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Race, gender, and identity in Toni Morrison's novels: Relevance to contemporary Black women's struggles in America

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how three novels by Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye*, function as transformative tools that critique modern social structures, especially concerning racial and gender issues. Through a qualitative approach and content analysis method, this research explores the themes of systemic racism, sexism, and intergenerational inherited trauma faced by black women in the novels. The main data used is the text of the three novels. Supporting data comes from relevant scholarly journal articles and literature on contemporary social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter. The transformative power of Morrison's novels is evident in their ability to engage readers in critical discussions about these pressing social issues. The results of this study underscore that Morrison's works are a poignant critique of social norms that suppress and limit the freedom of black women while also vividly portraying the psychological and social impact of such oppression. These works, in addition to their critical role, also serve as pedagogical tools in academic discussions, aiding in understanding the intersectionality and dynamics of oppression within the social and historical context of the United States. The conclusion of this study confirms that Morrison's work is not only relevant for understanding the contemporary challenges faced by black women, but also a cornerstone in academic discussions and modern social justice movements.

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Introduction

Toni Morrison's literary contributions are notable for their in-depth exploration of the complex intersections of race, gender, and identity, especially in the context of African American history and culture (David, 2023; Eric, 2023; Mohammad, 2023). Morrison's works, such as *Beloved* (1987), *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and *Sula* (1973), delve deeply into the lived experiences of black women. Morrison highlights how the interlocking forces of systemic racism and sexism shape their identities and social roles. Her narratives often center on marginalized characters grappling with the legacy of slavery, the impact of racial discrimination, and the pursuit of identity in an environment that seeks to dehumanize and silence them. Through rich and multi-layered storytelling, Morrison challenges the traditional literary canon by giving voice to those who have been historically excluded, offering an unforgiving black feminist perspective that emphasizes resilience, trauma, and the search for personal and communal identity.

Morrison's focus on these intersections is significant because it moves beyond a singular focus on race or gender, instead emphasizing the multiple oppressions Black women face, a concept now referred to as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Her characters embody the struggle of negotiating personal identity in a society that devalues their race and gender, offering a literary depiction later theorized by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989). Morrison's novels interrogate the sociopolitical forces that construct black women as 'Others' while offering empowerment, healing, and resistance paths. As a

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result, her work advances the representation of black women in literature and provides an important framework for understanding the broader social dynamics of race and gender in America.

Toni Morrison's work remains relevant in understanding the ongoing struggles of black women in contemporary America as she portrays their experiences at the intersection of race and gender in a profound and multidimensional manner. Through her novels, such as *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison explores the impact of a history of slavery, systemic discrimination, and social exclusion that continues to affect the lives of black women today. Her work not only highlights the trauma passed down across generations but also addresses how Black women continue to face structural violence, economic inequality, and negative stereotypes. In a modern context, Morrison's work serves as a critical lens that allows readers and researchers to understand how the social injustices addressed in her novels remain relevant to the challenges Black women face today, including issues such as the wage gap, access to health care, and political representation (Rodgers, 2017; Tamara, 2008). As literary works grounded in social realities, Morrison's work provides an important analytical tool for understanding the complexities of Black women's struggles in modern America.

An analysis of Toni Morrison's work provides deep insight into the systemic oppression faced by black women by exploring how social, political, and economic forces shape their lived experiences. In novels such as *Beloved* and *Sula*, Morrison portrays black women as subjects trapped under the double burden of racial and gender discrimination. This systemic oppression, rooted in a history of slavery and structural inequality, includes the exploitation of Black women's bodies, their exclusion from economic and political power, and their marginalization in a society dominated by white standards of value (McGee, 2021). These themes resonate with Black women's challenges in contemporary society, such as inequalities in access to education, health care, and employment opportunities (Leath et al., 2022; Showunmi, 2023). As such, Morrison's works are not only historical but also offer relevant social critiques to understand how these forms of oppression still operate in a modern context. Through her complex characters and narratives, Morrison showcases how black women resist and survive in the face of persistent oppression, providing insights that can be applied to critical analysis of current social injustices.

Toni Morrison explores race, gender, and identity in her novels, offering a critical perspective that reveals how black women in the United States continue to face systemic oppression. Through complex characters and narratives depicting trauma, marginalization, and the struggle for self-discovery, Morrison shows how the history of slavery and racial discrimination has left a legacy that affects black women's experiences in various aspects of life, including social, economic, and political (Jum-Gyu, 2023). Her work underscores the importance of understanding the intersections between race and gender to more clearly see the challenges black women face today and provides analytical tools to address ongoing injustices.

17 Research method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a content analysis method to explore how Toni Morrison's works, particularly *Beloved*, *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye*, serve as tools to critique modern social structures related to race and gender (Gwee et al., 2024). The data used in this research is secondary qualitative data, consisting of primary texts (Morrison's novels), supporting literature (relevant scholarly journal articles), and context data (studies related to contemporary social movements such as Black Lives Matter). This research utilizes literature to read and analyze Morrison's works and relates the themes in the novels to social reality and modern social justice movements (Saddam, 2022; Thapliyal, 2023).

The analytical technique used was thematic analysis, in which key themes such as systemic racism, collective trauma, race-based beauty standards, and Black women's empowerment were identified and categorized (Kamesha et al., 2020; Seanna et al., 2023). This data was then contextualized with literature on social justice movements to see the relevance of Morrison's narrative to contemporary social challenges. In addition, this study incorporates data triangulation by comparing the results of the thematic analysis with academic interpretations from other studies and discussions with experts in literary studies and gender studies to ensure the validity of the findings. Through this approach, this study aims to reveal how Toni Morrison's works critique modern society's structure and serve as relevant pedagogical tools in academic discussions on race, gender, and social justice in the United States today.

Finding and discussion

As the main data in this paper, the research results based on the three novels mentioned earlier are discussed. The presentation of the data discussed in this section is adjusted to the themes that are the objectives of this research, namely Trauma in Morrison's novels, Black Feminism, and intersectionality and social justice movements that occur in American society. However, before going into the subject matter, the researcher also presents a thematic analysis of the three novels as an opening insight for readers who are not from the literature department or have never read the novel. The researcher also presents contemporary issues that are relevant to what is discussed in Morrison's work.

Overview of key novels

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* depicts the impact of the trauma of slavery on the identity and lives of black women through the main character, Sethe. The story centers on the experience of Sethe, a former slave who escapes from a plantation and faces deep trauma due to the inhumane treatment she received during slavery. Sethe experiences prolonged physical and mental suffering. The experience also affected how she viewed herself and the world around her. The trauma inflicted by slavery, especially the event where she chooses to kill her daughter, Beloved, rather than let her return to slavery, is at the heart of the narrative. It shows how slavery damaged the relationship between black women and their identity as mothers and community members.

Furthermore, *Beloved* explores the long-term impact of the trauma of slavery on the next generation, as well as how black women have to deal with the legacy of violence. Morrison highlights how Sethe and other women in the novel, such as Baby Suggs, try to rebuild their identities and roles after slavery, but are always overshadowed by indelible memories and pain. Through the character of *Beloved*, who represents a haunting and unreleased past, Morrison illustrates how the trauma of slavery not only affects those who directly experienced it but also continues to impact the next generation, creating wounds that shape black women's identities and roles in society.

Meanwhile, *The Bluest Eye* explores how beauty standards dominated by white values shape black women's self-perception, particularly through the character of Pecola Breedlove. Pecola, a black girl living in poverty and experiencing discrimination, is obsessed with having blue eyes, which she perceives as a symbol of beauty and social acceptance. Morrison uses Pecola's character to illustrate the destructive impact of society's constructed standards of beauty, where beauty is associated with white skin and physical features that are far removed from Pecola's racial identity (Wajiran, 2024). Her failure to meet these standards causes a profound identity crisis, making her feel worthless and alienated from herself and her community.

The Bluest Eye also examines how the internalization of white beauty standards impacts the entire black community, especially women. Morrison shows that not only Pecola but women like Pauline Breedlove are also affected by beauty narratives that marginalize them. Internalized racism and the rejection of natural black beauty become tools of psychological oppression, causing black women to feel alienated from their own bodies and identities. Through this novel, Morrison reveals how the intersection of race and beauty standards works as a mechanism of oppression that lowers black women's self-esteem and limits the way they see and place themselves in society.

Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* explores the theme of friendship between two black women, Sula Peace and Nel Wright. The novel also highlights the role of community and society's expectations of black women. The friendship between Sula and Nel is at the narrative's core, illustrating how they navigate a world fraught with social and racial pressures. Morrison uses this complex relationship to show how the black community places different expectations on women. Nel is expected to adhere to traditional roles as wife and mother, while Sula chooses a more independent path and rejects social conventions. Sula's choice to defy societal norms makes her an ostracized figure. The novel sharply questions how communities often regulate black women's behavior through strict social control.

Sula also discusses how these social expectations limit black women's autonomy and freedom. Sula's character, living a life of freedom, is often considered immoral by society. This illustrates black women's attempts to redefine their roles beyond the traditional boundaries set by the community. Meanwhile,

Nel, who follows social norms, remains bound by the limits expected of women in a patriarchal society. Through this narrative, Morrison presents a critique of societal expectations that suppress black women's freedom while highlighting the importance of friendship and solidarity among women as a form of emotional support amidst strong external pressures.

Literary analysis of themes

In *Sula*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Beloved*, Toni Morrison consistently explores systemic racism and its psychological, emotional, and social impact on black women. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison illustrates how the internalization of white beauty standards operates as a form of systemic racism that undermines the self-esteem of black women, particularly Pecola Breedlove. Pecola's obsession with blue eyes, as a socially accepted symbol of beauty, reflects how American society has historically shaped black women's identities through a racist lens that denies their beauty and self-worth. Pecola's inability to meet this standard results in deep psychological devastation, reflecting how internalized racism can destroy individuals from within. The social effects of this racism are also reflected in Pecola's exclusion from her community, which reinforces her isolation and grief.

In *Beloved* and *Sula*, Morrison continues to depict ²⁵the impact of systemic racism on black women, particularly through the exploration of trauma and social connections that are severed due to ongoing oppression. *Beloved* presents the trauma of slavery as an experience that destroys inter-generational relationships, experienced by Sethe and passed on to her children. Systemic racism in the form of slavery not only deprives physical freedom but also destroys emotional and psychological bonds, leaving deep wounds that continue to affect black women's identity. In *Sula*, Morrison explores how societal expectations influenced by racism curb black women's freedom and how they struggle to define their roles within the community. Systemic racism works through social control, suppressing the freedom of individual women like Sula, who choose to reject these norms. Through these three novels, Morrison depicts racism not just as an external form of discrimination but as a force that shapes, and often corrupts, the psyche and social relationships of black women.

In these three novels, Toni Morrison sharply reveals the gender-based violence, sexism, and marginalization that black women face, both within their communities and in the broader social environment. *The Bluest Eye* depicts gender-based violence through the character Pecola Breedlove, who is sexually abused by her father Cholly. It is a form of violence that depicts multiple dehumanization: not only by her father but also by a society that has discredited the lives of black women. The sexism and marginalization of black women become even more evident when Pecola, after the violent incident, is abandoned by her community that fails to provide protection or support. Black women, like Pecola, are ignored in the patriarchal and racist structures that make up society, making them vulnerable to violence in the absence of adequate social solidarity.

In *Sula* and *Beloved*, Morrison continues her depiction of gender-based violence and marginalization by highlighting how social expectations and face sexism constrain black women on multiple levels. *Beloved* focuses on the experiences of Sethe, who faced brutal violence not only as a slave but also as a mother trapped in a patriarchal structure that forced her to make terrible decisions to protect her children from the same fate. Meanwhile, *Sula* depicts how women who reject traditional gender norms, like Sula's character, are subjected to marginalization and ridicule from their communities. Sula, who rejects traditional roles as a wife or mother, is seen as a threat to the patriarchal order, and her character shows how black women who challenge social conventions are often isolated and punished. Through these three novels, Morrison explores not only the physical violence but also the structural violence that continually oppresses black women, asserting that gender-based marginalization and sexism are integral to their experience in a world saturated by racial and patriarchal hierarchies.

Toni Morrison in *Sula*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Beloved* illustrates how her main characters, who are mostly black women, struggle to navigate and construct their identities amidst oppression, trauma, and oppressive social norms. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove, as a victim of racist white beauty standards, internalizes her powerlessness by desiring blue eyes, a symbol she associates with beauty and social acceptance. Pecola's obsession with having blue eyes reflects how black women often feel trapped in a society that defines beauty based on whiteness, thus preventing them from building a positive and

autonomous identity. As a result of constant external pressure, Pecola is unable to develop a full self-identity and is ultimately trapped in a psychological breakdown.

In contrast, in *Sula* and *Beloved*, characters like Sula Peace and Sethe challenge social norms to forge autonomous identities in the face of trauma and oppression. Sula rejects the traditional roles of women as mothers and wives and chooses a freer life, but she becomes alienated and ostracized by her community. Morrison illustrates how Sula's choice to define her identity outside of social boundaries leads to marginalization but also represents a form of rebellion against patriarchal conformity. Sethe, in *Beloved*, faces the trauma of slavery and takes the extreme decision to kill her own son to save him from slavery. This action reflects how past trauma and social pressure can influence a black woman's decision to define her identity as a mother and an individual. Both characters demonstrate black women's attempts to construct an autonomous identity in the face of trauma and social norms, but with often painful and risky consequences. Morrison, through her characters, highlights the tension between the quest for self-autonomy and the forces of social oppression that continue to try to control black women's identities.

Contemporary relevance of Morrison's novels

Systemic racism continues to be one of the major challenges faced by Black women in the United States today, particularly in the areas of education, health care, and employment. Racial inequality in education is seen in limited access to quality schools, inadequate resources in majority Black areas, and race-based discrimination in student assessment and placement (Linda, 2000; Paula et al., 2022). In health care, Black women often receive inferior services compared to White women, which is reflected in high maternal mortality rates and inequalities in access to appropriate health care. In the workforce, race and gender discrimination affect pay rates and career opportunities, with Black women often paid less than their male or white female colleagues despite having the same qualifications (Bailey et al., 2017). These issues reflect that systemic racism not only affects access to resources but also reinforces the marginalization of Black women in various aspects of life.

The depiction of post-slavery trauma in Toni Morrison's works, such as *Beloved*, provides important insights into understanding the mental health challenges facing the black community today. Morrison shows that trauma does not end with the abolition of slavery but is passed on across generations, affecting the psychological well-being of black individuals. This trauma is reflected in distrust of institutions, such as mental health services, as well as the stigma attached to seeking mental health care in the Black community (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). These experiences exacerbate the racialized stress faced by Black women, who often not only struggle against race- and gender-based discrimination but also carry the burden of historical trauma. As such, Morrison's work is an important tool in analyzing how historical trauma and ongoing systemic racism contribute to mental health challenges that are still relevant among Black communities today.

Gender-based oppression in modern America cannot be understood without taking into account the role of intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality highlights how Black women face double oppression, namely racial and gender discrimination, simultaneously, which places them in a highly vulnerable position in society. In this context, Black women are not only marginalized because of their gender, but also because of their race, creating a more complex and structured form of oppression. Crenshaw (1989) points out that legal and policy systems often fail to adequately address these forms of oppression, as they tend to view these issues in singular terms, such as based on gender or race alone, rather than a combination of both. An understanding of intersectionality is essential for analyzing the problems Black women face in gaining access to employment, health-care, and legal justice, where gender- and race-based discrimination continues to exacerbate the inequalities they face (Crenshaw, 1989).

Sexual violence, gender discrimination, and reproductive rights are issues that Toni Morrison often raises in her works, which remain relevant today. In *Beloved*, for example, Morrison explores the trauma of sexual violence and its impact on black women trapped in slavery. This theme still has strong resonance in the context of modern sexual violence against black women. In addition, reproductive rights remain an important issue for Black women who are often marginalized in national discussions on reproductive rights and access to health services. As revealed by Ross et al. (2017), Black women in the United

States tend to experience limited access to quality reproductive health services, and they are also more likely to face the risk of pregnancy-related deaths due to inadequate care. Through the lens of intersectionality, these issues are not only seen as a matter of gender or race alone but as an intersection of both forms of oppression that affect Black women specifically (Ross et al., 2017).

The search for identity for black women in a racially and gendered society remains a major challenge, especially in the face of media representations and beauty standards dominated by white ideals. In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison criticizes how these race-based beauty standards affect black women's self-perception through the character Pecola Breedlove, who is obsessed with the desire to have blue eyes as a symbol of beauty and social acceptance. Contemporary media representations often still reproduce beauty standards that are biased towards black women's physical traits, such as natural hair and dark skin tone, which are often considered less attractive than white beauty standards. According to research by Hill (2002), Black women often face pressure to conform to these standards, which can affect their mental health and self-esteem. Morrison's critique of such pressures is still relevant today, especially in discussions about media and popular culture that continue to ignore or distort positive representations of Black women (Hill, 2002).

In *Sula*, Morrison explores how black women struggle to define their identities amidst society's limiting expectations. As the main character, Sula Peace rejects the traditional roles imposed on black women, such as being a wife and mother, and instead chooses a life path, independent and free from social norms. However, this choice leaves Sula isolated and criticized by her community, highlighting how social and gender expectations often constrain black women. The relevance of this story is seen in contemporary discussions of Black women's autonomy, where they often still face pressure to conform to traditional or stereotypical roles shaped by a patriarchal and racialized society. According to Collins (2000), black women continue to struggle to claim their autonomy in a society that oppresses them economically, socially, and culturally. Through *Sula*, Morrison shows that the quest for self-definition is a radical act in the face of societal expectations that limit black women's freedom (Collins, 2000).

The role of trauma in Morrison's work and its parallels to Present-Day struggles

Toni Morrison, in *Beloved*, *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye*, explores the impact of the inherited trauma of slavery and how it affects the personal and collective identity of the black community. In *Beloved*, Morrison explicitly shows that the trauma of slavery does not stop with the abolition of slavery, but continues to be passed on across generations. Sethe, as the main character, carries deep wounds from her experience as a slave, which haunt not only her but also her family. When she kills her daughter to protect her from life as a slave, Morrison shows how the trauma of slavery makes individuals like Sethe make extreme decisions to avoid the same horrors being repeated in the next generation. This trauma creates a psychological condition that not only destroys individual identity but also intergenerational relationships within the black community.

The inherited trauma of slavery depicted in *Beloved* has parallels with contemporary issues, such as mass incarceration and police brutality. Many researchers, such as Alexander (2010) in *The New Jim Crow*, point out that the mass incarceration system in the United States has the same roots as the slavery system, where repressive legal policies disproportionately victimized black communities (see Seuntjens, 2019). Mass incarceration is not only devastating to the individuals involved but also to the Black community as a whole, with repercussions felt from one generation to the next. Like the inherited trauma of slavery, the impact of mass incarceration on families, especially black women who are often the backbone of the family, creates psychological and social instability. Morrison, in *Beloved*, captures these intergenerational nuances in a way that is relevant to understanding contemporary trauma in the context of incarceration and police brutality.

In *Sula*, Morrison illustrates how social trauma and community pressure can affect black women's collective and personal identities. Sula Peace, as a character who rejects traditional norms, faces trauma in the form of exclusion and negative judgment from her community. Her life choices that reject conformity make her a symbol of resistance and a victim of social isolation. This trauma illustrates that while black communities collectively experience pressure from external forces, such as racism, they also engage in the reproduction of internal trauma through strict social surveillance of individuals who reject the

roles expected of them. This phenomenon is relevant to the dynamics of collective trauma experienced by black communities in the United States today, where social pressures from within and outside the community amplify personal and collective identity crises.

Morrison also describes in *The Bluest Eye* how inherited trauma stems not only from slavery but also from racialized beauty standards that marginalize black women. Pecola Breedlove, as the central character, experiences psychological trauma due to the internalization of white beauty standards that dominate society. Her rejection of her own racial identity and her obsession with having blue eyes as a symbol of beauty show how the power of trauma can destroy one's personal identity. This has relevance to contemporary issues related to media representation and color-based discrimination, which continue to reinforce social pressures on black women to conform to beauty norms that do not reflect their experiences. Pecola's psychological trauma is in line with contemporary research showing how color-based discrimination affects black women's mental health (Tiani et al., 2023; Yendelela et al., 2024).

Overall, Morrison, in her three novels, highlights that trauma—whether stemming from slavery, structural violence, or social oppression—plays an important role in shaping Black people's personal and collective identities. This trauma, according to Morrison, is not only internal but also social and intergenerational, passed on through oppressive policies, social norms, and community expectations. Mass incarceration, police brutality, and race-based marginalization in the contemporary world have similar roots to the trauma of slavery that Morrison describes, reinforcing the relevance of her work in understanding the black experience in the United States today. Such, Morrison's exploration of past traumas provides important insights into how trauma continues to shape the lived experiences of black people and continues to pose social and psychological challenges for subsequent generations.

Black feminism and intersectionality

Toni Morrison's work have significantly shaped black feminist thought, particularly in explaining the complex relationship between race, gender, and identity in the experiences of black women in America. Through her works, Morrison presents narratives that highlight the experiences of black women living under multiple pressures, both from systemic racism and sexism stemming from patriarchal structures. By presenting black women as marginalized subjects but also as agents of change capable of overcoming trauma, Morrison creates space for a deeper analysis of the role of race and gender in oppression. Her ideas not only enriched the black literary tradition but also influenced black feminist theory by focusing on the complex lived experiences of black women in the United States.

Morrison's influence in shaping black feminist thought can be seen in the work of scholars such as Bell Hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Bell Hooks, in her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), often refers to Morrison's exploration of black female identity as a form of resistance to more dominant feminist narratives, which tend to ignore black women's racialized experiences. Hooks, like Morrison, focuses on the idea that black women's experiences are substantially different from those of white women and, therefore, require a specialized analysis that pays attention to the intersections between race, class, and gender. Hooks also emphasized that feminism must include all women, especially black women whose histories of oppression are different and more complex, a theme that Morrison also frequently explored in her works (Hooks, 1981).

Meanwhile, Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar who produced the concept of intersectionality, was also inspired by Morrison's narratives that explore the intersection of race and gender. In her theory, Crenshaw emphasizes the importance of viewing oppression from an intersectional perspective, where Black women face unique forms of oppression because they are at the intersection of racism and sexism. Crenshaw (1989), in her seminal work on intersectionality, refers to the idea that legal and social structures often overlook the complexity of Black women's experiences, which do not just deal with one form of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Through her works, Morrison depicts the experiences of black women facing gender and race-based violence, which reinforces Crenshaw's argument about the need for a more holistic approach to understanding the injustices experienced by black women.

Overall, the impact of Toni Morrison's work in shaping black feminist thought is felt in the way she has inspired contemporary scholars such as Bell Hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Morrison elevated black women's experiences in America through her literary lens and created an intellectual foundation for

black feminists to develop more inclusive and profound theories. By illustrating the complexity of black women's experiences under the dual pressures of racism and sexism, Morrison helps pave the way for discussions on intersectionality, as well as expanding our understanding of how black women's identities and experiences continue to be shaped by multiple social forces.

Social justice movements

Through *Beloved*, *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison plays an important role in shaping understandings of oppression, resilience, and empowerment among Black women. These themes are relevant in American history and crucial in the discourse of contemporary racial justice movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) (Alexander, 2010). Through her complex exploration of the trauma of slavery, social marginalization, and Black women's attempts to define their identities amid systemic oppression, Morrison provides an intellectual and emotional framework that serves as a foundation for activists in understanding the ongoing dynamics of oppression. BLM activists, who struggle against police brutality, structural racism, and social injustice, find resonance in Morrison's work, which highlights that race-based oppression is not only a phenomenon of the past but continues in new forms in the contemporary world (Alexander, 2010; Wajiran & Septiani, 2023).

One of Morrison's main contributions to inspiring the racial justice movement is her depiction of black women's resilience and empowerment in the face of historical trauma (Wajiran, 2024). In *Beloved*, the character of Sethe symbolizes how the trauma of slavery affects not only individuals but also the black community as a whole. The narrative of Sethe struggling against traumatic memories of her past illustrates how systemic trauma can be passed down across generations. This is relevant to the BLM movement, where activists often emphasize the importance of addressing the collective trauma of repeated racial oppression in the form of police brutality and legal discrimination. By centering black women's experiences as active agents against oppression, Morrison inspires for BLM to understand how trauma and resilience can coexist in the struggle against injustice.

In addition, *Sula* shows how individuals who reject social norms can become symbols of rebellion and freedom. Sula Peace's character rejects the traditional roles placed on black women in a patriarchal society and chooses to live according to her personal rules. Sula's rebellion against these social expectations reflects the spirit of empowerment also seen in the BLM movement, where activists rejected racist systems that tried to regulate black people's lives. Morrison points out that non-compliance with oppressive social norms is a radical act, and this concept was adopted by BLM, which focused on dismantling systems of oppression through direct action and social advocacy. The rejection of discriminatory social and legal norms is at the core of efforts to empower black communities across the United States.

The theme of resilience in the face of trauma also appears in *The Bluest Eye*, where Pecola Breedlove symbolizes an individual who is unable to overcome social trauma associated with racism and white-based beauty standards. Pecola's obsession with having blue eyes as a symbol of beauty highlights how black communities are faced with external pressures that undermine their self-esteem and identity. The BLM movement, in its efforts to counter structural racism, also seeks to dismantle dominant narratives that devalue black lives, both in media representations and in social policies. By recognizing the psychological impact of racism and discriminatory social standards, BLM seeks to rebuild self-esteem and a positive image of the black community, which is also an important theme in Morrison's works.

Morrison's work on black female empowerment is important for contemporary movements to promote awareness of the need for racial and gender justice. Through complex narratives of women navigating a world filled with violence and oppression, Morrison provides examples of how black women can play a central role in fighting for their freedom and that of their communities. This aligns with the spirit of the BLM movement, which is largely led by Black women pushing for a more inclusive narrative of racial and social justice. BLM activists such as Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors often refer to the importance of intersectionality in their movement, reflecting the influence of Morrison's work in emphasizing the connections between race, gender, and identity (Lydia & Elizabeth, 2023).

Pedagogically, Morrison's works have become an integral part of the academic curriculum, particularly in literature, gender studies, and race studies programs in the United States and worldwide. These works are often used to deconstruct concepts such as intersectionality, racial injustice, and gender-based

oppression. Using *Beloved* in literature and history classes allows students to understand better the historical impact of slavery and how that social trauma is still relevant in discussions about mass incarceration and police brutality in the modern era. Similarly, *The Bluest Eye* offers an important context in discussions about media representations and their impact on black women's self-perceptions, opening up discussions about discriminatory beauty standards and social pressures that still prevail today.

The pedagogical impact of Morrison's works in academic curricula has also expanded the discourse on race and gender in America, sparking deeper discussions on social justice and the role of education in countering racism. Scholars and students use these novels to explore how historical narratives can be connected to contemporary structural injustices. Using Morrison's works in the classroom helps enrich our understanding of how racial and gender identities operate in modern society and how individuals and communities can overcome oppression through solidarity and resilience. As such, Morrison's works serve as critiques of modern society and as effective educational tools to facilitate broader discussions on pressing racial and gender issues in the United States.

Overall, Morrison's works serve as an intellectual and emotional foundation for the current racial justice movement. By exploring black women's trauma, resilience, and empowerment, Morrison provides a deep understanding of how systemic oppression operates and how individuals and communities can survive and resist. As such, Morrison's works serve not only as works of literature, but also as guides for contemporary activists in their struggle against social, racial, and gender injustices.

Conclusion

Beloved, *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye* show that these works deeply explore the impact of systemic racism, sexism, and oppression on black women in the United States. In *Beloved*, Morrison explicitly addresses the trauma of slavery and its lasting impact on black women's identities, where the experiences of characters like Sethe show how racial violence continues across generations and affects social and psychological relationships within the black community. Meanwhile, *Sula* illustrates how black women resist the social norms that govern their roles in a patriarchal society and how life choices that go against these social expectations often lead to marginalization and isolation.

The Bluest Eye focuses on how race-based beauty standards, constructed by white society, undermine black women's self-perception. The character Pecola Breedlove, who experiences an identity crisis due to the internalization of these beauty standards, reflects the psychological impact of internalized racism. Through these three novels, Morrison critiques how modern social structures colored by racism and sexism not only affect black women physically but also damage their self-esteem, identity, and social relationships. Each novel illustrates that traumas, both historical ones, such as slavery, and more contemporary ones, such as social marginalization, continue to shape black women's identity in society.

Furthermore, through her works, Morrison promotes narratives of oppression and black women's resilience and empowerment. These works have become important tools in academic discussions on intersectionality, black feminism, and social justice, especially concerning contemporary movements such as Black Lives Matter. The use of Morrison's work in academic curricula helps enrich understanding of how racism, sexism, and trauma operate structurally and across generations while inspiring activists and scholars to continue the struggle against racial and gender injustice in the modern world. As such, Morrison's works remain relevant as tools for critiquing social structures and as guidelines for understanding the dynamics of oppression and resilience of black communities in the United States.

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