



POSTAL NEWS

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Postal Service Celebrates Author Toni Morrison on New Forever Stamp

Princeton, NJ — The U.S. Postal Service today celebrated the life and legacy of author Toni Morrison (1931-2019), whose artfully crafted novels explored the diverse voices of African Americans, in a first-day-of-issue ceremony at Princeton University.

“One of the goals of our stamp program is to raise awareness and celebrate the people who represent the very best of our nation,” said Pritha Mehra, USPS chief information officer and executive vice president, who served as the dedicating official. “It’s a privilege to represent the 650,000 men and women of the Postal Service, as we honor Toni Morrison with one more tribute — our new stamp that will be seen by millions and forever remind us of the power of her words and the ideas she brought to the world.”

Joining Mehra for the ceremony were Chris Eisgruber, president of Princeton University; Carla Hayden, 14th Librarian of Congress; Gene Jarrett, faculty dean at Princeton; Ruha Benjamin, professor of African American Studies at Princeton; and photographer Deborah Feingold, whose portrait of Morrison appears on the stamp.

Michael Cadden, university lecturer at Princeton’s Lewis Center for the Arts, was master of ceremonies.

“It was a privilege to photograph Ms. Morrison, an amazing author who contributed so much to the world through her works,” said Feingold. “However, it is an absolute honor to know that the same photograph capturing a moment in time is now the subject of a Forever stamp. I am delighted that my photograph was used as a source to design the stamp and to participate in today’s unveiling and celebration.”

A letter of tribute from former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama was read and a video tribute from Oprah Winfrey was played during the ceremony.

The stamp features Feingold’s photograph of Toni Morrison against a bright yellow background. Ethel Kessler, a USPS art director, designed the stamp.

Background on Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Ardelia Wofford on Feb. 18, 1931, in Lorain, OH, where she would later recall growing up in a family filled with storytelling and song. After graduating from high school in 1949, she enrolled at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and began using the name Toni, a reference to Anthony, the saint whose name she took when she was confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church at age 12. After graduating from Howard, she earned a master's degree in English at Cornell University and later taught English at Texas Southern University and at Howard.

In 1965, she began working as a textbook editor in upstate New York. In 1968, she was promoted and moved to New York City to become the first African American woman senior editor at Random House, where she prioritized the publication of books by African American authors.

Eager to see the previously untold stories of African Americans portrayed in fiction, Morrison published her first novel in 1970 while working full-time as an editor and raising two children. "The Bluest Eye" is an important inquiry into the life of an 11-year-old African American girl grappling with internalized negative racial stereotypes. "The Bluest Eye" is a mainstay of high school and college literature classes and a canonical novel about society's neglect and mistreatment of African American girls.

Published in 1973, Morrison's second novel, "Sula," dramatizes the relationship between two intelligent women who grow up poor in small-town Ohio. The novel explores themes of escape and living outside the confines of conventional society. "Sula" was nominated for a National Book Award.

Her next novel, "Song of Solomon," was a national bestseller and recipient of tremendous critical acclaim. Considered one of her masterpieces, "Song of Solomon" invokes generations of folklore as it follows a young man's search for identity. The novel won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was the first African American selection in the Book of the Month Club since Richard Wright's "Native Son" in 1940.

The decade that followed brought the author widespread recognition, beginning with President Jimmy Carter appointing her to the National Council on the Arts in 1980. After the publication of her 1981 novel "Tar Baby," a study of racism and conflicting social identities on a Caribbean island, Morrison was the subject of a cover story in Newsweek. In 1983, she left her full-time job as an editor to continue teaching.

The publication of "Beloved" in 1987 brought Morrison a new level of critical success. The novel tells the story of a woman who escapes enslavement but murders her infant daughter to prevent her from the same fate she did. A harrowing rumination on trauma and the lingering, even haunting nature of the past, "Beloved" won the Pulitzer Prize and secured Morrison's reputation as a great American writer.

In 1988, Morrison became the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Humanities at Princeton University. There she taught American literature and creative writing classes and co-founded the Princeton Atelier, a seminar program to foster collaboration across multiple disciplines. The Atelier attracted high-profile contributors from around the world in the fields of creative writing, dance, music, theater and visual arts.

Her next novel, "Jazz," explored the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, but with a focus on the lives of everyday people rather than the famous writers, artists, and musicians of the time.

In 1993, Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming the first African American woman to receive the rare distinction. Her Nobel lecture is remembered for its celebration of the power of language. Three years later, she received the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. Her poignant acceptance speech, "The Dancing Mind," addressed the relationship between writers and readers and the need for both to defend authors' freedom of expression.

The 1996 inclusion of "Song of Solomon" in Oprah's Book Club brought even broader public awareness of her work. Three other novels were later included in the club, further increasing sales and attention.

Morrison continued to experiment with language and push the possibilities of storytelling. Her 1998 novel “Paradise” tells the story of the rise and fall of an African American town. “Love,” published in 2003, tells the story of a beachfront resort for African Americans that declines after integration. The 2008 novel “A Mercy” explores how racial categories were formed in pre-colonial America, while the 2012 novel “Home” dramatizes the return of an African American Korean War veteran to the Georgia of his youth. Her final novel, 2015’s “God Help the Child,” explores the way childhood suffering challenges adult relationships.

Morrison received the National Humanities Medal in 2000 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama in 2012. In 2016 she held the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetry at Harvard University. In 2018, she was awarded the Thomas Jefferson Medal for Distinguished Achievement in the Arts, Social Sciences, or Humanities from the American Philosophical Society.

Although known primarily as a novelist, Morrison wrote in a wide range of genres. She published three collections of lectures and speeches about literature and race — “Playing in the Dark,” “The Origin of Others,” and “The Source of Self-Regard” — and edited books about political and social issues.” She also wrote the lyrics for the opera “Margaret Garner” in collaboration with composer Richard Danielpour. She wrote plays as well, most notably collaborating with stage director Peter Sellars and Malian musician, Rokia Traoré, on “Desdemona,” a fresh take on “Othello” staged in Europe and the United States from 2011 to 2015.

Toni Morrison died in New York City on Aug. 5, 2019, at the age of 88.

In November 2019, a memorial service at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York featured tributes by writers, thinkers, activists, and public figures. In 2019, Lorain County designated her birthday Toni Morrison Day, and the U.S. Senate passed a resolution honoring her. In 2020, the Ohio legislature made Toni Morrison Day a statewide commemoration.

The Toni Morrison Society, founded in 1993, continues to promote the teaching, reading, and study of her work. The society also sponsors the Bench by the Road Project, an initiative to place metal benches at important African American history sites, a direct response to a 1989 interview in which Morrison reflected on the absence of even the most basic memorials to slavery. Morrison’s ultimate memorials, however, are her novels, which are, in the words of the U.S. Senate, “dedicated to dramatizing the complex humanity and art of Black people.”

The Toni Morrison Forever stamp is sold in panes of 20. News of the stamps is being shared with the hashtag **#ToniMorrisonStamp**.

Postal Products

Customers may purchase stamps and other philatelic products through the [Postal Store](https://usps.com/shopstamps) at usps.com/shopstamps, by calling 844-737-7826, or at Post Office locations nationwide.

Forever stamps will always be equal in value to the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce price.

A video of the ceremony will be available on facebook.com/usps. Information for ordering first-day-of-issue postmarks and covers is at usps.com/shop.

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The United States Postal Service is an independent federal establishment, mandated to be self-financing and to serve every American community through the affordable, reliable and secure delivery of mail and packages to more than 163 million addresses six and often seven days a week. Overseen by a bipartisan Board of Governors, the Postal Service is implementing a 10-year transformation plan, [Delivering for America](https://usps.com/deliveringforamerica), to modernize the postal network, restore long-term financial sustainability, dramatically improve service across all mail and shipping categories, and maintain the organization as one of America’s most valued and trusted brands.

The Postal Service generally receives no tax dollars for operating expenses and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to fund its operations.

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