

# Representation of African American History in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

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## Abstract

Toni Morrison's novels—from *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to the latest *A Mercy* (2008)—are deeply rooted in American history. Through her rich imagination, Morrison has re-visioned and re-interpreted the Black Diaspora and transformed it into wondrous literary pieces. A fictional work as *Jazz* (1992) is, it derives inspiration from African American folk history, with events, dates and places corresponding fairly closely to those in U.S. history and geography. Set mainly in 1920s' New York, the novel delineates everyday life of African Americans living in Harlem and captures the special aura of the City. Meanwhile, *Jazz* also touches upon the rural life of African Americans in the South. In this highly significant African American migration narrative, *Jazz* not only records the historical changes experienced by African Americans after the Civil War, but also stresses American whites' atrocities on African Americans. This essay attempts to use *Jazz* as an example to illustrate how Morrison tries to represent African American history in this novel, with special attention to examining the impact of historical events and social changes upon the lives of the main characters in the novel.

**Key Words:** Toni Morrison, *Jazz*, African American fiction, African American history

## 《爵士樂》中的非裔美國歷史再現

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## 摘要

童妮·摩里森的小說——從《最藍的眼睛》(*The Bluest Eye*, 1970)到甫問世的 *A Mercy* (2008)——無不深植於非裔美國歷史。透過豐富的想像力，摩里森「重」視和重「釋」黑人離散史，並將之轉化成精湛的文學作品。《爵士樂》(*Jazz*, 1992) 雖屬虛構小說，但其靈感係來自非裔美國庶民歷史，且書中指涉的細節與美國實際史地大致吻合。在這部以 1920 年代紐約市為主要背景的小說中，摩里森不僅描繪當時哈林區黑人的日常生活，捕捉整個城市的特殊氛圍，而且對於南方鄉村黑人生活亦多所著墨。在這部非常值得重視的非裔美國人遷移敘事中，摩里森除記錄美國內戰黑人遭逢的歷史變遷之外，並且描述(及控訴)美國白人對黑人的欺負與暴行。本文擬以這部小說為例，探討摩里森如何在小說創作中再現非裔美國歷史，並特別著重分析書中指涉的歷史事件及社會變遷對小說人物所造成的影響。

關鍵詞：童妮·摩里森，《爵士樂》，非裔美國小說，非裔美國歷史