



# Those Bones Are Not My Child: A Novel

By Toni Cade Bambara

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## Those Bones Are Not My Child: A Novel By Toni Cade Bambara

Written over a span of twelve years, and edited by Toni Morrison, who calls **Those Bones Are Not My Child** the author's magnum opus, Bambara's last novel leaves us with an enduring and revelatory chronicle of an American nightmare.

In a suspenseful novel of uncommon depth and intensity, Toni Cade Bambara renders a harrowing portrait of a city under siege. Having elected its first black mayor in 1980, Atlanta projected an image of political progressiveness and prosperity. But between September 1979 and June 1981, more than forty black children were kidnapped, sexually assaulted, and brutally murdered throughout "The City Too Busy to Hate."

A separated mother of three holding down several jobs, Zala Spencer has managed to survive on the margins of a flourishing economy until she awakens the morning of Sunday, July 20, 1980, to find her teenage son Sonny missing. As the hours turn into days, Zala realizes that Sonny is among the many cases of missing children just beginning to attract national attention. Growing increasingly disillusioned with the authorities, who respond to Sonny's disappearance with cold indifference, Zala and her estranged husband embark on a desperate search. Through the eyes of a family seized by anguish and terror, we watch a city roiling with political, racial, and class tensions.

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

On a Friday night in July 1979, the first victim in what would come to be called the Atlanta Child Murders disappeared. Over the course of two years, more than 40 African American children would die--abused, mutilated, strangled--before an arrest in 1981 apparently settled the issue. Wayne Williams, a black man, was accused, tried, and convicted of the murders, and the good citizens of Atlanta breathed easy again, assured that the crimes had not been racially motivated after all, and that the criminal was behind bars.

Or was he? In her posthumously published novel, *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, Toni Cade Bambara revisits the summer of 1980 and suggests a chilling alternative:

The terror is over, the authorities say. The horror is past, they repeat every day. There've been no new cases of kidnap and murder since the arrest back in June. You've good reason to know that the official line is a lie. But you sweep the walk briskly all the way to the hedge, as though in clearing the leaves you can clear from your mind all that you know. You'd truly like to know less. You want to believe. It is 3:23 on your Mother's Day watch. And your child is nowhere in sight.

The protagonist of Bambara's novel is Marzala Rawls Spencer, an African American mother of three who is managing--just--to raise her family, hold down three jobs, and attend night school. When her 12-year-old son, Sundiata, doesn't return from a camping trip, Zala finds herself plunged into the nightmarish possibility that he has become the latest victim in the series of murders rocking the "City Too Busy to Hate." As she and her estranged husband, Spence, frantically attempt to discover what has happened to their child, the book takes them through the complicated morass of politics, race relations, and class that bedevil Atlanta--and perhaps obstruct the search for the *true* killer.

Bambara worked on *Those Bones Are Not My Child* for 12 years before her death in 1995. Toni Morrison edited the manuscript for publication, and though the occasional rough edge shows through, the well-drawn characters and inherent human drama in this stranger-than-fiction tale overcome its minor weaknesses. This is the novel Toni Cade Bambara will be remembered for, and rightly so. --*Alix Wilber*

### From Publishers Weekly

At the time of her death in 1995, acclaimed author, activist and educator Bambara (*Gorilla, My Love*; *The Salt Eaters*) had spent 12 years working on what her friend and editor Toni Morrison calls a "magnum opus." Bambara lived in Atlanta during the two years in which more than 40 children, mostly black boys under 15, were abducted and gruesomely murdered. Her luminous novel draws on a wealth of investigative material, historical detail and family stories, and puts to good use her gifts for passionate storytelling and incisive cultural criticism. The Spencer family, whose oldest son is missing, serves as the fictional anchor. When 12-year-old Sonny fails to come home one night, his anguished mother, Marzala, finds that the police have a pervasive lack of interest in her missing child. Zala and her estranged husband, Vietnam vet Spence, join the Committee to Stop Children's Murders, an activist citizens' group organized by Atlanta parents who are disillusioned with the authorities' indifference to the killings. The cast of characters includes the Spencers' friends, extended family, police, federal investigators, Atlanta officials and the STOP volunteers who search the city seeking leads and patterns, exploring Klan connections and suspicions of a child porn ring. Bambara's thorough re-creation of the STOP committee's work in the book's long middle section comes at the expense of narrative pacing; the story bogs down while the endless theories, tips, hunches and strategies

take center stage. Two crucial developments—the arrest of Wayne Williams and a fateful turn for Sonny—are focus the tale on the Spencers. The difficult truths they face are devastating. Bambara gives us an indelible, intimate and moving portrait of an American family, while at the same time producing a landmark work that achieves a potent immediacy as she sagaciously explores the far-reaching issues—racial, personal, political—at stake in one of the 20th century's most horrifying murder cases. (Oct.)  
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From Library Journal

This is Bambara's final novel (after *The Salt Eaters* et al.), published four years after her death and based on the Atlanta child murders of the early 1980s. In haunting detail she describes the plight of one fictional family as they try to find their missing child without support from either the police or politicians. (LJ 9/1/99)  
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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Kevin Buckley:**

In this 21st millennium, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive currently, people have to do something to make all of them survive, being in the middle of the actual crowded place and notice by means of surrounding. One thing that sometimes many people have underestimated this for a while is reading. Yes, by reading a guide your ability to survive enhance then having chance to stand up than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading some sort of book, we give you this specific *Those Bones Are Not My Child: A Novel* book as beginner and daily reading book. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

#### **Dave Thomas:**

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#### **Betty Sanchez:**

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**Ann Morgan:**

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