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### Toni Morrison: Uplifting the Voices of a Generation

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#### Recommended Citation

Kawola, Connor, "Toni Morrison: Uplifting the Voices of a Generation" (2021). *2021 Graduate Presentations*. 28.

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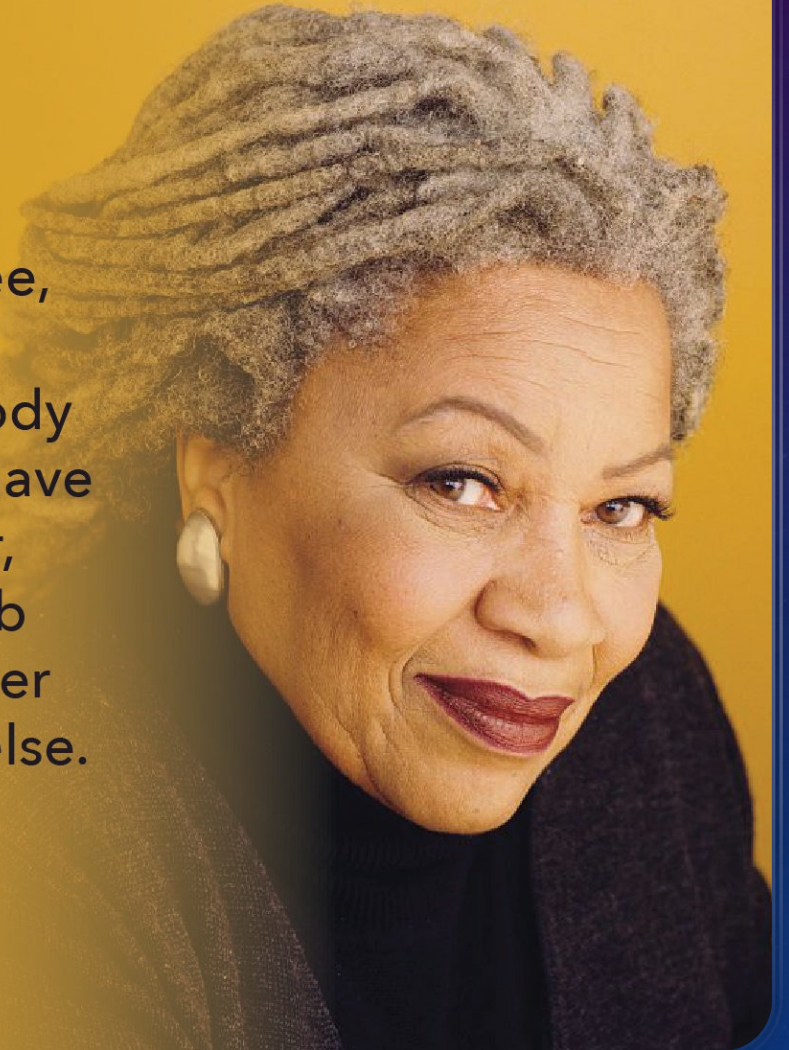
# TONI MORRISON

UPLIFTING THE VOICES OF A GENERATION

“

If you are free,  
you need to  
free somebody  
else. If you have  
some power,  
then your job  
is to empower  
somebody else.

NAACP



# ABSTRACT

- Toni Morrison was a Nobel Prize (1993) and Pulitzer Prize (1987) winning writer who used her profound and poetic storytelling abilities to paint a vivid and truthful picture of Black life in America. Morrison's legacy will be remembered as an author through her novels, like *Sula* (1973) and *Beloved* (1987), essays, children's stories, and poetry; but the impact Morrison made on the publishing world cannot go unnoticed. In 1967, Morrison became the head editor of Random House's fiction department. She was the first African American woman to hold this position since Random House's founding in 1927. From 1967-1983, while at Random House, Morrison was able to use her position to raise more Black voices by pushing for the increased publication of Black writers. During her time at Random House, Morrison helped to edit and publish writings from Black Panthers, Civil Rights leaders, and other influential Black writers at the time. Morrison fought to bring Black writing into the mainstream and uplifted the ideas and voices of a generation facing torment and oppression in America; some of the revolutionary writing Morrison edited was the co-founder of the Black Panther Party Huey P. Newton's *To Die for the People* (1972), radical activist Angela Y. Davis' *Women, Race and Class* (1981), incarcerated activist and revolutionary George L. Jackson's *Blood in My Eye* (1972), and outspoken three-time Heavyweight Boxing Champion Muhammed Ali's autobiography *The Greatest: My Own Story* (1975). In a time of civil unrest and social uncertainty, Morrison took the opportunity to give Black Americans the voice they needed in a country attempting to silence so many. Toni Morrison will be remembered for her incredible writing contributions to American literature, but the impact she made by creating more opportunities for other Black writers in the publishing world will remain her true legacy.



## EARLY LIFE

- Born Chloe Wofford in 1931 in Loraine, Ohio, Toni Morrison was the second of four children in a black working-class family.
- In 1949, Morrison decided to attend Howard University, a historically black college (HBCU) in Washington, D.C., and pursued her Bachelor's Degree in English.
- At Howard University Morrison experienced racial segregation in a new way. While touring the south with her theater group, she witnessed how racial hierarchy divided people of color based on their skin tone (Alexander).

- Morrison then attended Cornell University to earn her Master's Degree in English.
- When she graduated in 1955, Morrison began teaching English at Texas Southern University and eventually returned to Howard University as a professor.
- After teaching at Howard University for seven years, Morrison moved to Syracuse, New York to become an editor for the textbook division of Random House publishing.
- Within two years, she transferred to the New York City branch of the company and began to edit fiction and books by African-American authors (Alexander).





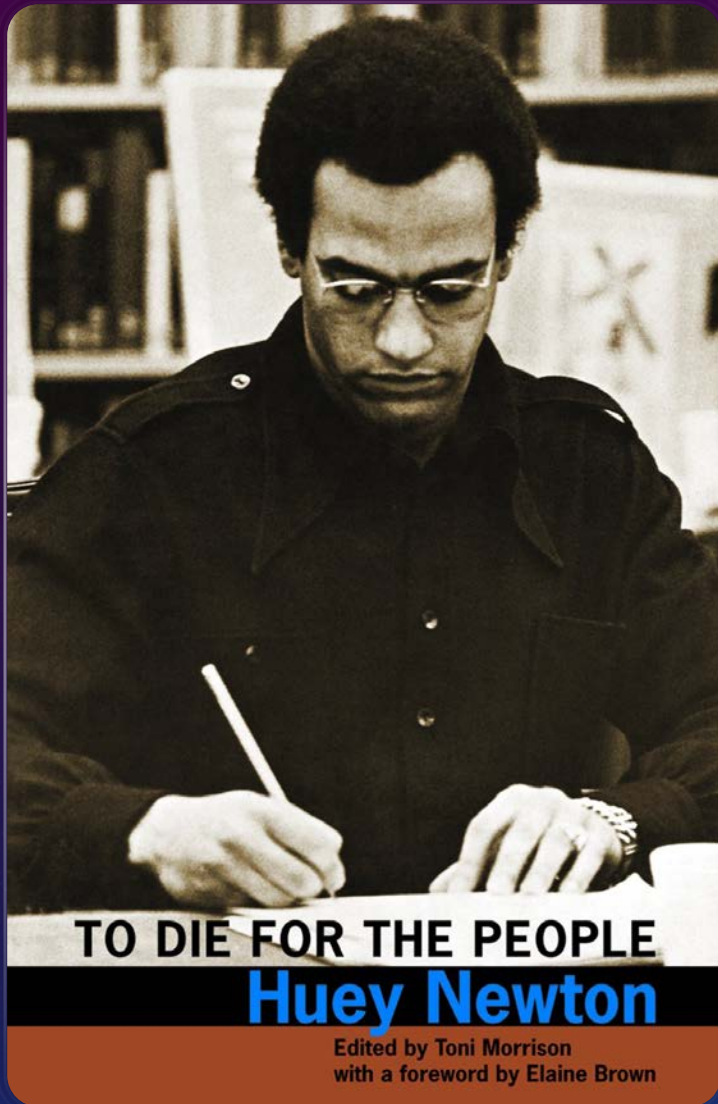
## THE WRITER

- Morrison wrote and published 11 novels - including *Sula* (1973) and *Beloved* (1987) - as well as children's stories and collections of essays.
- In 1988, Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel *Beloved*.
- In 1993, she was the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.
- President Barack Obama presented Morrison with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012 (Fox).

# HUEY P. NEWTON

- African American revolutionary, leader and co-founder of the Black Panther Party (BPP).
- Chief theoretician of the BPP and created the Ten-Point Program with Bobby Seale. The Ten-Point Program became the party platform.
- In 1967, Newton is charged with the murder of an Oakland police officer. After a conviction of manslaughter, the conviction was reversed in 1970 and led to two subsequent trials ending in stalemates. The charges were eventually dismissed, and Huey freed.
- On August 22, 1989 Newton was murdered. His last words were, *"You can kill my body, and you can take my life, but you can never kill my soul. My soul will live forever!"* (NARA).





# TO DIE FOR THE PEOPLE

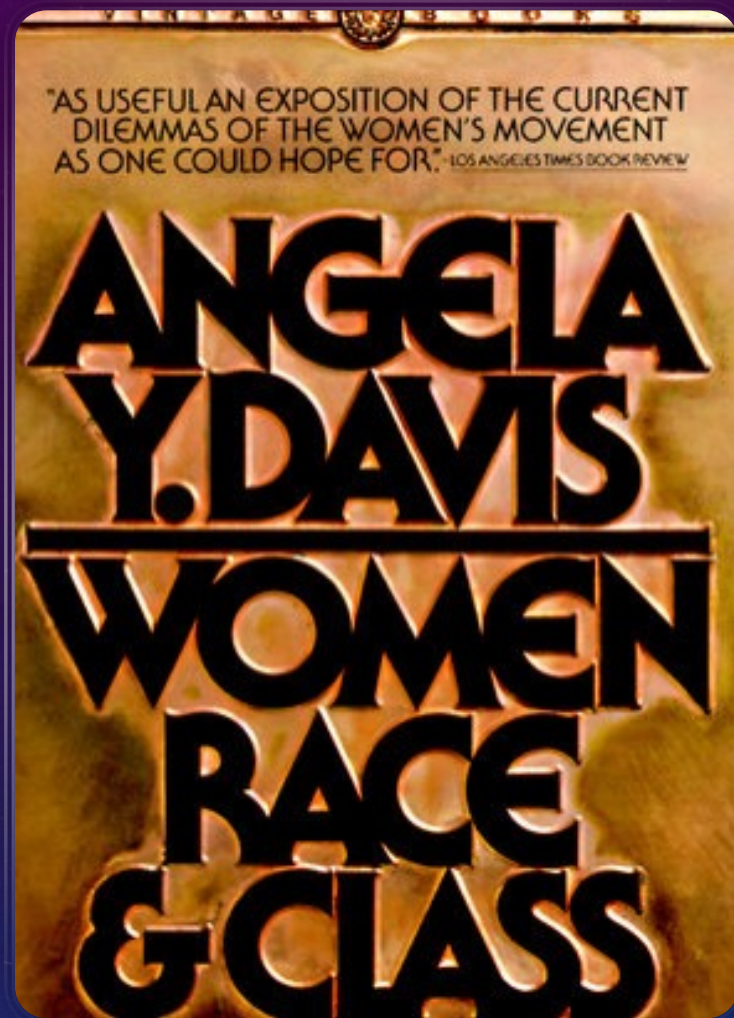
- "To die for the racists is lighter than a feather, but to die for the people is heavier than any mountain and deeper than any sea."
- Stressed the importance of meeting material needs of the community first and recognized the survival programs as some of the most important work done by the Party.
- Maintained an international perspective of solidarity with the oppressed peoples worldwide.
- Called out the enemy of the oppressed: the US empire and all who uphold imperialism and colonization.



# ANGELA DAVIS

- Radical African American activist and educator for civil rights and other social issues including feminism and prison reform.
- In 1969, Davis was working as an assistant professor at UCLA, but was fired later that year for her affiliation with the Communist Party. Davis took them to court and won her appeal; resigning at the end of her contract in 1970.
- Davis was placed on the FBI's Most Wanted list because of her support for the Soledad Brothers and her connection to the guns used by Johnathan Jackson's armed kidnapping of California Judge Harold Haley. She was acquitted of all charges in 1972 (Davis).
- Today, Davis remains involved in the pursuit for equality and revolution by giving speeches on college campuses and, most recently, contributing her voice and thoughts for the Black Lives Matter/Anti-Police rallies during the summer of 2020.



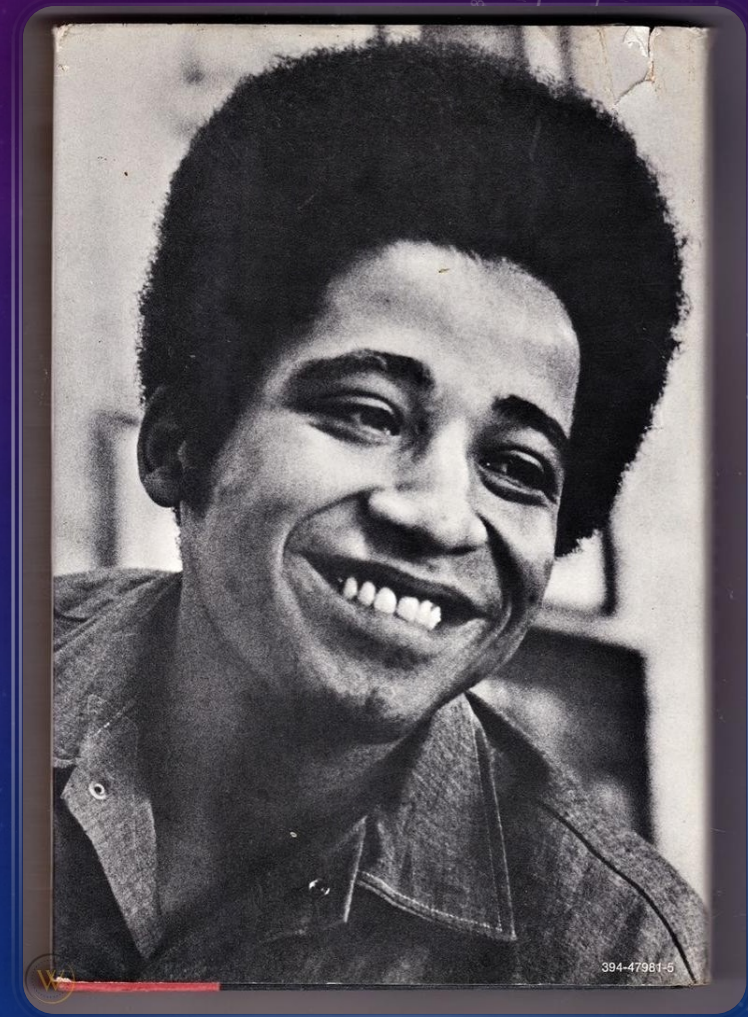


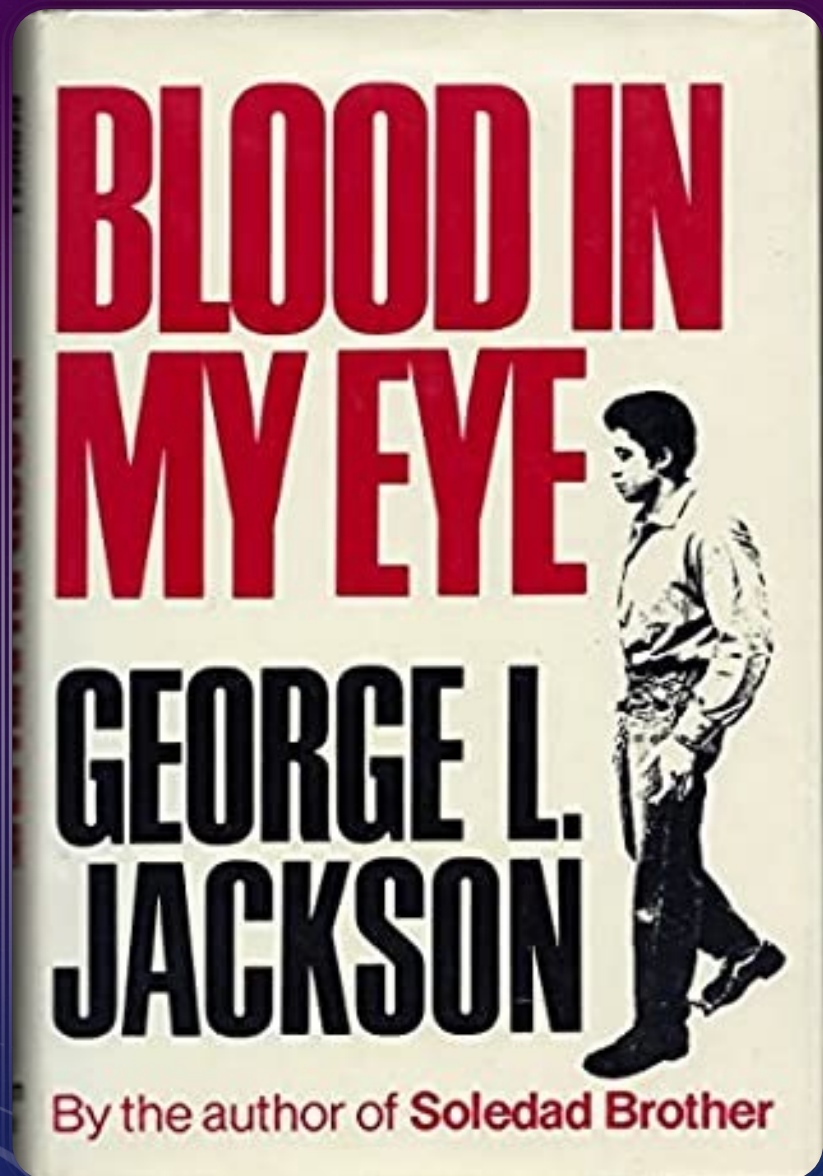
## WOMEN, RACE, AND CLASS

- "A powerful study of the women's liberation movement in the U.S., from abolitionist days to the present, that demonstrates how it has always been hampered by the racist and classist biases of its leaders," (Penguin).
- "If most abolitionists viewed slavery as a nasty blemish which needed to be eliminated, most women's righters viewed male supremacy in a similar manner – as an immoral flaw in their otherwise acceptable society," (Davis).
- "The last decade of the nineteenth century was a critical moment in the development of modern racism – its major institutional supports as well as its attendant ideological justifications. This was also the period of imperialist expansion into the Philippines, Hawaii, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The same forces that sought to subjugate the peoples of these countries were responsible for the worsening plight of Black people and the entire U.S. working class. Racism nourished those imperialist ventures and was likewise conditioned by imperialism's strategies and apologetics," (Davis).

# GEORGE JACKSON

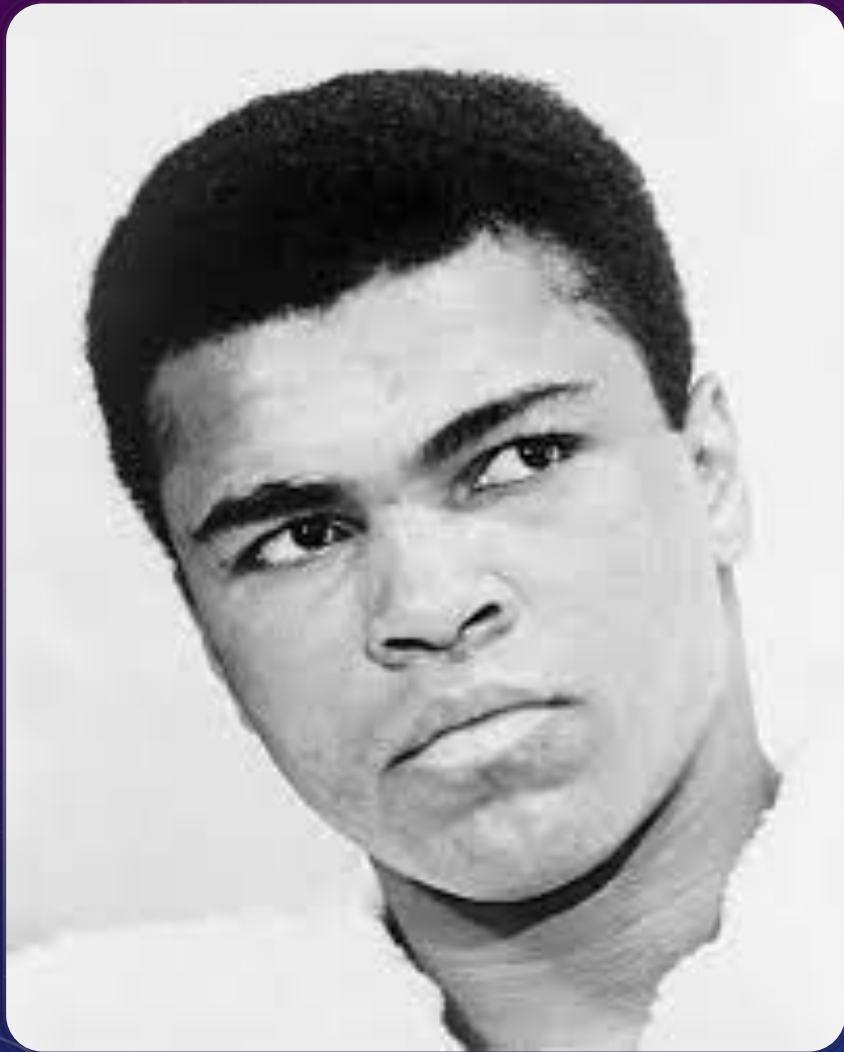
- An African American author, activist, and convicted criminal imprisoned for armed robbery.
- While imprisoned, Jackson became involved in revolutionary activity and co-founded the Marxist-Leninist Black Guerilla Family, an African American black power prison gang inspired by the philosophies of Marcus Garvey with goals of promoting black power, maintaining their humanity in prison, and overthrowing the US government.
- "I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me," (Soledad Brother).
- One of the Soledad Brothers, Jackson was charged with murdering a prison guard in the aftermath of a prison fight in which guards murdered three black inmates.
- In 1971, Jackson smuggled a gun into the prison and turning it on a guard said, "Gentlemen, the dragon has come," a reference to Ho Chi Minh.
- Three officers and two white inmates were killed, three other officers wounded, before Jackson made it into the prison yard and was shot dead from a tower.





## BLOOD IN MY EYE

- "It [Blood in My Eye] was completed barely a week before the author's murder in San Quentin on August 21, 1971. It was sent out of the Adjustment Center with specific instructions for its publication, almost as if the author knew that he would never live to see its appearance in print," (Jackson).
- "Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are already dying who could be saved, that generations more will live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done, discover your humanity and your love in revolution," (Jackson).
- Jackson knew what it meant to be a radical revolutionary and understood the depths of racism, white supremacy, imperialism, and colonialism in the USA.

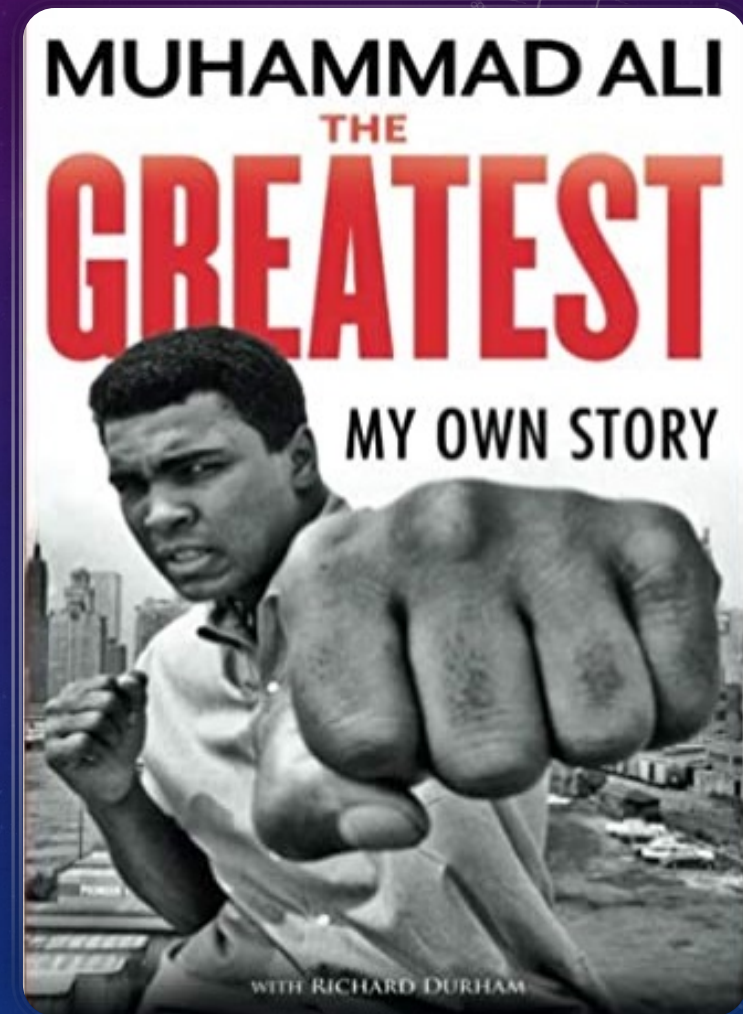


# MUHAMMED ALI

- Most notably a professional boxer, gold medalist, and 3x Heavyweight Boxing Champion of the World, but also activist and philanthropist.
- In 1966, Ali consciously refused to be inducted into the armed force out of protest of the Vietnam War.
- “My conscience won’t let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America,” he had explained two years earlier. “And shoot them for what? They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn’t put no dogs on me, they didn’t rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father. ... Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail,” (Brown).
- Ali was stripped of his boxing license in every state in the US, as well as his boxing titles. "On June 20, 1967, Ali was convicted by a Houston jury of a felony charge of violating the Universal Military Training and Service Act. According to a [New York Times report](#), federal District Judge Joe E. Ingraham sentenced Clay to five years in prison and fined him \$10,000," (Brown).
- In 1971, in what some considered a surprise decision, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously overturned Ali’s conviction (Brown).

# THE GREATEST: MY OWN STORY

- Ali's autobiography gave him a chance to show the world the side of himself that was often hidden or gone unnoticed; his generosity, his intellect, his understanding of the world around him.
- "Then there was this nightmarish image I always had of two slaves in the ring, like in the old slave days on the plantations, with two of us big black slaves fighting, almost on the verge of annihilating each other while the masters are smoking big cigars, screaming, and urging us on, looking for blood," (Ali).
- Morrison's work as an editor and publisher has provided us with countless works from voices often shut out from mainstream society (Newton, Davis, and Jackson), as well as different perspectives and understandings of icons like Ali.



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