

Toni Morrison

Author, Nobel Laureate (1931 –)

Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio, the second of four children in a working-class family. She received a B.A. in English from Howard University in 1953, then earned a Master of Arts degree, also in English, from Cornell University in 1955. After graduation, Morrison taught at Texas Southern University in Houston, before returning to Howard to teach English.

In 1958, she married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect and fellow faculty member at Howard University. They had two children before they divorced in 1964. She then went to work as an editor, first in textbooks, then moving to Random House as a trade editor.

Morrison had begun writing while at Howard and, in 1975, her second novel *Sula* was nominated for the National Book Award. Her third novel, *Song of Solomon*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award. It was a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, the first novel by a black writer to be chosen since Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940.

In 1987, Morrison's novel *Beloved* became a critical success. The novel failed to win the National Book Award or National Book Critics Circle Award, but won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. In 2006, *The New York Times Book Review* named it the best American novel published in the previous 25 years. Although her novels typically concentrate on black women, Morrison does not feel her work is feminist. "Not at all. I would never write any 'ist.' I don't write 'ist' novels," she responded in an interview.

In 1993, Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first black woman to win it. In 1996, the National Endowment for the Humanities selected Morrison for the Jefferson Lecture, the U.S. government's highest honor for achievement in the humanities.

In 1984, she was appointed to the Albert Schweitzer chair at the State University at Albany, and from 1989 until her retirement in 2006, Morrison held the ROBERT F. GOHEEN Chair in the Humanities at Princeton University. She is currently a member of the editorial board of *The Nation* magazine.



Courtesy of photographer HELEN MARCUS