

Thursday, February 18, 2021 | A supplement to The Morning Journal

Toni Morrison

A celebration

Associated Press photo

An inspiration to Lorain

Reflecting on writer's legacy on first Toni Morrison Day in Ohio

The first statewide Toni Morrison Day in Ohio dawns Feb. 18 as a reminder of one woman who rose from Lorain to international prominence as a winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Morrison was the first African American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature and only the eighth woman to win that prize since it was first awarded in 1901.

"The significance of Toni Morrison's life is a continual source of inspiration for people across the country, state, and

especially in our home county of Lorain," said state Rep. Joe Miller, D-Amherst, a joint sponsor of legislation designating Morrison's birthday as a day to honor her in December. "This legislation is an expression of appreciation for her life and legacy, and will serve as an annual reminder of her impact. Her work will continue to inspire many for future generations to come."

Born Chloe Ardelia Wofford on Feb. 18, 1931, in Lorain, she loved reading as a child.

Her best-selling nov-

els include "Beloved," "The Bluest Eye" and "Song of Solomon."

In co-sponsoring the legislation Rep. Stephanie Howse, D-Cleveland, said Morrison's works are required reading for students across the country to develop them into well-rounded global citizens.

Morrison's awards include the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for "Beloved."

"More important than her awards, is her continued impact on the African American community and the global community at

large," Howse said in December. "Her works stirred our souls, challenged our consciences to confront injustices and encourage the rest of the world to do the same."

A year ago local organizations recalled Morrison's influence and legacy.

"When Ms. Morrison passed, the world shifted," said Brittany Lovett, marketing and communications officer at the Community Foundation. "We felt it was our duty to come together and find a way to honor our hometown hero."

Oberlin College held a series of readings in honor of Toni Morrison.

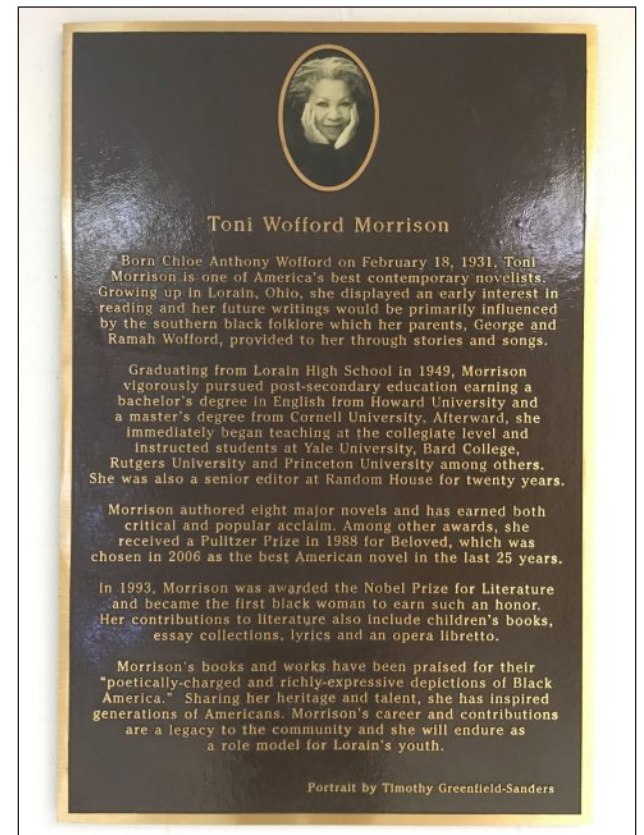
"Toni was an important artist and visionary from right down the road," said Johnny Coleman, sculptor/installation artist and associate professor of studio art and Africana studies at Oberlin College.

"Her vision was to create a space to think about the dehumanization of people," he said. "It's important for us to gather and acknowledge what she did."

The significance of Morrison's early life in Lorain and her expressions of heritage have meant more and more to the community, Miller said.

A school is named for her, a reading room and exhibits in the library were dedicated to her, and a celebration of her life was observed at a local community college.

"But the significance of



MORNING JOURNAL FILE

Lorain City Schools named Toni Morrison Elementary for Lorain native and American literary giant Toni Morrison, who died Aug. 5, 2019.

Toni Morrison's life is so much more than a local story," Miller said.

She ascended to the world stage.

Having someone from the neighborhood rise to worldwide renown as the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature is a source of pride for the International City, he said.

Because of Morrison's

trailblazing work, other artists may emerge.

"She set the stage for an entire generation of authors to tell their untold stories and celebrate the beautiful diversity of humankind," Howse said.

On Nov. 6, 2019, Lorain County Community College hosted a celebration of Morrison's life.

LEGACY » PAGE 6

Celebrating

Our Home Town Hero

Toni Morrison

Rey Carrion
Lorain 6th Ward Councilman

Section content compiled from previously published articles in The Morning Journal and elsewhere as noted.

Growing up in Lorain

Morrison's roots are in working class neighborhood of International City

The same working class neighborhoods in Lorain that produced crime out of poverty created Toni Morrison, a dreamer, word artist and internationally acclaimed writer.

"I developed a kind of individualism—apart from the family—that was very much involved in my own daydreaming, my own creativity, and my own reading. But primarily—and this has been true all my life—not really minding what other people said, just not minding," Morrison said in an article by Hilton Als published in 2003 in *The New Yorker*.

Her father, George Wofford, was born Aug. 27, 1908, in Cartersville, Ga., according to genealogy records. At the age of 15 after witnessing lynchings of two black businessmen in the racially volatile area, he fled north to Lorain. He worked as a welder and did odd jobs, she said.

On Sept. 12, 1906, her mother, Ella Ramah Wofford, was born in Greenville, Ala., according to genealogy records. Her family moved north to Lorain when she was a young girl.

The country was going through the Great Depression when Chloe Ardelia Wofford was born Feb. 18, 1931, in her grandparents' home on Elyria Avenue in Lorain. She was the second of four children.

The city was integrated racially, but divided through money classes, she recalled years later at a Princeton and Slavery Symposium, and in her neighborhood there was an equality.

"Everybody was dirt poor, that was what we had in common," she said.

"We gardened because we ate it, not because it was a cute little thing to do."

Chloe was about 2 years old when the type of abuse her father

fled reared its ugliness toward his family in Lorain. Unable to pay rent of \$4 a month, the landlord allegedly set fire to the home with the family inside.

Morrison described her family's response to the incident in an Oct. 8, 1993, article by *The Washington Post*.

"It was this hysterical, out-of-the-ordinary, bizarre form of evil," she says.

"If you internalized it you'd be truly and thoroughly depressed because that's how much your life meant. For \$4 a month somebody would just burn you to a crisp.

"So what you did instead was laugh at him, at the absurdity, at the monumental crudeness of it. That way you gave back yourself to yourself. You know what I mean? You distanced yourself from the implications of the act.



COURTESY - LORAIN PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

Toni Morrison, born Chloe Ardelia Wofford, as a preschooler.

In her own words

“What was driving me to write was the silence—so many stories untold and unexamined. There was a wide vacuum in the literature I was inspired by the silence and absences in the literature.”

“White people have a very, very serious problem and THEY should start thinking about what THEY can do about it. Take me out of it.”

~Toni Morrison

We are starting with books
Ben Franklin & MindFair Books, downtown Oberlin
440-774-5711 benfranklin@oberlin.net
<https://linktr.ee/benfranklinob>

In her own words

“**I developed a kind of individualism—apart from the family—that was very much involved in my own day-dreaming, my own creativity, and my own reading. But primarily—and this has been true all my life—not really minding what other people said, just not minding.**”

Roots

FROM PAGE 3

“That’s what laughter does. You take it back. You take your life back. You take your integrity back.”

Though the Woffords moved often, Chloe grew up in integrated neighborhoods and schools.

In a 2016 podcast posted by New York Public Library, Morrison and author Angela Davis spoke about experiences of racism, among other topics.

Lorain as a steel mill town offered employment opportunities for African Americans, Mexicans, Europeans, many groups, Morrison said.

“We all came there,” Morrison said. “The only thing we had in common was poverty. Then again, we were citizens, in some cases. And, you know,

the Polish lady next door would bring us those little cabbage things with meat in them, you know, if we didn’t have any. And if we had something, we would bring it to her. And everybody had gardens. I’m not trying to make it sound like it was thrilling. Although, we were too young to know we were miserable.

“So at any rate, my experiences about race are very different from many other Black people,” she said. “One, because I grew up in a mixed neighborhood. It didn’t mean people didn’t call me names, but they were calling each other names. So what?”

Morrison told of a job she held as a teen, and the lessons that carried into adulthood.

“I had a big racial moment when I was working for some white family just before I got my job as a page,” Morrison said. “I

was working after school just doing housework at \$2 a week, \$1 of which went to my mother and the other I could keep. But (the woman) had, for me, some complicated equipment, like vacuum cleaners...never saw one. And a stove that had the oven thing and I didn’t know how to work it. And so she would curse me out every now and then.

“I told my mother, ‘Ma, I got to quit. She’s too mean.’ My mother said, ‘Quit.’ Oh, but that \$1, right? So I told my father. I said, ‘Daddy, she’s so mean.’ and he said, ‘Go to work, get your money and come on home,’” Morrison said. “‘You don’t live there.’

“So I didn’t have an employment problem since,” she said. “My life was not there.”

Her writing grew out of a voracious habit of reading as a child, and listening to Afri-



COURTESY - LORAIN PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

Toni Morrison works as associate editor for her high school’s newspaper in Lorain

can-American folktales spun by her parents and Grandmother Ardelia Willis, according to Time.

At the age of 12, Chloe converted to Catholicism and took the name of St. Anthony of Padua. That new middle name pro-

vided Toni as a nickname in college, and eventually her pen name, she said.

As a teen, Chloe joined the yearbook staff, debate team and drama club at Lorain High School where she graduated with honors in 1949.

LCCC honors the legacy of Toni Morrison

LCCC is committed to equity and the fabric of diversity represented in our campus community. LCCC is a safe environment for individuals of all backgrounds to pursue a better life. While we know that we have achieved much, we also know that we have so much more work to do as a college and a community and pledge to continue that work.

“If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.”

- Toni Morrison



*Lorain County
Community College*

lorainccc.edu/equity



Toni Morrison Day

February 18

"The eighteenth day of February is designated 'Toni Morrison Day,' in honor of the American novelist, essayist, and teacher, who was born on that day in 1931." – from Sec. 5.293 of the Ohio Revised Code, signed into effect by Governor Mike Dewine on December 21, 2020.

"In my work, no matter where it's set...the process, the imaginative process, always starts right here on the lip of Lake Erie." Toni Morrison

"...a warm and welcoming atmosphere for people who would relish the comfort of such a place. Certainly some of my most memorable and happiest moments were spent in the Lorain Public Library." - Toni Morrison, on the Toni Morrison Reading Room at the Lorain Public Library System's Main Branch



In her own words

“
...being
a Black
woman
writer is not
a shallow
place but a
rich place to
write from.
It doesn't
limit my
imagin-
ation; it
expands it.
It's richer
than being
a white
male writer
because I
know more
and I've
experienced
more.”



The Toni Morrison Reading Room features an exhibit dedicated to Morrison and her life at Lorain Library at 351 W. Sixth St. in Lorain.

MORNING JOURNAL FILE

Legacy

FROM PAGE 2

Guest speaker Marilyn Sanders Mobley, PhD, presented “The Legacy of Toni Morrison: Re-imaginings of Home.” Mobley is a professor of African American studies and English at Case Western Reserve University and a founding member and former president of the Toni Morrison Society.

“Toni Morrison for all these years has been our elder, helping us know how to love ourselves,” Mobley said.

“This is about gender or however you've been ‘othered.’ ‘Bluest Eye’ is about poor people as if they don't deserve to be loved by everybody else.”

Morrison's novel, “Be-loved” was inspired by the story of Margaret Garner, an African American

LEGACY » PAGE 7

CONNECT, LEARN, & SUPPORT
LORAIN COUNTY STUDENTS DURING:

A WEEK AT
THE BEE



REGISTER TO PLAY AT
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United Way of
Greater Lorain County



LORAIN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

In Celebration of
Toni Morrison Day
February 18

Toni Morrison: HER story made HIStory

Learn more about “America's Greatest Storyteller”
with a *free virtual lesson* about her life and accomplishments.

<https://www.lorainhistory.org/childrens-room/>

The lesson follows the State of Ohio's education
standards and is suitable for grades 1- 5.

For more information about this and upcoming children's lessons:
Jenn McManamon, Children's Education & Curriculum Coordinator
jmcmanamon@lorainhistory.org • 440-245-2563

NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON

"The Bluest Eye"
 "Sula"
 "Song of Solomon"
 "Tar Baby"
 "Beloved"
 "Jazz"
 "Paradise"
 "Love"
 "A Mercy"
 "Home"
 "God Help the Child"



MORNING JOURNAL FILE

Legacy

FROM PAGE 6

woman who escaped slavery. Morrison went on to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama in 2012.

Morrison's life inspired the "Toni Morrison: The Pieces I am" which was released June 21, 2019, shortly before

her death on Aug. 5, 2019, at the age of 88.

Jason Jordan, 43, and lifelong resident of Lorain, was studying Morrison's work in 2019, he said.

"It gives hope for others who live here who go through the same struggles, the same life challenges," Jordan said, "it gives them hope and inspiration to achieve the kind of heights that she did."



MORNING JOURNAL FILE

Lorain Palace Theater honored Toni Morrison after her death with a message on its marquee.

In her own words

“ I’m a believer in the power of knowledge and the ferocity of beauty, so from my point of view your life is already artful — waiting, just waiting, for you to make it art.”

11TH ANNUAL JOURNAL JOG IS ON!

Supporting Mary Lee Tucker Clothe-A-Child



The annual Mary Lee Tucker Clothe-a-Child program provides several hundred needy school-aged children in Lorain County with warm, new winter clothing.

The clothes are paid for thanks to donations of money from readers, organizations and events like the Journal Jog. Volunteer shoppers donate their time to take the children shopping at designated area stores for coats, boots, gloves, hats, shirts, pants and other apparel.

Stay tuned for more information on signing up to run or walk the 11th annual Journal Jog while supporting a great cause.

5K RACE



3K WALK

JOURNAL JOG

Join Us

AUGUST 8, 2021

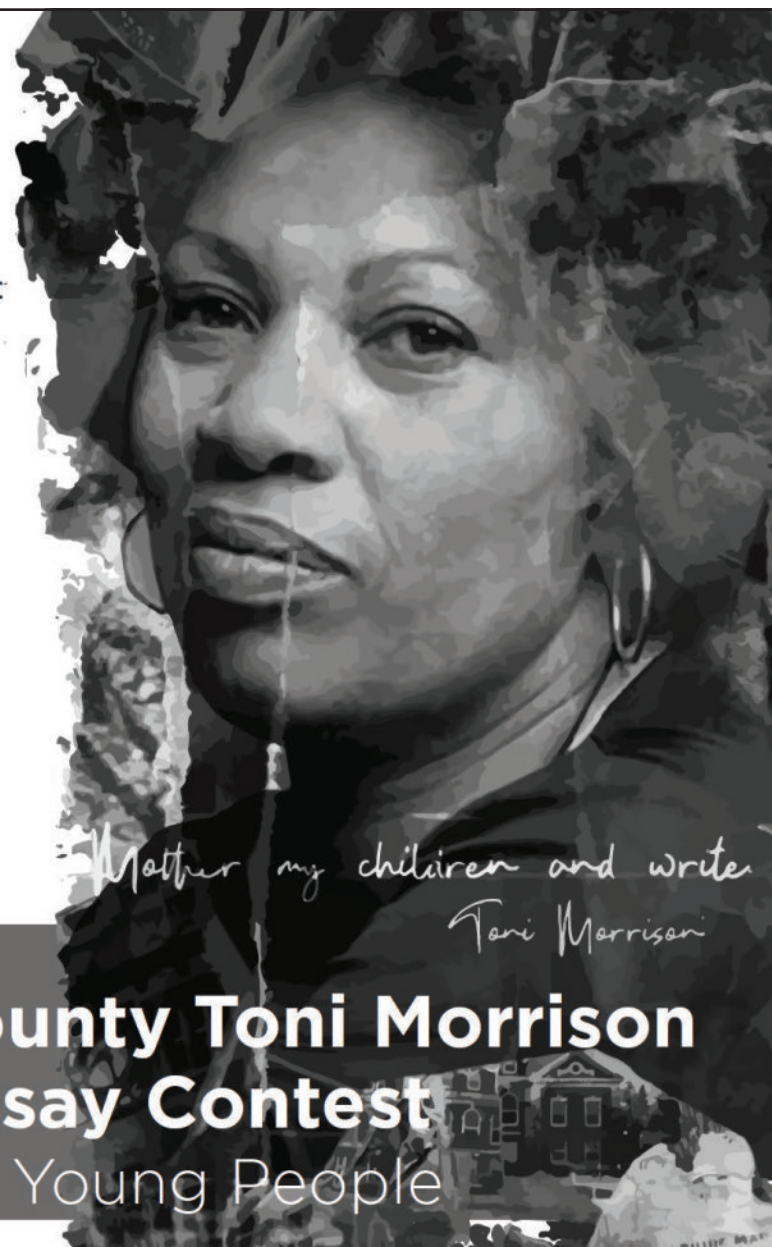
BLACK RIVER LANDING
LORAIN

Theme

The **Site** of
Memory

2021 Lorain County Toni Morrison Essay Contest for Young People

In honor of Toni Morrison Day



2021

Lorain County Toni Morrison Essay Contest for Young People

Congratulations to the **2021 Toni Morrison Scholars.**

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Abigail Clayton | Elyria High School | • Ezra Jones | St. Paul Lutheran Westlake |
| • Alena Aguayo | Ashland University | • Jay Kuznar | General Johnnie Wilson Middle School |
| • Alissa Van Dress | Amherst Steele High School | • Jeremy Faris | St. Mary's School |
| • Anna Bak | Nord Middle School | • Kieshawn Elliott | Lorain High School |
| • Arianna Alysse Buga | Toni Morrison Elementary | • Tevonte Ammons | General Johnnie Wilson Middle School |
| • Caitlin McComas | Clearview | • Zuzanna Citak | Toni Morrison Elementary |

To read this year's essays, or to learn more about the Community Foundation, please visit peoplewhocare.org or call **440.984.7390**