

# African American Women's Suffering as Depicted in Toni Morrison's "Beloved" and "The Bluest Eye"

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## Abstract

This article covers the suffering of American women and, in particular, African women. Since quite a long time ago and up to the present day, black women have faced a variety of obstacles. Slavery affects people both physically and psychologically. The novels of Toni Morrison depicted this pain in reality. In *Beloved*, Sethe suffers under slavery to the point where she would rather kill her children and live with the spirit of her daughter than see them humiliated by servitude. In *The Bluest Eye*, the threat of racial segregation affects the black community, causing families to become unrelated or unconscious. Pecola prays for beauty in the belief that it will lead to her being adored. If she is beautiful and has blue eyes. Unfortunately, her father's intoxication shattered all her life and her innocent fantasy when he raped her and drove her insane.

**Key words:** Suffering, racial segregation, black community, innocent fantasy.

## Introduction:

While white women of the time were socially and economically dependent on their male counterparts, it was previously theorised that enslavement encouraged women to be independent. Analyzing and revising this notion led to the conclusion that male slave owners maintained dominance, but taught their female slaves to appear to be independent. Despite the challenges, two-parent households were highly appreciated by slaves. Both men and women were expected to work long, hard hours on the plantations, and often did the same tasks. Although men often did not perform jobs seen as "women's work," not every work done by women was necessarily classified as such. Women worked alongside men in the fields, but the majority of the heavy lifting was done by males or

women who had long since finished having children. The "trash gang," a group of female field hands that included pregnant women, nursing mothers, and the elderly, was generally given less strenuous tasks. Also, a girl about the age of twelve would be sent to this group to learn the ropes of slave life and get used to the rigorous physical demands of their work. Female slaves may work in a variety of roles, some of which were highly regarded as skilled labour positions. They included the cook, who fed the master's family and the slaves after their day of labour. Slaves typically ate together in large groups, and because most women did not bother learning how to cook, slaves who did were held in high regard. Similarly, the skill of sewing was rather consistent. Slave women were not taught to sew and rarely had access to sewing supplies. However, there were certain women among the slave population who possessed this skill, and it was their duty to sew all of the garments worn by the slaves and, if they were particularly good, by the master's family as well. Midwifery, like the other highly skilled occupations of cooking and weaving, was reserved for women slaves. Midwifery was a common profession among African-American women far into the 20th century, with many women learning the craft from their mothers or other female relatives like aunts. Slave women often served as role models for others because of their age, experience, and/or the number of children they had, and the fact that most women worked in groups, that there was specialized work that was reserved for women and thus respected, and that women managed child and medical care all lend credence to the idea that black female slaves were able to establish their own social order within the female population.

This article set out to use a cultural materialist lens to examine *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, two novels by Toni Morrison. A cultural materialist reads a book for its cultural significance, rather than only for its plot or characters. Topics covered include slavery, classism, sexuality, and racism. In other words, they targeted minorities who already faced discrimination, such as black individuals dealing with cultural challenges. Toni Morrison's novels have predominantly black protagonists, suggesting that she places a premium on the experiences of underrepresented groups and, in particular, women. Thus, the purpose of this research is to focus on cultural aspects of Toni Morrison's two novels and to assess the stance she takes toward such underrepresented groups.

The issues of race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and rape are all relevant to the works of Toni Morrison, a renowned writer of the twentieth century. She is a well-known American author who cares deeply

about the plight of African Americans. Beloved earned her the 1988 Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Morrison encouraged other black women to write and created a new type of reader who was more aware of and interested in learning about gender and racial dynamics. Toni Morrison often uses the role of race in contemporary American society as a central theme in her works. That is one of the many topics she discusses. The contributions of African Americans to American literature are explored in "In Unspeakable Things Unspoken: For three hundred years, African Americans, according to Toni Morrison's argument, claimed that "race" was not a meaningful way to categorise people. During the same three centuries, every academic field—history, natural science, and the like—insisted that 'race' was the decisive force in human progress. When African Americans realised they had created a culturally constituted race, they were told abruptly that "race" does not exist in any meaningful sense, whether biological or cultural, and that intellectual discourse cannot include such a concept. As far as I am concerned, those who created the 'race' hierarchy when it suited their objectives should not be the ones to provide an explanation for it when it no longer does. But culture does exist, and it is shaped by and affects people of all races and genders.

Characters' senses of dignity and worth are severely damaged or destroyed by racism, marginalization, and oppression in Morrison's novels. In other words, the darker their skin, the more valuable they are. African-Americans with lighter skin tones, for example, fared better in society than their darker-skinned counterparts. Not only did this idea irritate the white majority, but it also manifested itself in how black people treated one another. These beliefs have been handed down from generation to generation. Taking Morrison's characters into account, it is apparent that racism and oppression have far-reaching effects, affecting not just the current generation but also future ones. Slave narratives often feature female protagonists, and one common theme is the fragility of their bodies. They are defenceless and need help. Black women were not only subject to the whims of their owners but also to the harsh and exhausting work that often surpassed their physical capabilities. They had no choice but to offer their master access to their bodies whenever he desired. They had no control over their own lives because they were considered property by their masters. It is safe to assume that both their owners and, in some cases, their own relatives treated them as if they were mere objects of gratification and pleasure. For this reason, a great deal of sex violence, especially rape, is shown in works centred on slavery.

It is Morrison's belief that traditional slave narratives omit and forget the history of slavery and its awful issues and effects, and it is this history that she hopes to bring to light in her writings, especially in *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*. According to Holden-piece, Kirwan's Toni Morrison told Time magazine's Bonnie Angelo that the United States actively suppresses its memories of slavery. She points out that the people of *Beloved* do not want to think about slavery's place in American history either. In addition, Morrison says, "I do not want to remember, black people do not want to remember, white people do not want to remember." Morrison's novels, on the other hand, force readers to confront the evil of slavery, which is often forgotten or ignored. Morrison highlights in her writings the dehumanizing nature of slavery for its victims. Sethe, who is raped, tortured, and violated throughout *Beloved*, serves as a fitting symbol of the plight of female slaves. After Sethe went, some lads came and stole her milk, she says. They needed that, therefore that is why they went in. Keep me down and take it. Mrs. Garner had that lump and could not talk, but tears poured from her eyes when I told her about it. I ratted out to the boys. My back was split open by the one my teacher used on me, and when it healed, it formed a tree. It is still thriving there.

Morrison reimagines history in *Beloved* so that her reader will never forget the struggles of African Americans in the past. The most painful portion of African American history, slavery, is explored in Morrison's bestselling novel *Beloved* through a technique she calls "rememory."

*Beloved* reveals that Sethe had murdered her daughter to protect her from the horrors of servitude. It was not crazy, but the reality of slavery, that prompted Sethe to kill her kid, despite her knowledge of the act's cruelty and compassion, according to Fuston-White.

Most of the slave women had been raped at some point throughout their lives. The protagonist Seth in *Beloved* also has her milk taken and is the victim of a rape. Poets like Jayne Cortez, Ntozaka Shange, and June Jordan have framed rape in terms of a war and the bodies of women as a front line. Because of their status as second-class citizens in the United States, black women were subjected to a disproportionate share of America's worst abuses. They were extremely defenseless, therefore white males used their bodies to symbolise dominance and subjugation. In contrast to other groups, black women were unable to even imagine the concept of independence, let alone benefit from it. Some authors have examined Morrison's usage of the themes of rape and child abuse in her works. Toni Morrison's works (1990). Even though child abuse, incest, and rape are openly

discussed and widely reported on today, Wiford. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems note that this was not always the case. In the past, many issues went unnamed and neglected even though they were widely known in the shadows. Morrison freely investigated them in her ground-breaking rare novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

Morrison's works depict the history of slavery and the conditions of slaves by narrating the dangers of slave existence. The main characters in Morrison's books are often those who are overlooked. Morrison's books are excellent resources for cultural materialist studies because of their focus on oppressed groups and their struggles in a white-dominated society, as well as on racial discrimination, gender roles, and sexuality. For cultural materialists, the social order is also a point of study. Cultural materialists and critics with an interest in cultural studies have long given attention to issues related to social class differentiation. *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, the two novels analysed here, both feature prominently in their discussions of social class. Social class generates some prejudices in addition to skin colour, gender, lineage, and money, all of which serve to demarcate groups of individuals from one another. Morrison says that the emphasis on ancestors is a defining feature of African American writing since it is the ancestors who created the disparities in social status and economic opportunity that are central to her stories. She claims that these forebears are more than just parents; they are eternal beings whose ties with the protagonists are compassionate, instructional, and protective and who impart a certain wisdom. Toni Morrison's novels have been studied by cultural materialists and critics interested in cultural concerns from a variety of vantage points due to the centrality of racial, socioeconomic, slavery, and gender themes. Through the use of the aforementioned problems in her writing, Morrison has brought attention to the disasters that African Americans experience. Morrison has a remarkable ability to read into her characters' minds and disclose their innermost thoughts in exquisite detail. Her writings have the potential to greatly assist in centring the experiences of black people and black women in particular. It is Morrison's ability to tackle questions of race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status all at once that gives her fiction its lasting impact. One of her works' main points is that the author did not focus solely on topics of racism and slavery. To put it another way, Morrison's works resonate with readers of all races because they reveal realities about the human condition.

*The Bluest Eye* is appropriate for the study of the American novel because it depicts the narrative of a group of Americans, men, women, and children who are descendants of slaves and who live in a culture in which the colour of your skin dictates who you are. the benefits to which you are entitled. We cannot fathom how Pecola

felt when she was dubbed "a nasty little black bitch" and falsely accused of killing a cat. However, we understand what it is like to feel ugly and terrified. Pecola is an extreme example of a person who is treated terribly by everyone she meets, either because she is black or because she is ugly, or both. Her mother ignores her, her father raped her, her friends betrayed her, children and adults insulted her, and a cat and a dog were even slaughtered in her presence. All of these items are constantly encountered by people. All Americans experience something as seemingly insignificant as name calling.

Morrison shows American experiences and traits like violence, growing up, love, family, hate, race, beauty, and ugliness in a clear and painful way. The sad parts of American history are not hidden or played down. People often think of chains when they think of slavery. They do not understand how slavery affects people's minds and hearts. After running away, a slave had to face the horror of what they had done and the bad memories of their life in chains. The book looks at how slavery affects people who were once slaves. Morrison points out how it affects women. These women are most affected by being mothers. Through *Baby Suggs* and *Sethe* is stories, Morrison looks at how slavery changed motherhood and the relationships between slave mothers and their children. In *Beloved*, slavery physically and emotionally splits up mothers and children. Sethe says that when she was a baby, she was taken away from her mother and raised in a group on the plantation. A nurse took care of her. Sethe is a mother, but all slave women worked in the fields from dawn to dusk and had no time to care for their children. After she lost her mother and family when she was young, Sethe loved her children too much. She thinks of her kids as a part of her. Sethe sends her kids to Baby Suggs out of desperation before she leaves Sweet Home to love and care for them. She says she will not make them slaves again. If her kids go back to Sweet Home, she will never see them again. Sethe never got to do that. This means that Sethe's killing of her daughter was an act of self-defense and not a crime. Sethe was raped and abused by her white masters, so she thought it was 'simple' to kill them. After her mother was killed, Denver hid herself away out of fear. Sethe repeats her warning many times to show that ideas keep coming back to her and that she is able to move on. Because of her past, Denver is afraid to leave her neighbourhood, so she stays by herself. After her children were taken away by slavers, Baby Suggs learned not to love too much. Baby Suggs and Sethe did not own their children when they were slaves. Slaves' mothers and children are their property. As property, moms do not have a voice.

## Works Cited

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