

# Narrative Self Invention From Bessie Smith To Jack White: A Timeless African American Tradition

Narrative self-invention is a process by which individuals create and re-create their own identities through storytelling. This process is often used by marginalized groups to challenge dominant narratives and create new ways of seeing themselves and their world. In the African American community, narrative self-invention has been a defining characteristic of culture since its inception.



## Fictional Blues: Narrative Self-Invention from Bessie Smith to Jack White (African American Intellectual History) by Larry Sandberg

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One of the earliest examples of narrative self-invention in African American music can be found in the blues. Blues musicians such as Bessie Smith used their music to tell stories of their own lives and experiences. These

stories often explored themes of love, loss, and hardship, and they provided a way for African Americans to express their own unique experiences and perspectives.

In the 20th century, narrative self-invention continued to play a vital role in African American music. Jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker used their music to create new and innovative sounds that challenged the traditional boundaries of music. These musicians also used their music to tell stories about their own lives and experiences, and they helped to create a new vision of African American identity.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement brought about a new wave of narrative self-invention in African American music. Soul musicians such as James Brown and Aretha Franklin used their music to speak out against racism and injustice, and they helped to inspire a new generation of African Americans to fight for their rights.

In the 1970s and 1980s, hip-hop emerged as a new genre of African American music that allowed for even more freedom of expression. Hip-hop artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and Run-DMC used their music to tell stories about their own lives and experiences, and they helped to create a new and more positive image of African American youth.

In the 21st century, narrative self-invention continues to be a vital part of African American music. Artists such as Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar have used their music to challenge stereotypes and create new and more inclusive narratives about African American identity. These artists are helping to shape the future of African American music and culture, and they

are ensuring that the tradition of narrative self-invention will continue for generations to come.

### **Bessie Smith: The Empress of the Blues**

Bessie Smith was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1894. She began singing in her local church at an early age, and by the time she was a teenager, she was performing in vaudeville and tent shows. In 1923, she signed with Columbia Records and began recording her own music.

Smith's music was a unique blend of blues, jazz, and vaudeville. Her powerful vocals and passionate delivery made her one of the most popular singers of her time. She was also a gifted songwriter, and her songs often explored themes of love, loss, and hardship.

Smith's music had a major impact on the development of African American music. She helped to popularize the blues, and her music influenced a wide range of artists, from Billie Holiday to Janis Joplin. Smith was also a pioneer in the use of narrative self-invention. Her songs often told stories about her own life and experiences, and she used her music to create a new and more positive image of African American women.

### **Jack White: The Raconteur of Rock**

Jack White was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1975. He began playing guitar as a teenager, and by the time he was in his early twenties, he was playing in local bands. In 1999, he formed the White Stripes with his then-wife, Meg White. The White Stripes quickly became one of the most popular bands of the early 2000s, and White's unique guitar playing and songwriting style earned him critical acclaim.

White's music is a blend of rock, blues, and country. His songs often explore themes of love, loss, and redemption. He is also a gifted storyteller, and his songs often tell stories about his own life and experiences.

White's music has had a major impact on the development of rock music. He has helped to revive interest in the blues, and his music has influenced a wide range of artists, from the Black Keys to the Arctic Monkeys. White is also a pioneer in the use of narrative self-invention. His songs often tell stories about his own life and experiences, and he uses his music to create a new and more personal vision of rock music.

### **Narrative Self Invention: A Timeless African American Tradition**

Narrative self-invention is a timeless African American tradition that has been used to challenge dominant narratives and create new ways of seeing oneself and the world. From the blues of Bessie Smith to the rock of Jack White, African American musicians have used their music to tell their own stories and create new and more inclusive narratives about African American identity.

Narrative self-invention is a powerful tool that can be used to empower marginalized groups and create a more just and equitable world. By telling their own stories, African American musicians have helped to shape the culture of the United States and the world. They have also helped to inspire a new generation of activists and change-makers who are working to create a better future for all.

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