



## THE BENCH BY THE ROAD PROJECT

---

At the Fifth Biennial Conference, the Toni Morrison Society will place the first Bench in the **Bench by the Road** series on Sullivan's Island, the site of the first entry for most enslaved Africans who entered North America. The bench is a 6-foot steel structure with ribbed backing in black and specially coated to withstand the salt air of the Carolina Coast. A small, bronze naming plaque will be mounted to the inside back of the bench, and another bronze plaque describing the significance of the site will be placed in the cement foundation to which the Bench will be mounted. The Bench will be secured by the National Park Service at Ft. Moultrie and will be accessible to all who visit Sullivan's Island. Toni Morrison and her family will join nearly 400 conference attendees, their families, and visitors from Charleston, across the nation, and around the world for this first **Bench By the Road** placement.

**The Bench by the Road Project** is a community outreach initiative of the Toni Morrison Society. Its originates in Morrison's remarks about *Beloved* in a 1989 interview: "There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves . . . There is no suitable memorial, or plaque, or wreath, or wall, or park, or skyscraper lobby. There's no 300-foot tower, there's no small bench by the road. There is not even a tree scored, an initial that I can visit or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence or better still on the banks of the Mississippi. And because such a place doesn't exist . . . the book had to" (*The World*, 1989).

Because the Toni Morrison Society wanted to be a place where scholars and readers could, through their engagement with Morrison's novels, remember not only slavery but also many of the forgotten moments in African American history, the Society chose as its motto "a bench by the road." This Project extends our mission. While there have been several notable African American museums built in American cities since 1989, the goal of the Bench By the Road Project is to create an outdoor museum that will mark important locations in African American history both in the United States and abroad.

Over the next five years, the Society plans to mark ten of these sites by placing a specially crafted bench, each with an inscription detailing its significance. Corporate donors will be invited to join the Society in this effort by sponsoring a bench at an appropriate site. Our hope is that the Bench by the Road Project will serve not only to acknowledge Toni Morrison's attention to these historic sites and their meanings in her novels but also to mark their locations, inspire dialogue, and engage them as part of our public memory.

Among the other places being considered are those that have special significance in Morrison's novels--5th Avenue in Harlem where the Silent Parade, protesting the East St. Louis Riots, was held in 1917; the site of Emmett Till's death in Mississippi; train stations in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, where thousands began their journeys in the Great Migration; an all-Black town in Oklahoma--as well as other unmarked sites that have historical meaning for African Americans, Sullivan's Island off the coast of Charleston, University Hall in Providence, the home of Fannie Lou Hamer in Mississippi and many others.