore the affected idea of identity and place in the world.

Through the discussion of past, resentment towards whites, and communities we've covered several influences that affect the development and maintenance of black identity as presented in the works of the two women authors. Both authors give clues as to what they believe is important in African American lives and identities. The concentrations on different aspects are not the same giving an indication that the two authors think differently on the idea of black identity.

It should be remembered that to both of these authors, black identity is very closely tied up with female identity, or at least that the two coexist very closely together (Smith 3). This argument opens one last element of discourse about black identity herein. Both authors are black feminist writers, and in fact Toni Morrison has only written one book, Song of Solomon, where the main character was male. So how does this perspective affect the idea of identity as presented?

Walker experienced a closeness with her mother but was "more distant and negative" in relations to her father and brothers "marked as it was by sexism and violence" (Lauret 5). It is argued by the poet and writer K. T. Cheatwood, according to Lauret, that "Alice Walker has rejected black identity [...] because she purportedly seeks to divide the black community in her criticism of black men" (qtd. in Lauret 11). "Black/feminist identities, in order to gain a valid political voice, have repeatedly and contextually to reinvent themselves in dialogue and conflict with racism [sic]" (16). These statements indicate a close connection in Walker's mind concerning the issues of black identity and female identity. They are two sides of the same discriminated coin: a coin that includes the same arguments and the same ideas of past and oppression – whether from whites or men (of any color). She also strongly connects the idea of nature, of Paganism, to both black and female identities. "If there is one thing African-Americans have retained of their African heritage, it is probably animism: a belief [...]" all things are inhabited by a spirit (11). Paganism constructs nature as a Great Mother, a woman and mother. This idea for feminism is a perfect fit. For black identity it naturally puts woman in the center of all things. We can see the writing style of Walker follow these concepts very clearly. Her stories are not just about blacks but about how black identity relies upon not just any women, but black women.

Morrison, on the other hand, is again less antagonistic in her style and more rounded in her views, though she also works from a feminist perspective. Clearly she also views black identity as being closely aligned with black females. It is the females in her stories that influence the males. The black females are the ones that “lead” the men towards identity such as Pilate and Sweet does for Milkman in Song of Solomon. The only male main character for Morrison starts out as a spoiled childlike man who only sees his past, identity through community, and redemption through the efforts of women, who are themselves outcasts or somewhat unconventional. But it is only fair to present Toni Morrison’s views on her feministic writing.

I think it's off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I'm involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don't subscribe to patriarchy, and I don't think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it's a question of equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things  
(Morrison Time Interview)

Morrison goes on to state that that “doesn't happen with white male writers. No one says Solzhenitsyn is writing only about those Russians.” In other words, a woman writing about women must be a feminist. Morrison in an interview with Salon Magazine states that she “doesn’t write ‘isms’” (Morrison Salon Interview).

It can be argued that the influences of black identity as presented by these two African-American women writers is ‘colored’ by their own experiences and identities and perhaps even if they see themselves as feminist writers or not. However, that in no way weakens the arguments that they make through their writings. Past is an important part of group and individual identity. Their ideas of community come from their ideas of who blacks are and the concerns they have. Community and the culture therein is a fundamental influence on individual identity as well as the action that drives the plots of the novels.

Identity is one of the main themes in many different genres and types of

writing. Black identity is an important issue for black writers as the conflicts with the society in which they live have many conflicting values, thoughts, and peoples. Further, American history is one that makes black identity marginalized in many cases and in many ways. It is these problems that make it so central to black writing even though it may be hidden beneath other obvious issues like abuse and discussions of slavery.

And, as is argued here, one aspect that is treated differently but remains important is that of community. Black community, like any other ethnic community, stresses the interdependence of its members for purposes of not only helping each other but for keeping a collective culture alive; and therefore, keeping individual racial identities alive. However, the perceived importance of black community differs between the works of the major writers, Morrison and Walker. Morrison seems quite different in how her works portray community. She shows the need for blacks to rely on each other to form and maintain identity. Walker, on the other hand, in showing community, shows conflict between members. This stark difference in the treatment of this vital influence indicates the fact the idea of black identity differs between the two as to what really comes together to form that identity. Yet, we see both apparently sharing close opinions concerning the truth in black communities as “suspicions” between members is normal. Clearly, both writers believe a connection to the past is important, that to cut yourself away from your ancestors is to lose yourself, but Walker doesn’t seem to be able to go beyond this and sees neighbors only in those who share her views – comrades in arms against whites. The past is important it seems as a rejection of whites and the present. Her depictions of African-American communities are more concerned with the problems between individuals than with group identities. In fact, the words of her character Sula seem to sum up her idea of black identity’s main influence as that of whites in “you put it all on them” (Walker Sula 204). Walker’s dream of paradise seems to be an African plain unspoiled by whites. “Ecstasy is Uncut Forest and the Smell of Fresh-Baked Bread [sic]” (Temple 126). It seems that a crucial element of black happiness is for blacks to be completely left alone and dependent upon no one besides family. We can’t really see what Africa gives blacks from Walker’s works or comments. It is simply “home” and away from

whites. The traditions of Africa don't really seem to be of vital importance in her vision.

Morrison, on the other hand, sees the need to maintain traditions and that those traditions are intimately tied with the need to maintain community ties. This difference is one of the factors that tempers her writing and helps to bring a true meaning to the idea of "belonging" which is essential for any social identity. So for Morrison, paradise consists of blacks living in harmony and interdependence regardless of where. It is a paradise of cooperation and tolerance maintained and protected. And although her writing seems to be much more tolerant, her personal comments clearly show hostility towards whites. The influences on ethnic and personal identity seem very similar between both authors if the perspectives of both are examined; from the wrongs committed by whites to the struggles in living together with other blacks. Their writing, however, shows differences in treatment and severity. Morrison and Walker both give the reader different experiences in the depicted lives of African-Americans struggling to come to grips with who they are and what their places are in the world. It can be seen that the influences that form their answers come from those around them. The past is preserved and identity is maintained but both are done so together as a group – "a collection of family trees."



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