5-1995

Character Names in Toni Morrison's Beloved: Why the Slaves Lost their Native Names and how this Loss Affected their Lives

Kerry J. Andrusko

CHARACTER NAMES IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*: WHY THE SLAVES LOST THEIR NATIVE NAMES AND HOW THIS LOSS AFFECTED THEIR LIVES

by

Kerry J. Andrusko

B.A., Bethel College, 1993

A Starred Paper

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

St. Cloud, Minnesota

May, 1995

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Personal names are the labels which differentiate and distinguish one person from another. They signify one's worth, one's individuality, and one's being. In *The Story of Our Names* Elsdon C. Smith writes, "A man's name is his sign board to the world. It is one of the most permanent of possessions; it remains when everything else is lost; it is owned by those who possess nothing else" (61). Denying someone a name robs him or her of self worth, identity, and recognition as an individual.

When the Africans were brought to America to become slaves they underwent drastic name changes, a fact which affected their sense of personal and collective identity. Roberta Rubenstein addresses this problem in *Boundaries of the Self*: "During the slave era when black families were inhumanly separated, retaining one's true name became a crucial means of keeping track, not simply of identity, but also of place of origin and family bloodline" (153). Toni Morrison, the author of the 1987 novel *Beloved,* also addresses the problem of lost African identities: "If you come from Africa, your name is gone. It is particularly problematic because it is not just your name but your family, your tribe . . . " (qtd. in Rubenstein 153).

In *Beloved* Morrison deals with the issue of lost African identities by uniquely naming her characters and showing how the characters are defined, driven, or limited by their names. Some of the characters have names which represent and signify something important, such as Sethe, whose name means "blessing," and Denver, who is named after a white woman who helps deliver her. Other characters choose to change their names in an act of independence, such as Stamp Paid. Some characters, like the Pauls, are given generic names which strip them of individuality. Other characters are given no names at all, including Sethe's oldest daughter, the "crawling-already? girl," and Sethe's siblings, who are abandoned and left nameless. Morrison succeeds in portraying why names are important as she dramatizes the psychological effects that accompany the names of her characters in the novel.

This paper has two parts. The first section gives a brief history of how and why African names changed when the slaves were brought to America. It also deals with the psychological scars that the Africans endured as a result of their lost heritage, culture, language, and sense of identity. The second part is a study of character names in *Beloved.* It examines why particular characters are given their names and what implications these names have on the characters' lives.

AFRICAN NAMING CUSTOMS

The naming process in Africa differs greatly from the one found in America, primarily because all African names have deliberately chosen meanings. In his book *Family Names: How Our Surnames Came to America* J. N. Hook reports that Africans of the slave napping era generally had only one single name--based on something found in the African environment, such as birds, animals, trees, and food (288). Elsdon C. Smith in *Treasury of Name Lore* reports that many African names express a hope for the child's continued life (because of the high mortality rate among African infants), while others reveal attitudes of fate and resignation. Also, some African names are connected with events happening at the time of the particular birth.

In addition to an individual name, each child has a birthday name that indicates the sex of the child and the day of the week on which it is born. There are seven names for both males and females. Each child also has a common nickname, depending on which day the child was born (4). Naming processes such as these contribute to

the Africans' sense of worth and identity, as their names they tell a story and have importance to the families and tribes.

When the Africans were transported to America to become slaves, many of their African names were altered slightly or were completely changed. Eventually, the slaves lost all connection with the naming traditions of their native land as well as with their own families. Most importantly, they lost touch with who they were in regard to their cultural heritage. Hook writes:

> No other group of newcomers to American shores ever so completely lost their native names as did the Africans. Many Americans of Italian, German, Scandinavian, Chinese, or Japanese descent, among others, still reveal their heritage by their names, but very few blacks do. And when an Italian or a German has changed his or her name, the action has ordinarily been voluntary. But the black slave had no option. (287-88)

HOW, WHEN, AND WHY THE NAME CHANGES CAME ABOUT

Name Changes by Choice

Although it is agreed that African slaves adopted new American names when they were brought to America, critics disagree as to how, when, and why this actually happened. In *American Given Names* George Stewart suggests that the Africans brought their naming customs with them to America but ceased

using them out of "mere convenience" when they learned English, primarily because there were so many different African languages represented in the New World, including the English language of the Americans (19-20). This suggests that the slaves may have chosen to abandon their native tongues due to their desire to form a sense of community--one in which the same language was spoken.

Elsdon C. Smith writes that the slaves tended to copy the American naming pattern by substituting one or more common American names without regard to their significance, mainly because they wanted to adapt to the ways of their new land (*Treasury* 5).

Choosing a surname became necessary for the blacks when they gained their freedom. According to J. N. Hook, the freed blacks tended to be very conservative and adopted names held by many whites. In consequence, the most common surname for blacks before the Civil War was Jones (294). This suggests that the former slaves had a great desire to identify with the white culture in their new homeland. Hook writes:

> By the time freedom came to substantial numbers of blacks, they had lost most of their African language, had forgotten most of its names, and had learned to a considerable extent the

> language, names, and customs of America. It was customary for Americans to bear such unremarkable names as Jones, Smith, or Harris, so the freed blacks, wanting to conform and to be assimilated to the greatest degree possible, frequently chose the names most conventional in what to them was their new home. (294-295)

In *Black Names* J. L. Dillard suggests that some freed slaves willingly adopted American surnames because they wanted to act on the privilege of selecting a name, thereby establishing their right to make a choice, while others changed their names for protection. He writes, "By reaching for the name of a big and respected planter, they hoped to enlist his sympathy should trouble come" (23). In contrast, Hook reports that although some of the freed blacks took on their former masters' names, most opted not to. He writes, "since masters were by no means universally loved or even admired or respected, many newly freed slaves preferred almost any other name to that of the former owner" (295).

In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs' sales ticket indicates that her name is Jenny Whitlow, because she belonged to Mr. Whitlow of Carolina. However, Baby Suggs refuses to go by that name, as it is the name of her former owner--a fact which she wants to forget. As a result,

Baby Suggs adopts the name of her husband and leaves the name Jenny Whitlow to whither in the past.

Name Changes as a Result of Passing Generations

A study done by Murray Heller suggests that very few slaves were permitted to retain their African names in America, even though they may have wanted to. Heller writes, "Amongst black male slaves, names of African origin appear in small number; 9.25 percent of all male slaves employ African or African derived names. Slave females employ an even smaller, 6.25 percent of African names" (16). The rate drops considerably for freed slaves, with only 3.01 percent of black males and 4.66 percent of black females maintaining their African derived names. Statistics such as these suggest that as time passed, the Africans lost the majority of the ties that they formerly had with their native land. As the generations passed and the Africans grew further away from their native land and customs, it became easier and more convenient for them to adapt to the ways of their new homeland. This is seen in *Beloved* in the names of Sethe's two sons, Howard and Buglar, who are two generations removed from their African origins. The result

is that the two boys' names are more English than African, for no reason other than Sethe had little or no knowledge of what African names were like.

Name Changes from White Slave Owners

To many early slave traders, the African slaves were thought to be simply merchandise en masse. The slaves were not distinguished by individual names until they were bought by their owners. What's more, only those slaves who became "favorites" received names. The others continued to remain nameless (Heller 6). Heller writes, "These blacks, then, had no real identity to whites as human beings for they had no names. Only when the slave acquired a name did he assume some degree of dignity in the white owner's eyes, and it would seem that the type of names would reflect the relationship" (6). If a name was personalized it indicated that the slave was valued more than a slave who was given a common, generic name.

J. N. Hook attributes the changes in slave names to the large number of languages found among the African slaves. As was stated previously, George Stewart believes that the slaves chose to

abandon their native languages and names because they desired to "fit in" to their new culture. In comparison, Hook relates that the slaves were made to adopt the English language and discard their African roots because their white slave owners demanded it. Hook writes:

> On a single large plantation there could be a babel of tongues. Had all black slaves spoken a common language (other than the English they learned little by little), many more African words and African names might have survived in this country. As it was, the captains and the crews of the slave ships did not want to bother to learn the names of any individuals within the masses huddled or sometimes shackled in the hold or on the deck. And once in their new homelands the slaves did not find their owners or overseers very eager to twist their tongues around strange-sounding names. (289)

Name Changes with Both African and American Influences

In a study of the naming practices of the Ball Family Plantations (1720-1865), Cheryll Ann Cody reports that the naming practices of the Ball slaves suggest that the system of slave naming evolved from one based on owner selection, with a little bit of slave participation, to one in which the slaves chose the names of their own children, although they were strongly influenced by their white owners. The process began with the use of kin names, added to the

use of Biblical and literary names, to one which almost identically resembled those of their white owners (595-96).

Cody's study maintains that the Balls had a great desire to give each of their slaves a unique name and identity, so that it would be less confusing for the slave owners to tell them apart. However, this practice conflicted with any desire the slaves may have had to use family names for their children. They were required to name their children the way their white masters preferred. When slaves on the same plantation shared the same first name, some form of modification was added to one or both names to distinguish between the two individuals (572). "Old" or "Big" are examples of such identifiers. In *Beloved*, three of the Sweet Home slaves are named Paul. Paul A, Paul D, and Paul F are given little individuality, except different initials which indicate who their fathers are. As a result, the Pauls share--in effect--a self, a history, and a name. They are not three men, but one.

The Ball study found that the slaves' conversion to Christianity also had a great impact on their naming practices. Cody writes:

> The lessons of the Bible presented not only a new or revitalized pool of names for slaves but also a model of family organization that stressed male roles and paternal ties. The selection of a Biblical name and the emphasis on the paternal line in the choice of a kin name brought slaves closer in some ways to the familial values of owners. (573)

At the top of the list are the names Isaac, Daniel, Lazarus, Abraham, Isabel, Mary, and Rachel (583). In *Beloved* the character name Sethe is derived from the Old Testament name Seth, which means "blessing" and "consolation." Stamp Paid also has a Biblical birth name, Joshua, which was given to him by a white slave owner.

NAME CHANGES LED TO A LOST SENSE OF IDENTITY

Regardless of when, how, or why the African slaves changed their names, the fact remains that they did change--and quite dramatically at that. The rich cultural tradition embodied in the African naming traditions fell out of existence among the Africans living in America. Along with the change in names came a lost sense of self hood. African-Americans no longer had a solid foundation based on historical and cultural traditions to identify with. For various reasons, they took on or were given the same names as their white owners. The problem with this practice is that

although they had "white" names, they were not treated the same way as white people were. They had no clear identity, at least not one they were familiar with. Although their names were similar to the white man's, they were still set apart from them as well as from their African relatives.

This distinction between between the white race and the black is also seen on a greater level. The Africans living in America did not know how to define themselves as a collective group of people. Theodore Draper writes:

> In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, American Negroes usually referred to themselves as 'Africans' or 'free Americans.' In the first half of the nineteenth century, they preferred to be known as 'peoples of color' or 'the colored population.' The terms 'Negroes' and 'blacks' were also used but less frequently . . . Leaders of the freedmen felt that they might be told to 'go back to Africa' if they continued to call themselves 'African,' but they could not call themselves 'American,' for they had no fixed legal or customary status yet in the land of their birth. (19-20)

The result is that, even now, the African-Americans ask themselves "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" In the 1960s, members of the Black Power movement were successful in changing their name from Negroes to Blacks. Twenty years later, in December 1988, Jesse Jackson announced that members of his race wanted to be called

African-Americans. Jackson said, "To be called African-Americans has cultural integrity. It puts us in our proper historical context" (qtd. in Martin 83).

In the 1960s, a friend of the African-American leader Malcolm Little told him, "You don't even know who you are. You don't even know, the white devil has hidden it from you, that you are a race of people of ancient civilizations . . . You don't even know your true family name, you wouldn't recognize your true language if you heard it." (*Malcolm X* 161). Later on, Malcolm Little dropped his surname and adopted the letter "X." He writes:

> The Muslim 'X' symbolized the true African family name that I could never know. For me, my 'X' replaced the white slave master name of 'Little' which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forebears. The receipt of my 'X' meant that forever after in the nation of Islam, I would be known as Malcolm X. (199)

In 1972, the Pan African Students Organization printed a pamphlet called "What Is Your African Name?" The pamphlet urges African-Americans to claim their Africanity and ancestry by taking two names. In the foreword, the author writes:

> My slave-master's name was Allen. To be proud of this name is to be proud of the traditions and culture through which it was received. To honor this name is to honor the rapes of my mothers and the beastly lynchings of my fathers . . . In my case,

> I forsake the name 'Allen.' In one sense this is hard--for thusly I have been called, and I am proud of the people who have borne this name for the past three generations. In another sense it is easy, for the name was never mine in the first place. (qtd. in Hook 298-299)

Changing names nowadays may seem like radical behavior, but the principle behind it seems legitimate. The African-Americans lost a significant part of their past when their names changed years ago. Because they have no way of tracing their ancestry, this loss remains prevalent in their minds to this day.

CHARACTER NAMES IN *BELOVED*

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* deals with the issue of how important names and personal identities are. Many of Morrison's characters are denied or lose their given names, a fact that helps enslave and diminish them. In contrast, other characters in *Beloved* adopt or maintain specific names, a phenomenon which helps strengthen and empower them.

Beloved

Throughout the entire novel, the reader is never given the name of the child that Sethe kills. Her given name is forgotten. Early on,

she is simply referred to as the "crawling-already? girl." When her ghost returns to 124, she takes on the name Beloved, because that is the name on her gravestone. Morrison writes, "Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name . . . Although she has claim, she is not claimed" (336). This is why Beloved returns, to claim her name and her voice--to tell her story. In "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self" Barbara Schapiro suggests that Beloved's main desire is "to be touched, recognized, known in one's inner being or essential self" (201). This is why she demands that Paul D touch her and call her by her name (*Beloved* 143). She desperately needs to be known and claimed in an intimate manner.

When Paul D meets Beloved, the first thing he does is ask her what her name is. She answers him and slowly spells out the name, "as though the letters were being formed as she spoke them" (64). Morrison writes, "Paul D recognized the careful enunciation of letters by those, like himself, who could not read but had memorized the letters of their name" (65). This is a key passage in that it shows how important names are in the daily interactions between people. It also shows how names are precious to the individuals who own them. The baby girl that Sethe kills has no name. When the

baby's ghost returns, it claims and possesses the name that marks her grave. Beloved memorizes her name and spells it out for everybody to hear. In effect, she says "this is who I am."

The name "Beloved" refers to the Sixty Million and more that Morrison dedicates her novel to. In her article "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" Jean Wyatt suggests that the generic name Beloved, which is taken from a gravestone, refers to "all of the loved ones lost through slavery, beginning with the Africans who died on the slave ships" (479). Walter Clemons in "A Gravestone of Memories" comments, "The Sixty Million and more is the best educated guess at the number of black Africans who never made it into slavery--those that died either as captives in Africa or on slave ships" (75). Denver hints at this when Paul D asks her, "You think she sure 'nough your sister?" to which she responds, "At times. At times I think she was--more" (*Beloved* 327). Because Sethe does not give her oldest daughter a name, Beloved symbolically becomes everybody's child--or everyone's lost child. The name Beloved expresses both the feelings of those who have disappeared and of those who still remain. Walter Clemons writes:

> In Beloved's monologue we can grasp that this something 'more' is that she remembers passage on a slave ship, which Sethe's murdered baby couldn't have. Though Sethe and Denver have accepted Beloved as the reincarnation of the dead baby, grown up into a young woman with a baby's insatiable demands--and Sethe never learns otherwise--Beloved is also a ghost from the slave ships of Sethe's ancestry. (75)

In a 1985 conversation with Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison talks about her inspiration for writing *Beloved*--the true story of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who killed her beloved baby daughter when her owner caught up with them. Morrison wrote *Beloved* with the intention of claiming and naming the unknown baby girl. Morrison said:

> . . . bit by bit I had been rescuing her from the grave of time and inattention. Her fingernails maybe in the first book; face and legs, perhaps, the second time. Little by little bringing her back into living-life . . . She is here now, alive. I have seen, named and claimed her--and oh what company she keeps. ("Conversation" 593)

Another fact to point out is that Beloved acquired her name through her mother's desperation to leave a monument to the murdered child. Sethe couldn't afford the engravings, so she had to sell herself to the man who did the carving. Sethe's prostitution could only buy her the seven letters that spell Beloved. He wouldn't give her the other six letters that were needed to complete the

phrase "Dearly Beloved." Although Sethe sold herself for the engraving, she had no other choice. She was a victim of the white man's treatment of slaves. As a result, Beloved's name is the offshoot of the bounds of slavery. It is through the single word that appears on the baby girl's tombstone that Sethe remembers her baby girl and that Morrison memorializes all of the people who suffered in slavery.

It has been suggested that other characters in *Beloved* learn more about themselves by invoking Beloved's name. Adam McKible in "These are the facts of the darky's history" states, "By invoking the name Beloved, the major characters re-experience or 'rememory' the past in a way that reclaims it for them" (239). McKible suggests that Sethe, Denver, and Beloved, herself, all conjure up their histories by invoking the ghost baby's name, which unlocks the future potential and healing. He writes:

> The characters in Beloved unleash the past, disjoint and revise it, and unlock the promise of days to come. Beloved's name, a container of uncontainable incongruities, becomes a crystal of consciousness that shatters the truth value of Schoolteacher's method of historiography. (240)

Beloved's name, which represents every forgotten slave, serves as a means of reorganizing the broken and lost past. Nameless slaves are given their deserved identity through the generic name Beloved.

Baby Suggs

Mr. Garner asks Baby Suggs, "What you call yourself?" to which she replies, "Nothing. I don't call myself nothing" (*Beloved* 174). Her sales ticket says she is Jenny Whitlow, because she belonged to Mr. Whitlow of Carolina. But when Mr. Garner calls her Jenny, the name is foreign to her ears. She has never been called or claimed by such a name; she is not even aware that it refers to her. In the article "Reclaiming the Mother ('s) Tongue" Kate Cummings comments, "to Baby, the bill-of-sale identity represents her servitude and perpetuates her estrangement from the husband who loved her and fondly called her 'Baby'" (566).

She takes on the name "Baby" because that is what her husband, Suggs, calls her. He gives her an identity--one she associates with loving feelings. For this reason, she adopts his name as her surname and calls herself Baby Suggs. She refuses to go by "Jenny Whitlow" because Jenny Whitlow, the person, never

existed outside of a piece of paper. Baby Suggs, on the other hand, is loved, acknowledged, and known. She could not entertain calling herself Jenny Whitlow--even if it is more "suitable" (by the white man's standards) for a freed woman--because the people who love her only know her as Baby Suggs. Cummings writes, "Baby Suggs holds on to her name as an exteriorized affect and the foundation of a self one can love" (566).

According to the *Dictionary of American Family Names*, the surname "Suggs" is of English descent and means "one with some characteristic of a female hog" (209). Taking the origin and the meaning into consideration, it is safe to assume that Baby's husband, Suggs, was given his name by a white slave master.

Sethe

It has been suggested that the character name Sethe is derived from the Biblical name Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve. Elsie F. Mayer writes that the name Seth, and the feminized Sethe, means "consolation" and "blessing" (193). Mae G. Henderson suggests that the Hebrew name Seth is translated to mean "granted" or "appointed" (78). In the Old Testament account, Eve names her third

son Seth and states, "God has granted me another child in the place of Abel" (Genesis 5: 25).

Like the Biblical Seth, *Beloved's* Sethe is also a blessing and consolation to her mother. Sethe's mother bears several children to white slave owners, but she kills or abandons them as soon as they are born. She discards them and leaves them nameless. Morrison writes, "The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them" (*Beloved* 78). Sethe is different, however, as she is conceived in an act of love--not rape.

In addition to being kept and protected, Sethe is given a name which commemorates the act of love from which she is conceived. Sethe is given the name of her father. Nan tells Sethe, "You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never" (78).

What is interesting is that when Sethe meets Amy Denver, she tells the white woman that her name is Lu. Because Sethe can not trust white people, she chooses not to reveal her name. Instead, she lies and hides her true identity from the white woman. What's more, she doesn't even reveal her true name after Amy helps her--which is

a good example of the us/them, black/white phenomenon. Although Sethe likes Amy and appreciates her kindness, it doesn't cancel out the fact that Amy is a member of the opposite race. If Sethe were to reveal her name she would run the risk of betrayal.

The Pauls

Paul A, Paul D, and Paul F are three men who live and work together at Sweet Home. They are all lumped together and are given little individuality, except different initials indicating who their fathers are. Kate Cummings writes:

> The Pauls' personal names tell another story which directly engages the generic; in their case, the given name, which ought to personalize, undoes personality along with difference and specificity. In fact, were it not for the men's separate initials, the three would (appear to) be . . . the same. Although they approach namelessness, the slaves' sameness stops short at a crucial juncture. In effect, the three Pauls plus initials are the making (s) of a brand name. They are slightly different packagings, in other worlds, for a product that is essentially the same . . . the black male is left with nothing that's his own: not a self, a personal history, a real name. (559)

The initials help the other slaves create a more intimate relationship with the individual Pauls, but those not belonging to the immediate slave community all see them as one single group rather than separate men. They are robbed of a specific and personal name

and are made to share an identity with two others, which is part of the dehumanizing tactics of many slave owners.

Schoolteacher

Schoolteacher's name is never revealed in *Beloved* and it is to be assumed that none of the slaves ever knew it. He is called Schoolteacher because of his profession. His name turns out to be quite ironic in *Beloved* in that he does, indeed, teach the slaves at Sweet Home a lesson that they will never forget. However, the lesson is not a positive one as is expected from schoolteachers. His lesson is one of brutality, ownership, and murder, and it is a lesson that all of the Sweet Home slaves fall victim to at some point in time. Schoolteacher is ultimately responsible for Sixo's murder, the degrading of Paul D, the "unmanning and maddening" of Halle, the rape of Sethe, and the death of the "crawling-already? girl" (Cummings 563). He is also to be held accountable for his lesson to the nephews--that the slaves are not fully human.

In one vivid scene, Schoolteacher instructs his students to study Sethe and to compare her to an animal by putting her human characteristics on one side and her animal characteristics on the

other. In another scene, Schoolteacher has his nephews do an experiment on Sethe as he instructs one nephew to hold her down and the other nephew to nurse from her breast. Such a brutal act dehumanizes Sethe by defining her as being like an animal.

In "Reconstructing kin: family, history, and narrative in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Dana Heller associates Schoolteacher with Adam, the first man, in that they both claim the power to construct and withhold identity. She writes, "Like Adam, he sees himself as the giver of the name; like the animals of Eden, he sees the enslaved blacks as the passive recipients of the name" (6). The slaves are not fully human in Schoolteacher's mind, but are animal-like. As a result, he acts as their superior and treats them like animals. Like Adam, Schoolteacher is in charge; it is he who makes the rules. It is he who calls the slaves animals.

30 Mile Woman

In describing the 30 Mile Woman to Paul D, Sixo says, "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order" (*Beloved* 335). She is never named, but is only referred to as the 30 Mile Woman. It

is a phrase filled with affection, given to her by Sixo because her given name is not known. This is not to suggest that she is unworthy to be named; on the contrary, it indicates just how far Sixo would go to be with a person like her--one who is a friend of his mind. The important thing about her is what she represents to Sixo. To him hope and love is only thirty miles away. She is also the woman who will pass on his name and his heritage. At his death, Sixo laughs and screams the word "Seven-O," which indicates that because of the 30 Mile Woman Sixo's spirit and name will live on by way of their offspring.

Sweet Home Men

Mr. Garner refers to his male slaves as men. He listens to them and trusts them. The only problem is that their roles as men are limited to Sweet Home; elsewhere they are merely slaves. Paul D reflects, "They were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race" (*Beloved* 154-155). When Garner dies, the Sweet Home Men's illusions of manhood die with him. He led them to believe that they are men with intelligence and worthy opinions. Yet, all of these

ideas are shattered when Schoolteacher replaces Garner at Sweet Home and treats them like animals instead of men.

By calling the Sweet Home slaves "men," Garner emphasizes their human worth. Incidentally, Mr. Garner also creates his own self worth through calling his slaves men. In a conversation with another farmer, Garner boasts, "At Sweet Home, my niggers is men every one of em," to which the other man argues, "Ain't no nigger men." Garner's response is "Not if you scared, they ain't . . . But if you a man yourself, you'll want your niggers to be men too" (*Beloved* 13). By calling his slaves men, Garner implies and emphasizes his superiority over both the slaves and the other white men.

When Schoolteacher takes away their right to be called men, the Sweet Home slaves lose all sense of self-hood. They are left degraded and confused. Kate Cummings comments that the Sweet Home men are cast as "imitation men" (559) and Paul D wonders, "Was that it? Is that where the manhood lay? In the naming done by a white man who was supposed to know?" (*Beloved* 154). He goes on to question whether Garner was "naming what he saw or creating what he did not" (271).

Paul D contemplates whether the five Sweet Home slaves are really men. He is quite certain that Sixo is because he has maintained his sense of self. Sixo still has his African roots to define him as he has managed to maintain his native language. Paul D is also pretty sure that Halle is a real man because Halle knows who his mother is. What's more, Halle is able to make a deal with the white slave owners to stay with his mother, despite the odds against such a situation. Halle has a history to define who he is and where he belongs. But what about the Pauls? Paul D continues to question the concept of manhood for the rest of his life and he can never comes up with a definite, satisfactory answer because the slaves have little left to define them. Aside from Garner, nobody else tells them that they are, indeed, men.

Denver

Sethe names her youngest daughter Denver after Amy Denver, the white girl who helps Sethe deliver the infant into the world. Amy tells Sethe, "She's never gonna know who I am. You gonna tell her? Who brought her into this here world? You better tell her. You hear? Say Miss Amy Denver. Of Boston" (*Beloved* 104). Sethe does

tell Denver the story of her birth and the young girl engulfs the tale. She gets a thrill out of hearing the story over and over again and she loves to relate the legend of her birth to her sister Beloved.

The fact that a white girl had a significant role in Denver's birth and that she was named after that white girl proves to be a life-long thrill for Denver. Her name means something to her--a white girl was kind and generous towards her and her mother. It gives her a sense of pride, mystery, and self. What's more, Amy Denver was probably the only white person who treated Sethe as a genuine human being. Amy saw Sethe as a woman in need, not merely as a slave. Because of this, Denver is proud that she was named after Miss Denver. She can declare that she is Denver, born into freedom with the aid of a white woman--the woman that she has been named after.

Stamp Paid

In a conversation with Paul D, Stamp Paid says, "Let me tell you how I got my name . . . They called me Joshua, I renamed myself, and I'm going to tell you why I did it" (*Beloved* 286). Joshua changes his name to Stamp Paid when he is required to hand over his

wife to his master's son for sexual acts. Morrison writes, "With that gift, he decided that he didn't owe anybody anything. Whatever his obligations were, that act paid them off" (*Beloved* 227). Joshua and all of the bad memories die when Stamp Paid is created. In "The Naming of Persons" Paul Tournier states, "To change one's name is to break one's continuity as a person, to cut oneself off from the whole of one's past, which has defined one's person up to that point" (19). By renaming himself, Stamp Paid asserts his new existence, he chooses a response to the terrible conditions which he falls victim to, and he creates for himself an identity which is not dictated by the brands of slave holders. The name change signifies the extent of his sacrifice to the white man. He will never owe them anything again.

The name Joshua chooses for himself could mean two things: first, that the affair is over and that it is time for him to start life a new; second, that he paid back the master some of his and his wife's misery when he had his little chat with the young master's wife. In either case, Joshua's new identity grows out of his awful experience--and it makes him into the man that Paul D encounters, the helpful and giving man who calls himself Stamp Paid. His whole

life changes when his name changes. He takes the pain he felt in his past and uses it to help and benefit others.

CONCLUSION

Morrison's *Beloved* is successful in portraying why names are important as it dramatizes the psychological effects that accompany the names of the characters. The names in the novel reflect the characters' social positions and sense of self-hood in times of slavery. They play a significant factor in peoples' lives, from the names of the white slave owners to the names of the slaves to those who are unnamed. In the novel, there are those who change their names in an act of independence, such as Stamp Paid, and there are those who adopt new ones that mean more than their foreign-sounding given names, such as Baby Suggs. There are characters who receive names from their parents, names which represent something lovely--such as Denver and Sethe. There are those who only have generic names which are given to them by white slave owners, such as the Pauls from the Sweet Home Plantation. There are characters who are named according to their social position, such as Schoolteacher and the Sweet Home Men. In

addition, there are also many characters that are never named in *Beloved* including Sethe's brothers and sisters who are thrown away without names and Sethe's mother who can only be identified by the mark on her back.

What remains a constant is the fact that names play an extremely important role in each person's life as they offer individuality and provide mutual recognition. When the Africans were brought to America as slaves they were robbed of their history, their culture, their native language, and their personal and national identities. The pain and confusion that accompanied these losses is still felt, two-hundred years later, by the ancestors of the unidentified or unnamed slaves.

The importance of being named is universal and transcends all time. It is not a coincidence that the Sweet Home slaves choose the song, "Hush, hush. Somebody's calling my name. Hush, hush. Somebody's calling my name. O my Lord, O my Lord, what shall I do?" for their runaway signal (*Beloved* 275-276). The song, as well as the signal, suggests faith, hope, freedom, and the affirmation of the individual as a worthy being.

WORKS CITED

Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love; Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination.* New York: Pantheon, 1988.

Berry, Mary Frances, and John W. Blassingame. *Long Memory: The Black Experience In America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Clemons, Walter. "A Gravestone of Memories." *Newsweek* 110 (Sept. 28, 1987): 74-75.

Cody, Cheryll Ann. "There was No 'Absalom' on the Ball Plantations: Slave-Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country, 1720-1865." *American Historical Review* 92 (1987): 563-597.

Cummings, Kate. "Reclaiming the Mother ('s) Tongue: *Beloved, Ceremony, Mothers and Shadows.*" *College English* 52.5 (Sept. 1990): 552-570.

Dillard, J. L. *Black Names.* Paris: Mouton and Company, 1976.

Draper, Theodore. *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism.* New York: Viking Press, 1970.

Heller, Dana. "Reconstructing kin: family, history, and narrative in

Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*" *College Literature* 21.2 (June 1994): 105-117.

Heller, Murray. *Black Names in America: Origins and Usage.* Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1975.

Henderson, Mae G. "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text." *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text.* Spillers, Hortense, J., Ed. London: Routledge, 1991.

Hook, J. N., Ph. D. *Family Names: How Our Surnames Came to America.* New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1982.

Martin, Ben L. "From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming." *Political Science Quarterly* 106 (Spring 1991): 83-108.

Mayer, Elsie F. "Morrison's *Beloved.*" *The Explicator* 5.3 (Spring 1993): 192-195.

McKible, Adam. "These are the facts of the darky's history": thinking history and reading names in four African American texts. *African American Review.* 28.2 (Summer 1994): 223-236.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved.* New York: Penguin Books, 1991. All references are from this edition.

Naylor, Gloria and Toni Morrison. "A Conversation." *Southern*

Review 21.3 (July 1985): 567-593.

Rubenstein, Roberta. *Boundaries of the Self: Gender, Culture, Fiction.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Schapiro, Barbara. "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*" *Contemporary Literature* 32.2 (Summer 1991): 194-210.

Smith, Elsdon C., Ed. *Dictionary of American Family Names.* No copyright date or publisher was listed.

---. *The Story of Our Names.* Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1970.

---. *Treasury of Name Lore.* New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Stewart, George R. *American Given Names.* New York: Oxford University Press,1979.

Tournier, Paul. *The Naming of Persons.* New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

Wyatt, Jean. "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*" *PMLA* 108 (May 1993): 474-489.

X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1964.