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## **The Toni Morrison Senior Fellowship in African Diaspora Literature and Cultural Studies**

### **ABOUT NAMESAKE SCHOLAR TONI MORRISON**



Toni Morrison (1931-2019) was a prolific woman of letters whose contributions to world literature, the humanities, and the understanding of the African American experience, expands beyond her novels and into incisive texts in cultural studies and critical theory. By all measures, Toni Morrison is one of the most important thinkers of our time.

Being the first African American woman to win the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature, Morrison made her debut as a novelist in 1970 and soon after gained the attention of both critics and readers for her rich, powerful depictions of Black life, the supernatural, folklore, identity, friendship, and themes of womanhood. Read by millions, her unique voice encouraged individuals and entire nations to contextually imagine the black experience through powerful lyrical prose that continues to inspire old and new artists alike.

With an instructive mastery of the written word, she authored eleven novels, including *Song of Solomon*, which received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977, and *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Among her other works are *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*, as well as children's books, plays, and the essay collections *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (2007) and *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (2019).

Morrison attended Howard University graduating with a BA in English in 1953, and Cornell University where she earned an MA in 1955. After graduation she began a career that ranged from serving as a senior editor at Random House for nearly two decades, to an academic career that included Texas Southern, Howard, Yale, and Princeton University, where she held the Robert F. Goheen Chair in the Humanities from 1989 until 2006 when she became professor emeritus.

She held numerous lectureships and academic chairs at universities across the U.S. and Europe and was honored with many honorary doctorates. Among the many prestigious accolades, Morrison was awarded Officer of the French Legion of Honour (2010), The U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom (2012), the American Academy of Arts and Letters' highest honor for excellence in the arts, the Gold Medal for Fiction (2019) among many others. Moreover, in the fall of 2019, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution honoring Morrison's life and work, and legacy and the state of Ohio officially designated her birthday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, as "Toni Morrison Day" to be celebrated annually.



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As a tribute to her life and career her son, Ford Morrison, produced the film *The Foreigner's Home* (2018), which explores Morrison's artistic and intellectual vision through "The Foreigner's Home," her 2006 curated exhibition at the Louvre. Using exclusive footage of Morrison in dialogue with artists, along with extensive archival footage, music, and animation, the film presents a series of incisive exchanges about race, identity, foreignness, and art's redemptive power. The film is based on writings by Toni Morrison and conversations with Edwidge Danticat.