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Pain and Sacrifice in Toni Morrison's
A Mercy

*An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for a
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Dedication

I dedicate this academic research to my Aunt Karima, for her invaluable maternal support, as well as to my sisters, my brothers and the whole family.

Special thanks to my friends, Ikram, Chahinaz, Randa, Marwa And Hayat, for their productive and intensive debate on my work.

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Abstract

Throughout the bloodiest period of world slavery, history did not pity the nations. Millions of individuals have been sold as low-cost commodities, witnessing various forms of hardship, pain, oppression, and persecution. The current study delves deeper into the concept of “pain” and “sacrifice”, focusing on the painful experiments and sacrifices in colonial America. It focuses on how slavery affected the nation and the families, as well as the impact it had on people's spirits. *A Mercy* is one of her best books, telling the story of a black slave girl from Africa, Floren, who had been sacrificed by her mother. Various characters with different stories had all went through common states of pain and misery. The work relies on *A Mercy*, displaying the early colonial America of the 17th century and the various types of human bondage from race and slavery. Moreover, it reflects extensively on how motherhood is influenced by social factors and how mothers sometimes cannot safeguard their children and are obligated to sacrifice them.

Keywords: Slavery, Racism, Pain, Sacrifice

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General Introduction

Toni Morrison is a well-known modern writer who uses her writings to address many social and political issues in the United States. She made a number of novels about racism, slavery, and female oppression, among other subjects. *A Mercy* is one of Morrison's most brilliant works.

A Mercy is a story about the lives of African women slaves in the 1600s, with a significant historical backdrop. At the time, America was not yet independent, and white people from all over the world flocked to the area to establish colonies. They farmed their property with the help of African slaves. Florens is the story's primary character. She inherits her mother's position as a slave and thus becomes a slave. With her mother's agreement, she is sold to another employer. She becomes a good girl and a good slave at her new workplace. Her Mistress then sends her on a search for a healer. Throughout her voyage, she will encounter social and humanity issues, including racism directed at her race.

Morrison's novel, is more focused on female characters. It is about slave women, their agony, and the sacrifices they make. The aim of our research is to learn more about the hardship of slave women and how they were oppressed even more than black men. The novel resurrects the history of slavery in America in order to educate readers on the plight of slaves at the period. Through the present work, we investigate how slavery is portrayed in the novel and how it affects female slaves' psyche by attempting to provide answers to the following questions:

- How are slavey and racism represented in Morrison's novel?
- What are the main consequences of slavery on the psyche of both women and children in the novel?

In an attempt to answer the previous questions, this extended essay is divided into three chapters; the first chapter, entitled "Historical Background", explores the history of America, its beginnings, the foundation of the colonies, and the social life in the 17th and early 18th

century. In addition, it deals with the important theme of our research, slavery and its historical, social and cultural background as it is portrayed in the slaves' narratives.

The second chapter, entitled "The Representation of Slavery and Racism in *A Mercy*", depicts slaves' experiences as represented by Toni Morrison. The chapter discusses several aspects of slaves' lives during the time, including education, religion, and daily activities. It also emphasizes the protagonists' reactions to the persecution and humiliation they suffer. The chapter also aims at gaining an insight into the female status at that time concerning labor and sexual abuse.

The third chapter, entitled "Pain and Sacrifice: Traumatic Consequences of Slavery", examines the impact of slavery on slaves' lives and studies the mental and emotional effects of the whole system of slavery on family institution and women and children psyche.

As for the methodological aspects used in order to fulfill this inquiry, qualitative research is used in order to examine the data collected for a better understanding of the sources and information. As for the references used, a mixture of both primary and secondary resources is used in conducting the research among which the novel *A Mercy*, books, articles and educational websites. The seventh edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* is used in the works cited section, in-text citations, and some methods of writing.

Chapter One

Histrorical Background

Introduction:

America or the New World; as it was called, has long been regarded as a haven. By the early seventeenth century, it saw the start of a massive migration from Europe, which then lasted for the next three centuries. People came to America as refugees to increase their wealth and dominance over world affairs; hence, the basic motive for those recent arrivals was profit.

However, several others left their homelands for other reasons, such as political persecution or the desire to practice their religion freely and therefore, another group was sent to America against their will-convicts. Indeed, at the time, other forms of immigration emerged such as: “African involuntary immigration”, which became the catastrophe and the darkest phase in the world history under the name of slavery.

This chapter is exerted and reveals how and what happened in colonial America, including such aspects as social classes, living conditions, religious development, and how society functioned. Furthermore, the colonial era is never discussed without mentioning racism and slavery that characterized that time period.

1.1 Overview of American History:

October 12th, 1492, is America's yearly holiday during which all Americans get a day off to commemorate Christopher Columbus' discovery of America. The truth taught in schools was that Columbus was the founder of the Americas, although the reality of the territory had already settled before he set foot in it.

1.1.1 The Beginning of America:

The late 15th and early 16th centuries were to be the period when the Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus, discovered a new territory on his journey. Nevertheless, America had already been established at the time of his discovery's proclamation. The data obtained show

that humans were probably present before, during and immediately after the Last Glacial Maximum (about 26.5–19 thousand years ago). However, the more widespread occupation began during a period of abrupt warming, Greenland Interstadial 1 (about 14.7–12.9 thousand years before AD 2000) (Rasmussen) which coincided with the start of Beringian Western and Clovis cultural traditions.

The first known Americans crossed the land bridge from Asia, living in Alaska for thousands of years before moving south and settling along the Pacific Ocean in the northwest and the Mississippi River in the central west. Hohokam, Adenans Hopewellians, and Anasazi were the names of the group. They built villages and grew crops, yet for no reason the group over time disappeared. Although archaeologists have suspected that Clovis people migrated south, they have not yet found any Clovis artifacts in South America. (Little) also added that Genetic distinctions between the people showed they had traveled south in at least three different migration groups, one of which was the previously undocumented Clovis group (Little).

The Clovis were not the only people to be believed as the first Americans since this acquisition of the new continent was a mystery. The first Europeans to arrive to North America were Norse or the Vikings who had already colonized Iceland and Greenland roughly a millennium ago. The Vikings' explorer Leif Erikson, son of Erik the Red, sailed to a place he called "Vinland," in what is now the Canadian province of Newfoundland. Erikson and his crew did not stay long — only a few years — before returning to Greenland. Relations with native North Americans were often described as hostile. (Weiner)

1.1.2 The Foundation of the Colonies:

European explorers were searching for sea passages to Asia, others chiefly, British, Spanish, Dutch and French came to claim the lands and riches of what they called the “New World.” Christopher Columbus landed on islands in the Caribbean Sea in 1492, his journeys marked the beginning of centuries of exploration and colonization of North and South

America. According to Kevin Enochs, though “[i]t is commonly said that "Columbus discovered America." It would be more accurate, perhaps, to say that he introduced the Americas to Western Europe during his four voyages to the region between 1492 and 1502. It's also safe to say that “he paved the way for the massive influx of western Europeans that would ultimately form several new nations including the United States, Canada and Mexico.” (Enochs)

What became nowadays the United States of America previously were the thirteen British colonies or the American colonies. The thirteen colonies had established the new world by the 17th and 18th centuries. However, before the European nation as well Spanish French and Dutch colonists too settled there, according to National Geographic Society, the invasion of the North American continent and its peoples began with the Spanish in 1565 at St. Augustine, Florida, then British in 1587 when the Plymouth Company established a settlement that they dubbed Roanoke in present-day Virginia. This first settlement failed mysteriously and in 1606, the London Company established a presence in what would become Jamestown, Virginia. From there, the French founded Quebec in 1608, and then the Dutch started a colony in 1609 in present-day New York. In this regard, Joshua J. Mark stated that:

Two expeditions were launched in 1606; one funded by the London Company (also known as the Virginia Company) and the other by the Plymouth Company, both of which received charters from King James I to establish colonies in separate regions of North America. The Plymouth Company's expedition would found the Popham Colony in the region of modern-day Maine in 1607, but it failed after a little over a year. The Virginia Company's colony would become Jamestown, also founded in 1607, which struggled but survived to become the first permanent English colony in North America.

While Native Americans resisted European efforts to amass land and power during this period, they struggled to do so while also fighting new diseases introduced by the Europeans and the slave trade.

1.2 American Society in the 17th and Early 18th Century:

In terms of discovering the new territory and thus new people, the 17th and 18th centuries saw the creation of a whole new world. Ultimately, millions of immigrants from all over the world colonized it, resulting in the creation of a completely new culture and civilization. A society that grew despite the difficulties and pain it endured at the start of its existence.

1.2.1 Social Classes:

Since European nations first became aware of the American continent and the vast number of immigrants that settled there, traditionally, the establishment period has been harsh and complicated. Yet, almost all new arrivals expected to improve their circumstances and find the blissful luxury life that comes with it. However, this was completely inaccurate; they puzzled out assorted living conditions.

Colonial America that is, colonial society in the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, was evidently structured by social classes. As a result, Europe was a place of strict social divisions. And as America is a land of opportunity, it is apparent that, despite the growth of economic status, the same ways of life would inevitably establish in the colonies. In reality, these class-ridden social structures were inherited from Europe. As a result, colonial society and the entire population of the colonies, particularly the southern ones simulated themselves on British society, where social life and relations were limited to people of similar social class. (Tilson) The gentry established themselves in Virginia as tobacco planters relying heavily on the labor first of indentured servants and then enslaved Africans.” (Tilson)

Indentured servitude helped in the rise of a wealthy colonial class. Indeed, they were well educated, had the right to vote, and held high public office. As well as having a monopoly on political influence. Even then, Mark, Joshua J stated that laws forbade other social classes from dressing as they do and “laws were passed in a number of colonies prohibiting those of lower classes from dressing as their social superiors; doing so warranted a fine or event time in the stocks.” (Joshua)

Despite the status of wealth, the middle class, which made up about 75% of the population, was an enormous social group. Mainly, consisted of yeoman farmers and skilled craftsmen, they owned land, but they were not as wealthy as the gentry. They were small-scale farmers, as well as professional members of professions such as teachers, artisan, lawyers, ministers, and physicians, all of whom had the right to vote. (Joshua)

The lowest and poorest class in colonial America included poor whites, indentured servants and African slaves. Yet, the region (rural areas and cities) played a role in the occupations and lifestyle of those poor. They had no right to vote, and few of them owned land, but they were still illiterate. They were farmers, artisans, laborers fishermen, manual workers, cooks, apprentices, and hired hands for the poor whites. Around 50,000 convicts were indentured servants who had not paid a salary. Additionally, they were not permitted to marry, leave their homes, or move without permission, nor were they allowed to buy or sell anything. Slaves have accounted for about 20% of the population of North America. Nonetheless, the slave labor had increased largely the economy of the south, without ignoring the true people of the land, the Native Americans, who were outsiders among the newcomer. (Joshua)

1.2.2 Social Life:

What The United States of America have become today, the world’s most influential, civilized, wealthy, dynamic, and democratic self-government nation; was a challenge. America had been built to accommodate diverse and large populations of various faiths,

cultures, and races; a complex entity. Before displaying the values that embodied society, it is necessary to identify the so-called "social classes," which were the primary social status that regulated the living directly or indirectly. Unless it was religion, they were described by the way they dressed, ate, lived, went to school (only the upper classes went to school), and spent their leisure time.

Three centuries back or more, when America was primitive and wilderness, early years were difficult and life was short. Thousands of people died because they could not find anything they ate or cure their diseases. William Bradford affirmed that "life in the American wilderness was nasty, brutish, and short for the earliest Chesapeake settlers. Malaria, dysentery, and typhoid took a cruel toll, cutting ten years off the life expectancy of newcomers from England." (Bradford). Colonists had to work hard to survive unless they belonged to the upper class. They decided to build towns and cities out of the woods in response to attacks from Native Americans fighting for their land.

Colonists faced difficulties finding stable sources of food and support. Despite the hardships, they constructed fortifications to defend themselves from attacks from the natives. Virginia was known by Tobacco, according to David Jaffe, "experiments with tobacco proved successful and the exportable commodity became Virginia's main source of revenue, providing many of its landowning gentry a comfortable lifestyle throughout the next century and beyond." (Jaffe)

Tobacco cultivation was the first productive export. Bradford claimed that Virginians planted Tobacco to sell before planting corn to eat, even though it was a massive production that lowered prices. In addition, planters relied on receiving white indentured servants. Indentured servants had signed the contracts; they were a young, impoverished, and illiterate Englishmen. They received paid passages to America, which included food, clothes, and lodging, as well as the possibility of acquittal for a crime. By the end of years of servitude, these servants would have the freedom dues as it was mentioned that "these 'white slaves'

represented more than three quarters of all European immigrants to Virginia and Maryland in the seventeenth century.” (Bradford)

By 1675, a group of disgruntled freemen had given up hope of ever obtaining the land they had promised. Furthermore, Virginia was hit by a slew of economic problems, including a drop in tobacco prices, while also dealing with severe weather and natural disasters. A group of Doeg Indians also led a raid on a planter's farm, alleging that he had not paid for goods he had taken from them. Thus, the colonists vowed to retaliate, and the governor of the colony, William Berkeley, although he failed, attempted to broker a truce between the colonists and the Native Americans. Nathaniel Bacon Jr, a Virginian colonist, took charge of his affairs, leading the civil war to be the first rebellion that marked a turning point in the relationship between colonists and local tribes.(69)

New Englanders used to migrate not as a single person, but in groups, as families, which remained the heart of the country. Moreover, it is known that during the colonial era, family was a unit of production, “[y]oung women sent from England to Jamestown to be married,” wrote Mark Joshua. Back then, families were patriarchal, which meant that the father was the household's head. Daniel smith claims that New England families were tight-knit, patriarchal, religious, and had a strong sense of community.

The puritans, in particular, argued that the family was a representation of the church in society. It is also crucial that the father leads his family in a godly, biblical manner. He had been given the authority to discipline and punish insubordinate wives, destructive children, and unruly servants. Husbands and fathers were required to support their families financially. It is clear that social status varied for poor and rural families; the whole family is responsible for the house's upkeep, while the upper class relied primarily on the father to run the family business, aided by servants.

As for mother's responsibilities, there was often a divide between the society layers; poor mothers' primary responsibility was raising children; however, upper-class mothers

relied primarily on the father to run the family business, aided by servants but also help with routine requirements as with cooking, clean, and laundry, as well as planting (for those who owned land), crop tending, and animal care. Women in urban areas, on the other hand, spent less time with their children, relying on nannies, and more time planning social engagements.

Children from wealthy families concentrated on schooling and attended schools. However, children from poorer families did not have the opportunity to attend schools because public schools were not available; instead, they learned at home, and boys learned how to run the farm, make transactions, manage finances, and slaves. Girls focused on learning how to cook and read the Bible. Mark Joshua stated that “children were expected to work, not to play” (Joshua)

1.2.3 Children’ Conditions in Southern Colonies:

The southern colonies of Virginia, Maryland, Georgia, and the Carolinas are known for being the first to be settled by migrants and landowners with vast landholdings. According to Demos, children started training at the age of seven through apprenticeships, where they learned a lifelong trade. As Axtell points out, at the age of seven, illegitimate children were no longer financially supported by their fathers because it was decided that they were of working age. Childhood in the early Southern colonies was marked by "extremely broken homes, the prevalence of indentured servitude, and eventually, by chattel slavery." (Mintz)

Both Mintz and Daniel Smith claim that the dysfunctional family unit was caused by illness and war, which resulted in high death rates and extremely skewed gender ratios for both children and adults. This territory was also distinguished by a bi-racial society that was so distinct from the other colonial regions that it shaped their community culture and family structure. The upper planter class in the Southern Colonies “made a conscious effort to imitate the county families of England.” (Wright) The colonists develop immunity to diseases in the region, and war with the natives decreased. Families settled, gender proportions were balanced, and children's status changed accordingly.

According to Daniel Smith, “High death rates and a rather amorphous family structure in the seventeenth century may have placed considerable emotional distance between parents and children, but that by the middle of the eighteenth century a much more affectionate, even child –centered family environment developed, one in which children became the emotional focus of the family and as young adults were granted significant autonomy.” (Smith) Socialization was valued even more than schooling in white Southern culture. Children from poor white families were often employed as servants on plantation estates. Unlike in the Northern Colonies, where masters were required by law to regard their servants as family members, providing food, shelter, and even schooling, servants in the Southern Colonial area were mistreated.

Formal education in southern colonies was not highly valued as in other colonies. The English caste system was still very common in colonies like Virginia, according to Cable, which is one of the reasons why there were no free schools or free presses in the early colonial era. As Sir William Berkeley said, “learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world; and printing has divulged them and libels against the government.” (Williams)

1.3 Slavery and Racism in the 17th and 18th Century:

Racism and slavery being the worst episode of the creation of the new world played a large part in the history of colonial America.

1.3.1 Slavery in the 17th Century America:

Slavery, the brutal system, is defined as a human being's permission to dominate, confiscate another human being's ideas and freedoms until he is released or deaths. According to Richard Hellie, Slavery, condition in which one human being was owned by another. A slave was considered by law as property, or chattel, and was deprived of most of the rights ordinarily held by free persons. The legal definition of slavery is dependent on the concept of ownership; yet, the right of ownership over another person is no longer legally permissible.

There is a lack of clarity in this definition in relation to the concept of ownership, and the travaux préparatoires to the 1926 Convention. (Allain)

According to Marcus Rediker, the transatlantic slave trade began in the early 15th century Americas, when 240 Africans from West Africa were transported to Lagos, Portugal. They also sold slaves on estates to produce commodities like sugar, tobacco, and rice, he added. As said by Rediker Beginning in the late sixteenth century, slave ships played an important part in the early stages of capitalism. Africans were turned into profit-making human commodities. He argues, “Central to a profound, interrelated set of economic changes essential to the rise of capitalism.”, “seizure of new lands, the expropriation of millions of people and their redeployment in growing market-oriented sectors of the economy; the mining of gold and silver, the cultivating of tobacco and sugar; the concomitant rise of long distance commerce.” And finally a “planned accumulation of wealth and capital beyond anything the world had ever witnessed”. (Rediker)

In general, Slavery and freedom was central to the foundation of the modern world. By the 17th century the creation of the new world typically, was based on slave trade. “Perhaps 10 million Africans were carried in chains to the new world in the three centuries or so following Columbus’s landing. Only about 400,000 of them ended up in North America. The great majority arriving after 1700” (Bradford) The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the expansion of slavery in colonial America almost as soon as the English arrived and established a permanent settlement at Jamestown in 1607. Particularly, southern economic based largely on slave labor. Slave traders justify their enslavement of Africans by creating ideas of race that defined Africans as less than human and incapable of being civilized. (Davis)

1.3.2 Racism in the 17th Century America:

Considered to be the worst stage of humanity; racism is the belief that race account for differences in human characters or ability that a particular race is superior to others. Thus, it’s

the description of the negative feelings of one ethnic group towards another. The seventeenth-century had opened the door to racial violence and racial beliefs. Racism and discrimination have traditionally been utilized to safeguard the political and economic interests of those who discriminate.

According to Horton et.al, racism historically has carried one of two related meanings: (1) a belief in inherited race differences that explain the differences in racial behavior and (2) the support of segregation, discrimination, or unequal treatment of the races are often accompanied by strong prejudice and intense hostilities. Howitt & Owusu also claimed that racism is not merely something done by a few adherent racists; it is a socio-cultural system that systemically produces advantage and disadvantage on the basis of constructed differences. (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah)

The racist powers use different strategies or ideologies in order to put down the power of the other races, by making them less human or inferior, so they can criticize their religion, their culture or traditions and even their way of behaving; this problem generally existed between whites and other races and some historians believe that racism is generally associated with the clash between white and black races especially in the eighteenth century because racism was in the heart of North Americans and Europeans who ill-treated other.

In the United States, white domination over blacks was legal and supported in all branches of the American government because they believed that they were just slaves, they had no civil rights and no opportunities. Slaves in European colonies were forced to do hard labors especially in agriculture because colonists believed that slaves were better at doing hard works than them. In addition European countries believed that the existence of these black slaves in the new world was very important where they can get civilization and religion.

Racism was a substantial issue in America, with Native Americans, Irish Americans, and then African Americans bearing the brunt of it. As a fact, there were distinctions such as between European origin in America and that of African ancestry who were treated as slaves

in the United States South. Most Americans in the southern states exploited slaves for agricultural labor as animals since they believed slavery was integral to their lifestyles, as Manning Marable stated:

From the vantage point of people of color, and especially Americans of African descents, our collective histories And experiences of interaction with the white majority have been largely defined around a series of oppressive institutions and practices .While laws have changed regarding the treatment of radicalized minorities over the deep structure of white prejudice, power and privilege Which has formed the undemocratic foundation of most human interactions has not fundamentally been altered.

Racism is about power. While typically racism is constructed as related to individual actions motivated by prejudice or hatred, racism also operates through a much broader set of social processes and institutional practices that have become so normalized as to be invisible, at least to those of us who benefit from them (Fleras and Elliott).

America adopted racism as something that exceeded the level of concern regarding the massive population and the diversities. In addition, racism as a system or ideology that describes oppression based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that favors white people over black people had created with economic and political goals in mind, fundamentally, black people in America had no right to be mentioned, they were only existed under the name of “slaves”, yet the majority of the Americans held slaves.

Conclusion:

Eventually, the first chapter conveyed some of the facts on which the New World was built. Starting with how and when that world emerged, deep down the 17th century was the beginnings of the establishments of the British thirteen colonies, however, America the continent was already settled back at least 130.000 years, yet a lot of mysteries about who was the first Americans. The beginning was hard for the new arrivals, a society formed with hopes

despite the hardships and diseases they faced, ultimately without forgetting the black loop of slavery and the enslaved African people.

Chapter Two
The Representation of Slavery
and Racism in *A Mercy*

Introduction:

A Mercy is a novel that tackles issues such as racism, slavery, and female oppression by the well-known African-American writer Toni Morrison, whose writings always relate to the lives of black people. Toni Morrison is interested in the black community in America characterized by community life, gossips, and solidarity. However this community is victim of slavery and segregation due to skin complexion. The novel is reflecting the different American social and political matters. It tells the story of a black orphan slave girl named Florens. Florens lived in American plantations during the 17th century under the slavery system. In the novel, Morrison calls attention to specifically, the historical incident in American history when the cruelty of the whites dominated the black people.

This chapter will discuss society in general in the novel. Unquestionably, include the social conditions of black slaves during the 17th century and specifically how the characters in the novel lived in that period. On top of that, it highlights the theme of slavery and racial distinctions, ultimately the chapter will exhibit the pain and the sacrifice and how it has swooned in the main characters.

2.1 Slaves' Social Life in *A Mercy*:

In *A Mercy*, Morrison turned back to the 17th century, the beginning of the New World; she focuses attention on the historical events in America in 1680, during the European colonization. Indeed, the society and culture in colonial America varied widely among ethnic and social groups but was mostly around agriculture.

2.1.1 Slaves' Lifestyle:

The novel represents slavery as the domination of the upper class toward the working class and the white race toward other races, economic problems, and the survival of the immigrants in the new world. It also gives the description of the social condition of women slaves in the new land. During the colonial era, many things were influenced by the British Empire. One of them was the social pattern and condition.

The growth of a natural social hierarchy resulted from the acquisition of some type of daily existence from the land. Edmund S. Morgan delves into the social order of the 17th century in his book *American Heroes: Profiles of Men and Women Who Shaped Early America*. Large landowners, small farmers, landless whites, indentured servants, Native Americans, and Angolan or African slaves made up the early Colonial socioeconomic structure, according to him (Morgan). He goes on to say that, while each of these unique divisions had its place in 17th-century society, people of the mentioned statuses were forced to cross societal borders.

On the book, *American History: A Survey*, Richard N. Current and friends explained about the social systems during the colonization. The British Empire inherited a basic system of social institutions that is the class structure, the community, and the family. The most visible inheritance is the class distinction in the society; there are the working class society and the upper class society. The working class society is the community that works as farmers. Even black slaves eventually enter this categorization for their rapid growth in that time. The upper class society is the community that comes from the Puritan community. (Current)

Nevertheless, white American communities were different from those black African communities. Black people had faced severe life; they saw all kinds of pain and suffering, starting from their journey when they had brought to the new land. In *A Mercy*, Morrison portrays the experience of Florens' mother; she tells her story about the difference in skin color confuses her and some of her friends. "There we seen men we believe are ill or dead. We soon learn they are neither. Their skin was confusing." (164) They were transported to America by boat and imprisoned in a small place for them to breathe in. It had been a dreadful voyage filled with pain. Morrison depicts the slaves in a scenario where they would rather die than endure this torturous voyage:

I welcomed the circling sharks but they avoided me as if knowing I preferred their teeth to chains around my neck my waist my ankles. When the canoe heeled, some of we jumped, others were pulled under and we did not see their blood swirl until we alive ones were retrieved and placed under guard. (164)

Florens' mother characterized her voyage as awful, preferring to be eaten by sharks rather than suffer what she had lived, and even her friends committed suicide as a result of it. Correspondingly, Slaves, on the other hand, were sold to various plantation owners to serve them when they arrived on the shores of America. Slaves were considered the property of whites, who were the only ones who had the power to decide their futures. Morrison stated that the status of slaves is indistinguishable from that of tobacco: "...especially here where tobacco and slaves were married, each currency clutching its partner's elbow." (9)

Furthermore, Morrison accentuate that those slaves were also given as a payment for debt; the case of Florens when D'Ortega sold her to cover his debt toward Vaark. D'Ortega made a proposition to her that stripped her of her humanity, and he tried to draw Vaark's attention to the money he could make by selling them. "You sell them. Do you know the prices they garner?" (22) D'Ortega's statements represent how most Southern Americans regard African slaves as a commodity. Vaark Jacob, on the other hand, refused to buy a slave because he despises the slave trade, demonstrating that not all Americans at the time held the same views on black people.

Whites, indentured servants, freed blacks, and slaves are among the ethnically mixed characters used by Morrison. Lina is a Native American, Florens and Sorrow are black slaves, Willard bond and Scully are European indentured servants, and Blacksmith is a free black man. Morrison establishes a tiny society in which all of these ethnicities interact and share their experiences with various forms of injustice. Indentured servants like Willard Bond and Scully had similar fates and conditions, and even; they are punished if their families made mistakes. Scully was the son of an enslaved woman, and when she died, he had his mother's

contract to complete in her place: “Scully, young, fine-boned, with light scars tracing his back, had plans. He was finishing his mother’s contract.” (57)

As a result, the white race has a sense of superiority over the black race, even though both races were in the same class and shared the same unpleasant experiences. White people try their hardest to make black people the most marginalized individuals because they want cheap labor and as much profit as possible. The African slaves' community became centered on their families. They did it because they want a brighter future for their race and society. Darlen Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson in *A Shining Thread of Hope* explained, enslaved Americans were also deeply committed to the idea of family, at any cost. At the core of this response was the need to care for children. At the same time, however, enslaved women and men used families of all shapes and sizes to fill the need for companionship, support, intimacy, and sense of belonging (Hine and Thompson)

Morrison wanted to show how the black people were close to one another and formed a family through the story. Too, notwithstanding their distinct backgrounds; they were able to accumulate friendships on the Jacob Vaark Plantation, despite class or ethnic differences. They had to run through similar circumstances in their early lives, which is why their ties are so strong. The novel includes twelve chapters narrated through many characters, from Florens, her mother, and Jacob Vaark.

2.1.2 Female Slaves’ Conditions:

A Mercy presents an overview of slavery in America throughout the colonization period. Indeed, as Morrison describes the social conditions in the new land, African women were frequently shunned and seen as non-human or as tradeable commodities referred to be Negro slaves rather than people. Florens’s mother said “I was purchased by Senhor, taken out of the cane and shipped north to his tobacco plants.”(165)

Florens' mother sold as soon as she reached America; landowners want slaves to cultivate the land since slaves do not require wages, and women could work on the farm. She

should also confront societal justifications for her race and place in society. Being a black woman in that society was much more challenging; they were ruled by men, a patriarchal society, and white dominance. “To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below.”(163) Florence's mother was abused till she became pregnant “Slavery had a long reaching effect on the conceptualization of the black body.” (Cooper) They neither has neither right to vote nor state their opinion, they had no chance to develop themselves. Slave owners claimed full legal authority to sexually mistreat African ladies. Slave ladies were “only subjected to the white men's will.” (21)

Women slaves' lives were more complicated; they had been subjected to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by whites who used them as objects. They had no one to defend them, Hine and Thompson illustrated: “self-reliant and self-sufficient became, lacking black male protection, they had to develop their own means of resistance and survival.” To gratify masculine appetites and demonstrate their dominance, white masters brutally torture black women sexually. Even their male slaves were subjected to subjugation. . Angela Davis in her article “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” says: “the rape of the black woman was not exclusively an attack upon her. Indirectly, Its target was also the slave community as a whole.” Thus, a psychological and mental damage occur in the black souls attacking their dignity.

Slaves had treated like family on Vaark's farm, and Jacob Vaark was a benevolent master; nevertheless, on other plantations, slaves were treated like machines, and they were abused and exploited “Especially the master who, unlike their more-or-less absent owner, never cursed or threatened them. He even gave them gifts of rum during Christmastide and once he and Willard shared a tippie straight from the bottle.”(144) Nevertheless, outside the farm, they maintain the social structure due to their incapacity to transform the entire institution of enslavement and social position, “Female and illegal, they would be interlopers,

squatters, if they stayed on after Mistress died, subject to purchase, hire, assault, abduction, exile.”(58) That demonstrates how difficult it is for slaves to adhere to society's rules.

In her search for the Blacksmith, Florens encounters prejudice based on her race:

One woman speaks saying I have never seen any human this black. I have says another, this one is as black as others I have seen. She is Afric. Afric and much more, says another. Just look at this child says the first woman. She points to the little girl shaking and moaning by her side. Hear her. Hear her. It is true then says another. The Black Man is among us. This is his minion. (111)

They portray her as a horrible person who spreads diseases since they are terrified of her skin color, as if she is a human who had been linked to a monster.

2.1.3 An Orphaned Family:

A Mercy concerns the lives of five main characters—Florens, Jacob, Rebekka, Lina, and Sorrow. These ethnically and socially diverse characters lived and worked together on Jacob Vaark’s farm in 1680 Maryland; shaping a community that was unified by material interdependence and psychological similarity as orphans. Morrison brings to collect cast who were comparable in their experiences or similar in persisting the same conditions or at least feeling the same things.

Starting with Jacob Vaark, a white farmer attempting to make a livelihood in a new world, he lost his mother in childbirth before being purchased by a Dutch father, who at least saved him from decimation. Because all of the other characters were orphans in a way or another, an orphan is both a person, and especially a child, who has lost both parents. It can also be a person deprived of “protection, advantages, benefits, or happiness previously enjoyed; [someone who] has been abandoned or ignored.” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries)

Vaark’s residence was the abode of an orphaned family. Lina is a young Native American woman who has survived the terrible strain of pox that decimated her tribe. She was sold to Vaark and exploited to oversee his household. Vaark's wife, Rebekka, arrived

from England to marry Jacob after he advertised for a wife. Rebekka lived with her devoutly pious but frigid and unloving parents. Rebekka buried each of her four children one by one. Vaark purchased sorrow, a mongrelized girl rescued from the riverbed by a family of sawyers. Sixteen-year-old Florens is the protagonist. A black girl who was rejected by her mother, is rejected a second time by the blacksmith, who was a freeman she loves when he chooses an orphan child over her.

According to Marjorie Downie, stated: “The world of this novel is an inclusive one, with relationships between women and girls dominant, but it also touches on relationships between men and between men and boys. It seems to be saying that whether male or female, African American, Native American, European American or “mongrelized”, the characters are all orphans— human beings full of hurt and needful of love and acceptance.”(58) Except for Native Americans, everyone in the United States of America is descended from immigrants. They were all made into scapegoats, especially the Africans who were transported to America. The circumstances on the ships that transported them were appalling, and life in the New World was no better. The slaves who were transported over were both literal and cultural orphans, cut off from their family, country, language, and history.

2.1.4 The Role of Religion in Slaves’ Lives:

For thousands of years, religion has been the most fundamental aspect of humanity. Indeed, religious motivations relating to religious warfare between the 11th and 15th centuries drove the inhabitants to seek exile to a region where they could freely practice their religion. As a result, religion was an important topic that authors addressed. *A Mercy*, indeed, deals with religion. In the novel, in addition to highlighting the differences between whites and blacks, Morrison also deals with the similarities that served as a tie between all the people who were brought together by religion. Krupa N. Dyva claims: “the characters in the novel are projected as Christians, God-fearing and faithful. They seek god for help.”

The name Blacksmith is associated with several Christian beliefs in Christianity. As the book of Genesis argues in the Bible “tubal-Cain, a descendant of Cain, is the name of Blacksmith who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.” (Biblical Myths, Symbols and Concepts) Morrison portrays the blacksmith as a powerful figure with healing abilities. In addition, the snake is an underworld symbol of evil power and chaos; The Blacksmith had constructed a serpent on top of Jacob's house gate in the tale. Jacob's transgression had referenced in this act. It symbolizes Jacob's avarice and the fact that he amassed his fortune through the slave trade. She highlighted the existence of God in the lives of humans through Rebekka, the wife of Jacob Vaark, the farm's owner; she was held as a slave by her parents when she was a child “her father would have shipped her off to anyone who would book her passage and relieve him of feeding her.”(74).

Rebekka believed that religion was a raging flame fuelled by a wondrous hatred and that her understanding of God was similar to that of “...except as a larger kind of king, but she quieted the shame of insufficient devotion by assuming that He could be no grander nor better than the imagination of the believer.”(74). Rebecca blames the church for her death after they had refused to baptize her eldest daughter, and her attitude toward God demonstrated: “I don't think God knows who we are. I think He would like us, if He knew us, but I don't think He knows about us.” (80) She also endured the death of her husband, after which she converted to Christianity, convinced that what had occurred to her was a divine punishment. Willard said: “She laundered nothing, planted nothing, weeded never. She cooked and mended. Otherwise her time was spent reading a Bible or entertaining one or two people from the village.”(145)

Morrison wanted to clarify that Christianity is the only solution to a person's issues and that being apart from God as a punishment necessitates following God's precepts. Slaves had forbidden from attending church and punished if they were caught secretly performing religious rituals. In the case of Lina, who was a slave, Rebekka forbade her from participating

in religious ceremonies with her, but she did so in secret and despite the barriers. Slaves resisted because they believed that praying was the only way to gain their freedom. After Jacob's death, his two indentured slaves, Willard and Scully, saw Jacob's ghost in his new residence, a scenario that demonstrates Morrison's interest in religious rites and spiritual beliefs.

2.1.5 Slaves' Literacy:

Slave education and knowledge development were forbidden, according to this quotation by Morrison. They had no right to read or write because the white community did not enable them to develop themselves. They desired that they illustrate. Florens and her mother, on the other hand, surreptitiously learned to read and write with the reverend father, believing that knowledge was a powerful tool; Florens mother pleads that:

I hoped if we could learn letters somehow someday you could make your way. Reverend Father was full of kindness and bravery and said it was what God wanted no matter if they fined him, imprisoned him or hunted him down with gunfire for it as they did other priests who taught us to read. He believed we would love God more if we knew the letters to read by. I don't know that. What I know is there is magic in learning. (163)

Although reading and writing were detrimental to slaves, the reverend father claims that: "it was what God wanted no matter if they find him, imprisoned him or hunted him down with gunfire for it as they did other priests who taught us to read."(163)

Witek stated: "It is clear that slave-owners knew of the dangers in literate slaves, and their fear of losing The Corinthian: The Journal of Student Research at Georgia College 66 power to literacy would only magnify slavery becomes more and more important socially and economically in America." (Witek) Henry Louis Gates, Jr., writes that: "the command of written English virtually separated the African from the Afro-American, the slave from the ex-slave, titled property from fledgling human being" (Gates). Even though some slaves had

the opportunity to learn, they were bound by specific regulations. However, the vast majority of them lacked this quality.

2.2 Slavery and Racism in the Novel:

The system used by the white community to govern the black community has been racism and slavery. As a result, for economic and political reasons, the new world would almost certainly never have reached its current level of development without those standards. There was a dread of slaves formed behind the racial discrimination. Morrison mentioned the story to present all aspects of slavery and discriminatory laws in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

2.2.1 Slavery in the Novel:

Slavery has always had a significant impact on white and black Americans. Throughout history, America has been known as a dark chapter. Through *A Mercy*, M Slaves, free blacks, and indentured servants were all living together in the society depicted in the novel; yet, not only black people were enslaved, but whites also were enslaved by white masters, and both were forced into human slavery. Morrison delves into the vague history of slavery and human servitude in America. Dr. Ferdinand Kpohoue stated: “slavery...bondage.”

Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy* looked at the experiences of slavery and racial enslavement. In the narrative, four slaves lived in the household of Jacob Vaark in the 1680s, during the early stages of the slave trade. Furthermore, Morrison depicted slavery with a cast of extraordinary individuals; all of them were of different ethnicities. Lina, a Native American, was brought from the Presbyterians by Jacob Vaark, the farm owner when she was fourteen years old: “Hardy female, Christianized and capable in all matters domestic available for exchange of goods or specie.” (52). She was Florens's stepmother and Rebekka's friend, yet she mistreated sorrow. Sorrow was a victim of ethnic slavery; she was treated like an animal, and Lina refused to allow her on the farm unless she washed her hair: “Lina thought

otherwise and after the hair-washing, scrubbed the girl down twice before letting her in the house.”(121)

Darby Witek claims that: “Morrison is able to show vastly different girls brought into the same space. The rigid black versus white structure of the binary fails Lina and Sorrow, whose servitude is based upon their social status rather than their race.”(48) Roye mentions, “Morrison does not limit herself to black girlhood alone but goes on to focus on all of those ‘peripheral girls’: any girlhood impeded by peripherality deserves the attention of a writer alarmed at the colossal waste of potential through a deliberate disregard.”

The slavery of Lina and Sorrow was based on their social standing rather than their race, Witek illustrated, “Morrison’s emphasis on peripheral girls demands a form of American captivity that tells more of the story than the white slave-owner and the black slave, making room for these characters by finding their space before it has been erased.” When Florens was on her way to find the Blacksmith for some white man, she appeared to be awful, possibly carrying diseases to the townspeople. A little girl was terrified of her since her skin was black, and she was associated with demons,

Slaves and indentured servants faced comparable discrimination based on their class and gender. Willard and Scully, two European indentured servants; featured in the novel, were mistreated and kept in bondage through deceit, Morrison emphasises, “Sold for seven years to a Virginia planter, young Willard Bond expected to be freed at age twenty-one. But three years were added onto his term for infractions—theft and assault—and he was re-leased to a wheat farmer far up north.”(148)

Florens and her mother reportedly lived in servitude in the home of D’ Ortega, a Portuguese slave owner who sold Florens as a debt to Jacob Vaark; nevertheless, he was startled when Florens's mother offered and pleaded with him to take her daughter instead of her, he said: “ill-shod child that the mother was throwing away.” (34) In the penultimate chapter, Florence's mother narrated the story from her point of view, attempting to convey

that she did not want her daughter to suffer the same fate as her mother servicing the sexual desires of her white cruel master D'Ortega, A Minha Mae said: "One chance, I thought. There is no protection but There Is difference." (166) Finally, as an African American writer, Toni Morrison was acutely aware of black people's anguish. She wanted readers to comprehend the pains and sorrows of America's slaves via the characters of Florens, Lina, Sorrow, Willard, and Scully, as well as Florens's mother, in *A Mercy*.

2.2.2 Discriminatory Laws:

The white population believed that by enacting discriminatory and enslavement laws, they would be able to maintain control over black people and limit their freedom. Some of such constraints had explicitly shown by Morrison in *A Mercy*: "By eliminating manumission, gatherings, travel and bearing arms for black people only; by granting license to any white to kill any black for any reason; by compensating owners for a slave's maiming or death, they separated and protected all whites from all others forever."(10) In this excerpt, Morrison describes how the local aristocracy uses all of the rules to their advantage, allowing white people to kill any black person for any reason. However, in the case of Jacob Vaark, he refused to accept these regulations and was opposed to cruelty.

Moreover, as Morrison points out, the white court used inhuman laws to punish blacks: "D'Ortega identifying talents, weaknesses and possibilities, but silent about the scars, the wounds like misplaced veins tracing their skin. One even had the facial brand required by local law when a slave assaulted a white man a second time." (22) She demonstrates that black people, even when repressed or humiliated, have no right to defend themselves. Restrictions to kill slaves and protect whites developed only to suit the desires of the southern Americans. Slaves were inferior physically, socially, and politically.

Conclusion:

The plot of *A Mercy* took place in the 1690s when slavery had just begun. The futures of African-American black women in the United States were in jeopardy. Morrison intends to

show the truth of racism and slavery, as well as the physical and psychological effects, especially in black women. Racial slavery shattered family links and relationships; people became orphaned and homeless in the blink of eye slavery. Morrison exposes the true nature of motherhood: mothers are ever-generous, ever-giving, submissive, and self-sacrificing women who are never overwhelmed by their children's needs.

Chapter Three
Pain and Sacrifice: Traumatic
Consequences of Slavery

Introduction:

Slavery was the first major theme of *A Mercy*. For slaves, slavery was a cruel and demeaning experience in which they suffered both physically and psychologically. In this work, Toni Morrison depicts the trauma of slavery as well as the traumatic situations that the characters have been through. The work also revealed what was happening beneath the surface of slavery. Even their horrific incidents stem from slavery's ravages, Morrison showed a group of mixed-race people who take turns narrating their stories, and their voices bear the physical and mental scars of their life's struggles. Toni Morrison highlights how enslavement's harsh experiences generated trauma in this novel, illustrating the consequences of slavery via the characters in the plot.

The third chapter focuses on slavery and its effects on slaves, particularly the influence of slavery on female psychology and how slavery affected their mental health. In conclusion, a critical summary of *A Mercy* is presented.

3.1 Pain and Sacrifice in *A Mercy*:

In *A Mercy*, Florens, an enslaved African girl in seventeenth-century colonial America, suffers from the misery of feeling that her mother has abandoned her in favor of being with her younger brother. Toni Morrison not only tells the story of Florens' grief. But she also narrates other tales, all of which appear to include the same level of devastation. Florens, Floren's mother, Rebekka, Lina, and Sorrow, were all in excruciating pain. Furthermore, suffering had traditionally associated with sacrifice as a result of performed deeds. In this story, we witness how Florens's mother sacrificed her daughter to save her from the misery that had previously struck her mother.

The majority of patients who experience pain around the world had been stimulated to see a doctor. To be in pain is to be hurt; it is to have one's feelings harmed. Physically, pain can be severe or trivial, and it can be sporadic or persistent. Physical pain is only experienced for a short period, such as as a result of an accident, an injury, or something similar.

Medicines could alleviate the physical pain, but scars remained. Physical pain is something that can easily be articulated and defined, and it affects every human being. The toughest aspect of this is the inability to express one's feelings. Heartbreak, loss, and the feelings that come with being left out are all tough to describe by nature. However, mental pain, psych pain, psychological pain, emptiness, psychache, and internal perturbation are all expressions used in literature to describe the invisibility of suffering, which is since emotional wounds are unseen. As a result, an emotional experience that harms the heart will never be cured as a long-range sense that manifests the person's implications on his body and develops into a psychological torment.

Besides, Baken observed that the individual feels psychological pain at the moment when he/she becomes separated from a significant other. (Baken) Sandler also defined psychological pain as the affective state associate with discrepancy between ideal and actual perception of self. (Sandler) Indeed, Baumiester viewed that mental pain as an aversive state of high self-awareness of inadequacy. (Baumiester) When bad consequences fall short of one's ideal self and, goals and those outcomes are blamed on the self, that individual suffers from mental distress. As a result, self-disappointment is the most basic emotion in mental suffering.

Engel underlines that grief is the characteristic response to the loss of a valued object, be it a loved person, a cherished possession, a job, status, home, country, an ideal, a part of the body, etc. Further, Engel points out that grief is a cause of mental pain, produces a variety of bodily and psychological symptoms and it interferes with our ability to function effectively. Indeed, the most prominent characteristic of grief is its painfulness. (Engel) The pain of depression is similar to grief as are other depressive symptoms such as low energy, inward turning, preoccupation, guilt, and self-criticism. However, grief is less often characterized by low self-esteem, pessimism, and hopelessness.

Losses of resources, including health, material resources, territory, status, relationships or kin, cause comparable emotional pain. Kato and Mann have suggested, for example, that the loss of a spouse is often conceptualized as a loss of the emotional, instrumental, and financial aspects of social support. (Kato) Bolger, defines, in other hand, emotional pain as a state of 'feeling broken' that involved the experience of being wounded, loss of self, disconnection, and critical awareness of one's more negative attributes. (Bolger)

Pain is the result of actions of others, although mental pain is frequently dismissed as less important than physical suffering, it must be handled seriously. Emotional pain is related to a range of typical feelings that can influence both physical and mental health. Presumably, throughout this work, Morrison has exhorted several phases of mourning. Indeed, she utilizes and gathers a cast that had survived a traumatic age in which its people must have tasted the sting of existence at the time. Morrison wants to show us each character's anguish or suffering in a unique way that not only brought them together but also brought them into a brutal era.

Nonetheless, they said that pressure causes an explosion, and in this work, Morrison linked a similar phrase to the suffering causing the sacrifice. As a result, sacrifice and suffering are unavoidable realities of life. Sacrifice is an essential part of man's religious and spiritual existence. Sacrifice is described as the giving of one's self, whether in the form of time, money, or something else, for a higher and more hopeful purpose. Merriam-Webster defines sacrifice as "an act of offering to a deity something precious especially: the killing of a victim on an altar". The term sacrifice, in its broadest sense, always connotes murdering oneself or someone else with the intention of achieving a specific objective, such as sacrificing for the sake of one's homeland, which is the ultimate example of sacrifice.

Indeed, sacrifice can take various forms, and the novel in our hands *A Mercy*, offers us a different kind of sacrifice, that of children. D. Kostadinović illustrates that the communication with the myth, started in some papers of the Proceedings first and second volume, was accomplished more directly in the third volume, published in 1998, in which the authors

focused their interest to the topic *Sacrifice and Self-Sacrifice in Literature*. This was absolutely expectable, as the act of making human sacrifice, either voluntary or forced, is linked to the ritual practice of the original mythological conscience, in which a sacrifice is regarded as the possibility of removing certain peril threatening to endanger the survival of the community. (Kostadinović)

The novel depicts a mother's sacrifice, with Florens's mother selling her daughter to the Dutch trader Jacob Vaark to protect her from future sexual violence at the hands of their Portuguese, Senhor D'Ortega. Her maternal love transcends patriarchal ownership laws and defies limits based on race and gender intersections. The novel revolves on a similar theme: maternal sacrifice and its link to love. Authors such as Nietzsche plays a key role in awakening this generation to the profound nihilism behind a passion for sacrifice that was "a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life." (Nietzsche) *A Mercy*, goes on to write on many periods in African-American history, ranging from the colonial period to the present day. The novel focuses on how the context of slavery influenced the daily lives of different women. The colonial era was difficult for individuals especially women. Families were scattered. It's not without reason that ethnicity and racism were the major factors in the American community at the time.

The American society was established on a hate of black people, who were primarily seen as property to be owned. Apart from the Africans and their problems in colonial America and during the height of slavery, the imperative of living and accepting it was more difficult than simply existing in a society with levels and colors, the family was the core framework of the society. The word "home", "community" and "family" are recurrent in this novel and refer, macroscopically, to the future nation, Lawrence Fuchs described as "a cultural kaleidoscope", replacing static images, such as "mosaic", "salad bowl" or "rainbow": "The most accurately descriptive metaphor, the one that best explains the dynamics of ethnicity, is

‘kaleidoscope’. American ethnicity is kaleidoscope, i.e., complex and varied, changing form, pattern, color.” (Fuchs)

Ultimately, the rainbow, or the salad bowl as Fuchs named it gathered varied races and different ethnicities where they formed a new community and sometimes new families with totally different members as well for the case of Jacob Vaark’s farm, a family formed with scattered members had come from different places through the world, they became friends, mothers, brothers, and sisters yet were they all used to be an orphaned people. Orphanhood, if was not for the truth, souls would be orphaned. It was destined for most citizens, especially African- American, they lived a harmful and miserable life. Toni Morrison in this novel shed the lights on a specific characters yet a varied characters unified them the quality of orphanage unexpectedly.

A Mercy tells a story of a girl that had been abandoned by her mother for a reason only her mother knew. Florens the protagonist of the story; the abandonment shaped her a psychological node which had let to that became an orphaned child and her mother alive. Through the story Morrison wanted to show us that whether you were a Native American or African American everybody in America stemmed from immigration. In her book *Cultural Orphans in America*, Diana Loercher Pazicky states that the “orphan imagery is inseparable from familial imagery, and that the metaphorical meaning of orphanhood depends on the larger symbolic context of the family (...).

In American history, the family is the paradigmatic institution that defines cultural values” (13). Pazicky further explains: “during the colonial period, the trauma of separation from England (...) created doubt among the Puritans about their mission in the New World and their status as God’s adopted ‘children’ (...) and fostered an identification with political and spiritual orphanhood.” The Puritans feared orphanhood, as they were the “natural or adopted ‘children’ of that ‘family’, and so they needed scapegoats “onto whom their identification with orphanhood could be placed.”

Because they were different, immigrants were disregarded once they arrived in America; but, in the case of African-Americans, they were not only employed as free labor, but their orphan trope was both literal and cultural. The “blacks had been torn from their land and culture, forced into a situation where the heritage of language, dress, custom, family relations, was bit by bit obliterated.” (Zinn) Judith Herman claims that “the core experience of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others.” Consequently, “traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community.” (Ramírez)

Diana Pazicky also claims, “groups, and even nations, behave like individuals. Following this logic, one can infer that [groups] (...) can experience a sense of orphanhood and that its process of collective identity formation is also relational in nature.” López Ramírez further claims that “social and racial minorities experience insidious trauma as a result of the cruelty inflicted by the dominant group (...). Consequently, they internalize feelings of inferiority and self-contempt, which are projected onto them by the patriarchal Western discourse.”

3.1.1 Motherhood and Sacrifice:

Andrea O'Reilly states that Morrison defines motherhood as "fundamentally and profoundly an act of resistance, essential and integral to black women's fight against racism and their ability to achieve well-being for themselves and their culture. The power of motherhood and the empowerment of mothering are what make possible the better world we seek for ourselves and for our children." (1) Indeed, Toni Morrison depicts how the institution of slavery enslaved the female African population in mercy. The novel explores the concept of motherhood, showing how slave mothers were forced to make terrible and difficult decisions. To save her daughter; a Minha Mae Florens's mother, a fearless female under the harsh circumstances of slave life, decided to rescue her daughter from the ghost of slavery,

which had haunted her since she landed on the American continent; thus, her harsh decision to be separated, actually sold her daughter was just out of her great love for her.

The story in our hands introduces us to the main character, Florens's mother, but also other characters such as Rebekka, Lina, and Sorrow, who have all experienced the pain of loss, either losing their mothers or their children. However, the main event is the proposal made by Florens's mother, whose great love for her daughter drove her to sacrifice her to save her; Being the best character who embodies a mother's unconditional love for her daughter. According to Chodorow Nancy and Jane Flax that “the continuity and lack of separation in the mother-daughter relationship have enormous implications in the female self, shaping her personality. A girl maintains her identifications with the presence of her mother.” (Ramirez)

Slavery completely undermined the concept of maternity, and it had a significant impact on the lives of black slaves, especially black women, who suffered unfairly. They frequently pushed into sexual relations that resulted in the birth of children. The female community in 17th-century colonial America lacked male protection, which meant that women and children, in particular, were always at risk for one reason or another. Children became orphans, and mothers were compelled to abandon their children. Finally, people live through tragedies and events that could not be forgotten.

Toni Morrison told a story about Florens, a slave child who had been abandoned by her mother (as she thought). However, the story began when the mother of a minha Mae Florens made a proposition to Jacob Vaark, a Dutch trader, to take her daughter as payment for debt instead of her. This traumatic experience affected Florens for the rest of her life. Thus the mother-child bond had been destroyed. Furthermore, all of the other characters were affected by tragic events, and each of them lost one of their loves as a result of the separation from their families. Furthermore, Lina, a Native American, had a close relationship with Florens, her foster mother, because she had lost her mother and sought to fill that void with Florens, “Then Lina smiles when she looks at me and wraps me for warmth.”(8)

Furthermore, Rebecca, Jacob Vaark's wife, suffered from the fate of being a mother because she lost her children one after the other after birth, as it is explained: "Three dead infants in a row, followed by the accidental death of Patrician, their five-year-old, had unleavened her." (21) Sorrow was also a mother; being a mother helped her to heal psychologically from the traumas she had experienced; her child inspired her to change her name from "sorrow" to "complete," and she became more powerful, she said: "I am your mother," she said. "My name is Complete." (134) "At one point, Sorrow, prompted by the legitimacy of her new status as a mother." (133) For Sorrow, motherhood was hope; she recognizes and owns herself mentally after being labeled a mongrelized slave girl.

Minha Mae, a slave mother who worked on the D'Ortega farm, was an abusive white guy who was a racist and slaveholder. Florens' mother, as the main character, depicts the constraining contracts imposed on black mothers under slavery through her experiences. Jacob Vaark was taken aback by Florens' mother's action when she offered her daughter for sale, and he couldn't understand how a mother could sell her child "He believed it now with this ill-shod child that the mother was throwing away." (33) Maternal love is an emotion that can't be digested or equalized.

Black women were stigmatized, and Minha Mae, hooks states that "marginality [can be seen] as much more than a site of deprivation . . . it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance . . . a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist." She needs to prove to herself and her daughter that everything she did was motivated by love and concern for her daughter's future and that she wanted her to understand the reality behind what traumatized her, "One chance, I thought. There is no protection but there is difference". She didn't want her daughter to have to face the trials of slavery and live the life of a powerless woman, as she had explained, "You stood there in those shoes and the tall man laughed and said he would take me to close the debt. I knew Senhor would not allow it. I said you. Take you, my daughter. Because I saw the tall man see you as a human child,

not pieces of eight. I knelt before him. Hoping for a miracle. He said yes. It was not a miracle. Bestowed by God. It was a mercy offered by a human. I stayed on my knees.” (166-167) All that she wants is to communicate her mother's worry.

Despite the terrible system of slavery, a mother's job included not only maternal love but also protection and efforts to secure a better future for her daughter. Toni Morrison investigated motherhood as a source of power. Andrea O'Reilly states, "Building upon black women's experience of, and perspectives on motherhood, Morrison develops a view of black motherhood that is, in terms of both maternal identity and role, radically different than the motherhood practiced and prescribed in the dominant culture.”

A Minha Mae's stance was one of sacrifice; she relinquished parental attachments and placed her daughter in the care of another slave owner, whom she considered being less harsh, Adrienne Rich, in *Of Women Born*, writes, "Woman did not simply give birth; she made it possible for the child to go on living. Her breasts furnished the first food, but her concern for the child led her beyond that one to one relationship.” Women, particularly black women, had no protection under the institution of slavery, and Minha Mae, a vulnerable mother, was sexually raped, a harsh truth she did not want her daughter to suffer.

3.2 Slavery Trauma:

The word trauma comes from Greek, which means "wound." It's an emotional reaction to a traumatic incident. Trauma is a result of severe pain, yet its symptoms can lead to serious psychological and even bodily diseases, so it is a feeling that should not be underestimated. Originally, trauma refers to an injury inflicted on a body. In medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the term trauma is understood as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind.” (Caruth)

Trauma is a series and long-term reactions. It includes erratic emotions, memories, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms, yet some people struggle to go on with their life. When an event occurs, trauma as a shock not be recognized at first, but rather in

“the way that is was precisely not known in the first instance then returns to haunt the survivor later on.” (Caruth) Hence, it is not just considered as a simple illness of a wound psyche “it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth is not otherwise available.” (Caruth)

Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he explains that “we describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. (...) The concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli” (Freud). In response to Freud’s analysis of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis states that “trauma results from the lack of protective mechanism. The treatment of trauma allows traumatized people to heal, not by forgetting or dismissing what happened. But by locating the core of the trauma and accepting the facts as memories. After undertaking the trauma, the victims will be able to go on with their life in a constructive manner.” (Hsieh)

Slavery was the first prominent motif in Toni Morrison's works. Slavery was a tragedy in which slaves were physically and mentally tortured. In *A Mercy*, the protagonists, like all slaves living in colonial America during the 17th century, went through horrific experiences and memories, which resulted in the trauma of slavery, which lingered in their life like a ghost. Laura Brown defines insidious trauma as “living in an environment in which there is a constant lifetime risk of exposure to certain trauma.” In *A Mercy*, we discover characters from throughout the world, notably Americans, Africans, and Europeans, all with extremely different origins. They are a mixture of characters that have all been through trauma before enrolling at Jacob Vaark's farm. Rape, assault, and death are all possible outcomes for women on their new common ground.

Toni Morrison offers each individual a chance to tell their narrative; the majority of the characters are slaves. Florens, the protagonist, is a slave girl who had been taken as a partial

payment to Jacob's farm. Lina, a Native American whose tribe had been decimated by smallpox; she was the farm's first slave and householder. Sorrow a black slave also worked on the land, and Florens's mother, who had been shipped from Africa to work as a slave on the Portuguese D'Ortega plantation. Similarly, Morrison depicted slavery and the painful scars that slaves had suffered via their stories. There were not only black slaves the tyrannical community, but also indentured servants like Willard and Scully were also subjected to the horrors of slavery, yet all the individuals portrayed the trauma of slavery.

A Mercy portrayed the journeys of troubled characters that are either going through or are recovering from trauma. Nigel C. Hunt's (2010) research shows that trauma affects basic cognitive processes such as attention and perception. Traumatized people, according to him, are more attentive to and perceptive of surrounding stimuli, which remind them of the traumatic event.

3.2.1 Childhood Trauma:

According to Schreiber, the impact of trauma varies depending on the period in which it occurs. As a result of their psychic integrity, children are more vulnerable to trauma than adults. The separation of children from their parents is the leading cause of childhood trauma. Additionally, Schreiber states, in *A Mercy*, it is easy to understand why a "mother's abandonment" is underlined within the intricate structure of trauma, especially in Florens' experiences. Florens, a black female character who endured the anguish of abandonment, is rejected by her mother, due to the terrible circumstances of life imposed by the dreary ghost of slavery. As Shirley A. Stave and Justine Tally suggest, the theme of abandonment in the novel, "both literal and metaphorical, specifically insofar as African-American identity is fraught with the knowledge of an original displacement from home and family that was sustained through the institution of chattel slavery." (Stave and Tally)

Florens's mother believed that her deeds were not abandonment, but she saved her daughter out of mercy. When she offered her to Jacob Vaark, mothers had no other option but

to resort to violence to redeem their children during the time of slavery. Floren's mother was a victim of many horrors during her life, including rape. As a result, she was obliged to give up her daughter to protect her from the dirt of white men; “to be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below.”(163)

Florens has been traumatized since her mother persuaded Jacob Vaark to take her with him; she was only eight years old when her mother rejected her. Florens had no idea the reality behind her mother's move, and she shed a heroic deed to spare her from slavery's harshness. Floren's only recollection of her mother is that she preferred her brother to her, “mothers nursing greedy babies scare me.”(8) Her mother's goal, though, she believed, was to stay with her little boy, she said: “I see a minha mãe standing hand in hand with her little boy” (3), she states also: “Me watching, my mother listening, her baby boy on her hip. Senhor is not paying the whole amount he owes to Sir. Sir saying he will take instead the woman and the girl, not the baby boy and the debt is gone. A minha mãe begs no. Her baby boy is still at her breast. Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says. Me. Me.”(7) Her mind is constantly disturbed by the memory of her mother's abandonment.

Florens has the shock of being abandoned twice by people she cares deeply for when she is brought to Vaark's farm and then grows to fall in love with the blacksmith, who is a free man working on Vaark's new house. Florens thought the blacksmith would be her savior and love would be an offset to what she has experienced, but the truth is once again abandonment:

You are my protection. Only you. You can be it because you say you are a free man from New Amsterdam and always are that. Not like Will or Scully but like Sir. I don't know the feeling of or what it means, free and not free. But I have a memory. When Sir's gate is done and you are away so long, I walk sometimes to search you. Behind the new house, the rise, over the hill beyond. I see a path between rows of elm trees and enter it. Underfoot is weed and soil. In a while the path turns away from the elms and to my right is land dropping away in rocks. To

my left is a hill. High, very high. Climbing over it all, up up, are scarlet flowers I never see before. Everywhere choking their own leaves. The scent is sweet. I put my hand in to gather a few blossoms. I hear something behind me and turn to see a stag moving up the rock side. He is great. And grand. Standing there between the beckoning wall of perfume and the stag I wonder what else the world may show me. It is as though I am loose to do what I choose. (69-70)

Indeed, this passionate love provides a 'mirrored self'. (Hsieh) Surprisingly, Floren's experiences of abandonment with her mother and the blacksmith were similar. Furthermore, for her, the explanation is that they prefer to select someone else over her, her mother by her brother and the blacksmith by an orphaned youngster Malaik, thereby repeating the ancient tragedy. Malik is kept by her brother, which caused her to abuse him harshly. She says: "Tight. No question. You choose the boy. You call his name first." (140) She adds: "I am lost because your shout is not my name. Not me. Him. Malaik you shout. Malaik." (140)

As a result, she was once again exposed to the trauma of abandonment. Another traumatic event at widow Ealing's town, she witnessed a woman and her daughter enjoying the sort of bond she imagined having with her lost mother. Jane is viewed as a devil in her village because: "One of her eyes looks away, the other is as straight and unwavering as a she-wolf's." (107) and her mother tried her best to protect her child. Florens hoped that if her mother was around, she would both instruct and protect her, florens thought: "If my mother is not dead she can be teaching me these things." (109)

Florens' loss and separation left an indelible mark on her psyche. She became a harsh, rude, and dumb person as a result of her abandonment trauma, in addition to having a psychological illness. Separation from one's parents is the most destructive and unpleasant sensation a youngster can have. Through her relationship with her stepmother Lina, the Native American on Vaark's property, she felt a sense of isolation. , according to Carl Jung, "the psyche pre-existent to consciousness [...] participates in the maternal psyche on the one hand,

while on the other it reaches across to the daughter's psyche [...] every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother, and that every woman extends backwards into her mother and forward into her daughter."

Clair states: "This mechanism includes both normal developmental processes as well as defensive processes. After the serenity of the womb, the infant experiences life as a chaotic discontinuity and splitting is related to processes that allow the infant to let in as much of the environment that it can manage, without the whole indigestible experience. Thus, early splitting refers to the maturational inability." Children are so sensitive and in need of a guardian that they feel insecure; their parents, especially mothers, are their shelter and heroes in their eyes. Florens' trauma grew with her, and a special hatred for youngest babies grew in her heart; her memory graved the sight of her mother begging Jacob Vaark to take her with him, though a minha Mae had her reason to apprehend that crucial step thus to guarantee her daughter a decent life and a childhood as it should be, however, slavery wouldn't let them have it.

Though being a slave and black caused Florens to be traumatized by racists, abandonment was not the only sort of pain he endured. When Florens was in the village, a little girl screamed when she saw her because she was dark and it scares her, "she screams and hides behind the skirts of one of the women." (111) and the scene deeply disturbs Floren, "I hear the quarreling. The little girl is back, not sobbing now but saying it scares me it scares me." (113) This traumatic scene is presented by Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* but through different characters. The story says that there was a frightened boy who screams when he met a black man saying: "'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible." (Fanon)

Morrison claims that racism traumatized Florens on her search for the blacksmith; indeed, Florens described the Whiteman gaze when she says:

Eyes that do not recognize me, eyes that examine me for a tail, an extra teat, a man's whip between my legs. Wondering eyes that stare and decide if my navel is in the right place if my knees bend backward like the forelegs of a dog. They want to see if my tongue is split like a snake's or if my teeth are filing to points to chew them up. To know if I can spring out of the darkness and bite. Inside I am shrinking. I climb the streambed under watching trees and know I am not the same. I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain. Something precious is leaving me. I am a thing apart. (114-115)

Afterward, Florens recognizes how the mistress's letter saved her life, realizing the importance of letters. As a result, Floren had a tough childhood.

3.2.2 Abandonment Trauma:

Florens is a black female character who suffered from the trauma of abandonment. After her mother rejected her, Florens offered to Jacob Vaark, a Dutch trader. Her mother desired to spare her daughter from the worst possible fate of slavery by making the painful decision to give up her child. During the time of slavery, it was unavoidable for mothers to give up their children. In the case of Minha Mae, It is an obligation for her to offer her daughter so that she would not suffer the same fate as her and not fall victim to atrocities such as rape, Root's model suggests "that for all women living in a culture where there is a high base rate of sexual assault and where such behavior is considered normal and erotic by men, as it is in North American culture, is an exposure to insidious trauma." Yet nobody asks the small girl's opinion when she is taken from her mother.

Florens' mother sees her daughter's abduction as a mercy deed aimed at the girl's salvation, but Florens spends her life trying to make sense of her mother's abandonment. Florens' mother realizes that her daughter is unprotected after being sexually and physically tortured by her master. Florens suffered the anguish of abandonment when she was eight years old. Her mother's rejection left her traumatized; all she knew was that her mother

prefers her brother above her. The loss and separation from her mother cause Florens a frame of mind, she grows with this trauma and becomes rude and have a psychological disorder. the feelings of rejection during her childhood develop in her the fear, violence, and anxiety, yet as a result of that, the hatred of little babies grow in her heart, when she sees Malik a baby boy with the blacksmith, she feels anxious and frightened and the memory of abandonment resurfaces her.

The dent on Florens' psyche caused by maternal separation makes her desperate in her relationship with the Blacksmith, a skilled healer whom she sets out to bring after Varrak's death to heal his wife Rebekka of her illness. In the Blacksmith, Florens forms the attachment she misses with her mother, and the fierceness of the emotions she invests in that relationship is frightening enough to doom the relationship to an unfortunate end. "Your head is empty, and your body is wild" (168) were among the last words the Blacksmith tells her. The Blacksmith's rejection brings back memories of her mother's abandonment.

This second loss is deeper because once again, another is preferred. Whereas her mother keeps her son in place of Florens, the Blacksmith chooses the adopted boy, Malik over her. Florens becomes mentally disturbed in this situation since the blacksmith no longer wants to be with her and refers to her as a crazy slave girl. His actions match those of her mother in her thoughts, causing her to lose her mind due to a sense of abandonment. Herman explains that trauma can be disorienting and one's emotions and thoughts can fly out of control.

3.3 Literary Criticism of the Novel:

Toni Morrison's work *A Mercy* is reviewed by several researchers, each of whom focused on a different aspect. Our research primarily focuses on slavery, pain, and sacrifice, as well as how slavery impacted society as a whole, particularly the slave society, the African-American Individualists. We previously stated that the suffering and sacrifices were all a result of servitude, as well as the cruelty and abuse, particularly of women, and the psychological scars it left on their souls.

Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* has also been dealt with by Michael Miller. In 2008, he published a piece in Newsweek Magazine titled "Review: Toni Morrison's Poetic "A Mercy." According to him, *A Mercy* "takes on the very roots of America's blood-soaked racial history." He claims that *A Mercy* alludes to Morrison's past dark themes of racism, brutality, and desire, but that the race relations in this novel are more unclear than in her other works. For Miller, Morrison is more interested in investigating questions of power, poverty, and the fight for human liberty.

Manuela Lopez Ramirez takes a different approach to Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* in 2014. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, she authors an article titled "The Pattern of Severed Mother-Daughter Bond." Through *Minha me-Florens*, she examines the mother-daughter relationship. She also illustrates the tyranny of female slaves through the separation of mother and daughter. She emphasizes that the mother-daughter separation breaks emotional links between them and has disastrous consequences for their psyches. G. Sharmely wrote an article titled "Racial Slavery in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*" in 2016. Morrison goes back to the beginning of slavery in America to provide light on the meaning of slavery as well as emancipation, according to Sharmely. Through the characters in the narrative, she explores the experiences of enslavement and freedom. She talks about how Morrison depicted the key people as living on the same farm, even though they were of various races. She concludes that racism is not the same as slavery.

After her unsuccessful last novel, *Love, Majorie Dawnie* notes that the novel is a refreshing return to the powerful cadences of her best work. It takes place in the 1690s, during the slave era when being without the "protection" of a man was dangerous, independent women were still suspected of being witches, and paternalistic male-female relationships were still the norm. In this novel, Morrison brings together people from all of the New World's major racial groups: African, Native American, Anglo, and mulatto. (Dawnie) In her *Review*

of *A Mercy*, Grewal Gurleen states that, “A Mercy” is a collection of poetry vignettes depicting the men and women who help run the farm and their limited and traumatized lives.

Daniel Garret, on the other hand, has a fresh interpretation on the novel. Garret noted during his examination of early American history and slavery:

It is a book about civility and savagery, intelligence and stupidity, love and hatred: life and death. It also concerns a theme that may be as timeless: what children do not understand about parents, especially their acts, as well as feelings, within the treacherous churning of history.

Khem Guragain, a lecturer at Tribhuvan University's Ratna Rayja Laxmi Campus in Kathmandu, Nepal, claims, in a magazine based on his research “African American Literary Tradition and Toni Morrison's Aesthetic Perspectives”, Toni Morrison is a key voice in African American literature and Morrison's writings question the mainstream opinion of academics and critics. Guragain states that, “The major themes of Toni Morrison's writing is to redefine the notion of white American canonical texts and their idea of African American writing as being non-canonical or inferior.” Many reviewers clearly regard Morrison as a gifted writer and a staunch protector of her ethnicity. Her works were impacted by historical events, and she spoke out against racial discrimination, slavery, inferiority, women, and a variety of other humanitarian issues.

Conclusion:

Ultimately, the final chapter dealt with what slavery caused. The third chapter focused on the consequences of slavery and its psychological impacts. *A Mercy* with its unique story, narrate what florens the protagonist had felt and experienced through her life , being an abandoned child who she thought that her mother sold her and prefer her brother than her, however she did not know that what her mother did was a motherhood sacrifice yet not to let her daughter to experience the grief and the abuse she saw as result to be a slave. The chapter emphasis the traumatic experiences, the trauma of slavery and abandonment.

General Conclusion

Slavery, according to our analysis of *A Mercy*, destroys the slave life for a long period of time. Slaves were denied essential rights like liberty, education, religious expression, and marriage. This research reveals that the subject of slavery in literature is extremely complicated and cannot be comprehended without a thorough understanding of its historical and social context. In order to acquire a clear and accurate picture of the slave experience, some historical facts and personal data should be used.

The impact of women's physical and sexual subjugation is also highlighted in the study. Slavery has a significant role in severing bonds between slave women and their surroundings. The links between a mother and her child are broken by slavery; with the absence of her child, the mother loses herself and the child's individuality is ruined. As a consequence, slavery causes the destruction of a sacred relation and the falling of a whole family structure. Morrison is successful in expressing the female protagonists' loss of identity, psychological illnesses, and traumatic shocks as a result of slavery.

All in all, literature can be seen as a mirror used by authors to reflect both past and imaginary situations. Authors use fiction in order to discuss and shed light on phenomena that have changed and influenced the world. This extended essay has aimed to tackle one of the most controversial themes in American history which is slavery and racism. *A Mercy* presents an example of a tragic life story of a woman who experiences pain and is forced to sacrifice her own daughter as a result of her enslavement.

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Appendix I: Toni Morrison Biography

Toni Morrison, original name Chloe Anthony Wofford, (born February 18, 1931, Lorain, Ohio, U.S.—died August 5, 2019, Bronx, New York), American writer noted for her examination of Black experience (particularly Black female experience) within the Black community. She received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Morrison grew up in the American Midwest in a family that possessed an intense love of and appreciation for Black culture. Storytelling, songs, and folktales were a deeply formative part of her childhood. She attended Howard University (B.A., 1953) and Cornell University (M.A., 1955). After teaching at Texas Southern University for two years, she taught at Howard from 1957 to 1964. In 1965 Morrison became a fiction editor at Random House, where she worked for a number of years. In 1984 she began teaching writing at the State University of New York at Albany, which she left in 1989 to join the faculty of Princeton University; she retired in 2006. Morrison's first book, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is a novel of initiation concerning a victimized adolescent Black girl who is obsessed by white standards of beauty and longs to have blue eyes. In 1973 a second novel, *Sula*, was published; it examines (among other issues) the dynamics of friendship and the expectations for conformity within the community. *Song of Solomon* (1977) is told by a male narrator in search of his identity; its publication brought Morrison to national attention. *Tar Baby* (1981), set on a Caribbean island, explores conflicts of race, class, and sex. The critically acclaimed *Beloved* (1987), which won a Pulitzer Prize for fiction, is based on the true story of a runaway slave who, at the point of recapture, kills her infant daughter in order to spare her a life of slavery. A film adaptation of the novel was released in 1998 and starred Oprah Winfrey. In addition, Morrison wrote the libretto for *Margaret Garner* (2005), an opera about the same story that inspired *Beloved*. In 1992 Morrison released *Jazz*, a story of violence and passion set in New York City's Harlem during the 1920s. Subsequent novels were *Paradise* (1998), a richly detailed portrait of a Black utopian community in Oklahoma, and *Love* (2003), an intricate family story that reveals the myriad facets of love and its ostensible opposite. *A Mercy* (2008) deals with slavery in 17th-century America. In the redemptive *Home* (2012), a traumatized Korean War veteran encounters racism after returning home and later overcomes apathy to rescue his sister. In *God Help the Child* (2015), Morrison chronicled the ramifications of child abuse and neglect through the tale of Bride, a Black girl with dark skin who is born to light-skinned parents. A work of criticism, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, was published in 1992. Many of Morrison's essays and speeches were collected in *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction* (2008; edited by Carolyn C. Denard) and *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (2019). She and her son, Slade Morrison, co-wrote a number of children's books, including the Who's Got Game? Series, *The Book About Mean People* (2002), and *Please, Louise* (2014). She also penned *Remember* (2004), which chronicles the hardships of Black students during the integration of the American public school system; aimed at children, it uses archival photographs juxtaposed with captions speculating on the thoughts of their subjects. For that work, Morrison won the Coretta Scott King Award in 2005. The central theme of Morrison's novels is the Black American experience; in an unjust society, her characters struggle to find themselves and their cultural identity. Her use of fantasy, her sinuous poetic style, and her rich interweaving of the mythic gave her stories great strength and texture. In 2010 Morrison was made an officer of the French Legion of Honour. Two years later she was awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom. *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* (2019) is a documentary about her life and career.



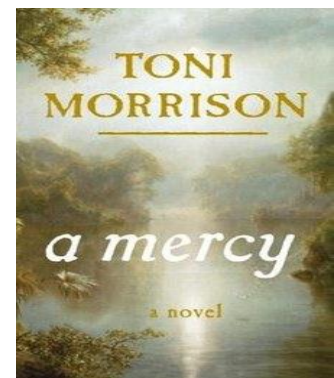
Source: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Toni-Morrison>

Appendix II: Synopsis of *A Mercy*

Published in 2008, *A Mercy* is Toni Morrison's ninth novel. Morrison, both a prolific scholar and author, centers the question of slavery and a pre-racial America in this fictional novel. *A Mercy* was chosen as one of the best books in the year of its release by the New York Times.

Plot Summary

A Mercy endeavors to explore the experiences of slaves in early America. The narrative frequently changes focus between different characters who live or work for the Vaarks. The primary protagonist is a 16-year-old enslaved girl named Florens. Florens begins the novel on the D'Ortega tobacco plantation in Virginia. There, the D'Ortegas are known for their exceptional cruelty towards their slaves. The D'Ortegas are in a great deal of debt, and the novel opens as a trader named Jacob Vaark arrives at the plantation to collect the money they owe him. Vaark is disapproving of the D'Ortegas, frowning upon their cruelty, arrogance, and political views. The D'Ortegas do not have the means to repay the debt and offer an enslaved person to Vaark instead. The two come across Florens's mother, who offers her child up to Vaark. Florens believes that in doing so, her mother willfully abandons her; however, Florens's mother does so to protect her, having recognized a kindness in Vaark that does not exist in the D'Ortegas. When Florens arrives at the Vaark farm in rural New York, life with Jacob and his wife Rebekka is considerably better than that on the plantation. Two other slaves live on the farm: Lina, an Indigenous woman, and Sorrow, a young girl born from a Black mother and White father who suffers from mental health issues. The Vaarks and their slaves form a strange but functional pseudo-family unit, a phenomenon that was strange for the time. Through interchanging perspectives, Morrison skillfully weaves the personal histories of each character into the narrative. The lived experiences of the characters in the novel allow them to function together relatively seamlessly; they are almost all orphans, and all intimately familiar with abandonment. However, when Jacob Vaark falls ill and dies, a cog in the system comes loose. Fear and panic run rampant on the farm as Rebekka, too, becomes ill. A farm run entirely by women is almost unheard of, and the threat of those who might mean them harm becomes a constant thread of paranoia. All of the slaves try their best to help Rebekka get better, but finally, Florens must go to the Blacksmith, a freed Black man whom Florens is in love with. Florens and the Blacksmith had a brief affair the last time he was on the farm, despite Lina's best attempts to keep her away from him. Lina is distrustful of the Blacksmith, and having practically raised Florens, feels extremely protective over her. Florens is delighted to have an excuse to go and look for the Blacksmith and is more than ready to see him again. After a couple days of walking, Florens arrives at a cottage where she meets Widow Ealing and her daughter. Widow Ealing's community is enrapt in a hunt for witches, and when the locals arrive to check Widow's daughter and ensure that she is not a demon, they all become convinced that Florens is the devil due to the color of her skin. The Widow's daughter prepares food for Florens and helps her escape. She tells Florens where she can find the Blacksmith. The Blacksmith leaves to care for Rebekka, though he asks for her to stay behind and care for a young boy who has no one else to look after him. Florens worries that the Blacksmith will inevitably choose the young boy over her, and that he will decide to one day abandon her just as her mother once had. Florens becomes increasingly cruel to the boy, and when he begins to cry, she grabs his arm to silence him, breaking it. The boy faints from the pain and the Blacksmith arrives to witness it all. He is furious with her and slaps Florens, telling her to return to Rebekka since she is incapable of reason. After Florens returns to the Vaark farm, everything changes. The two indentured servants on a neighboring farm, Willard and Scully, share an intimate and romantic relationship. They provide an outside perspective on the marked changes that have occurred in the women on the Vaark farm. Rebekka has become a religious zealot and increasingly cruel towards the slaves, and wants to sell Florens. Florens does not seem to care much about this, spending her days working and her nights in the new, empty house that Jacob had built before his death. There, Florens carves words into the wood, a letter to the Blacksmith about all that has happened. The novel ends with a peek into Florens's mother's mindset. Florens's belief that her mother abandoned her was wrong all along; her mother had given her to Jacob Vaark to protect her. The final lines are a prayer of sorts, with Florens's mother hoping that her daughter will understand and forgive her one day.



Source: <https://www.supersummary.com/a-mercy/summary>

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