# How does Toni Morrison present gender?

## Task 1: African American Feminism - Research Task:

* Go to <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/revolutionary-practice-black-feminisms>

**The time ABOUT which Morrison writes (narrated time, mid-late 19th century):**

* Sojourner Truth
* National Association of Colored Women (NACW)

**Time of writing (late 20th century)**

* 1970s: movements under the umbrella of the Women’s Liberation and Civil Rights Movement
* 1983: Alice Walker

**Evaluate:** Which ideas from these movements does Toni Morrison integrate or reference in her novel? What can you infer about her view of femininity and gender more broadly?

## Task 2: Exploring African American Masculinity with James Baldwin

**James Arthur Baldwin (August 2, 1924 – December 1, 1987) was an American writer and activist.**

*“The American idea of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American idea of masculinity. Idea may not be the precise word, for the idea of one’s sexuality can only with great violence be divorced or distanced from the idea of the self. Yet something resembling this rupture has certainly occurred (and is occurring) in American life, and violence has been the American daily bread since we have heard of America. This violence, furthermore, is not merely literal and actual but appears to be admired and lusted after, and the key to the American imagination.*

*All countries or groups make of their trials a legend or, as in the case of Europe, a dubious romance called ‘history.’ But no other country has ever made so successful and glamorous a romance out of genocide and slavery; therefore, perhaps, the word I am searching for is not idea, but ideal.*

*The American IDEAL, then, of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American IDEAL of masculinity. This ideal has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and f\*\*\*\*t, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden—as an unpatriotic act—that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood.”*

**Evaluate:** How would you summarize James Baldwin’s points on masculinity? Do you think these are (or might have been) controversial? Which of thee ideas could you use to explore masculinity in *Beloved*?

## Task 3: A feminist perspective on Masculinity?

Find out about bell hooks! Good places to start are

* Her page on the Poetry Foundation website, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/bell-hooks>
* Her obituaries on NPR <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/15/1064509418/bell-hooks-feminist-author-critic-activist-died> or in the Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/17/bell-hooks-obituary>

***The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love***

In 2004, bell hooks published this book, which addresses how patriarchy shapes (and limits) the masculine experience – it explores masculinity in patriarchy form a feminist perspective. It is written in order to help men reclaim their inner lives, emotions and ability to love.

**Tasks:**

1. Read the quotations below. Which ideas do you feel are relevant when exploring masculinity in *Beloved*?
2. Unsurprisingly, this book raised controversies as well as praise. Which idea would you expect to be controversial? Why / How?

*“To indoctrinate boys into the rules of patriarchy, we force them to feel pain and to deny their feelings[….]Learning to wear a mask (that word already embedded in the term “masculinity”) is the first lesson in patriarchal masculinity that a boy learns. He learns that his core feelings cannot be expressed if they do not conform to the acceptable behaviors sexism defines as male. Asked to give up the true self in order to realize the patriarchal ideal, boys learn self-betrayal early and are rewarded for these acts of soul murder.”*

*“Only a revolution in values in our nation will end male violence, and that revolution will necessarily be based on a love ethic. To create loving men, we must love males. Loving maleness is different from praising and rewarding males for living up to sexist-defined notions of male identity. Caring about men because of what they do for us is not the same as loving males for simply being. When we love maleness, we extend our love whether males are performing or not. Performance is different from simply being. In patriarchal culture males are not allowed simply to be who they are and to glory in their unique identity. Their value is always determined by what they do. In an antipatriarchal culture males do not have to prove their value and worth. They know from birth that simply being gives them value, the right to be cherished and loved.”*

*“The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem. Feminist movement offered to men and women the information needed to challenge this psychic slaughter, but that challenge never became a widespread aspect of the struggle for gender equality. Women demanded of men that they give more emotionally, but most men really could not understand what was being asked of them. Having cut away the parts of themselves that could feel a wide range of emotional response, they were too disconnected. They simply could not give more emotionally or even grasp the problem without first reconnecting, reuniting the severed parts.”*

*“The root meaning of the Latin word patior or is “to suffer.” To claim passion, men must embrace the pain, feeling the suffering, moving through it to the world of pleasure that awaits. This is the heroic journey for men in our times. It is not a journey leading to conquest and domination, to disconnecting and cutting off life; it is a journey of reclamation where the bits and pieces of the self are found and put together again, made whole.”*

