

**BETTER,  
NOT  
BITTER**

**LIVING ON  
PURPOSE IN  
THE PURSUIT  
OF RACIAL  
JUSTICE**

**YUSEF  
SALAAM**

**OF THE EXONERATED FIVE**

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**BOOK CLUB KIT**

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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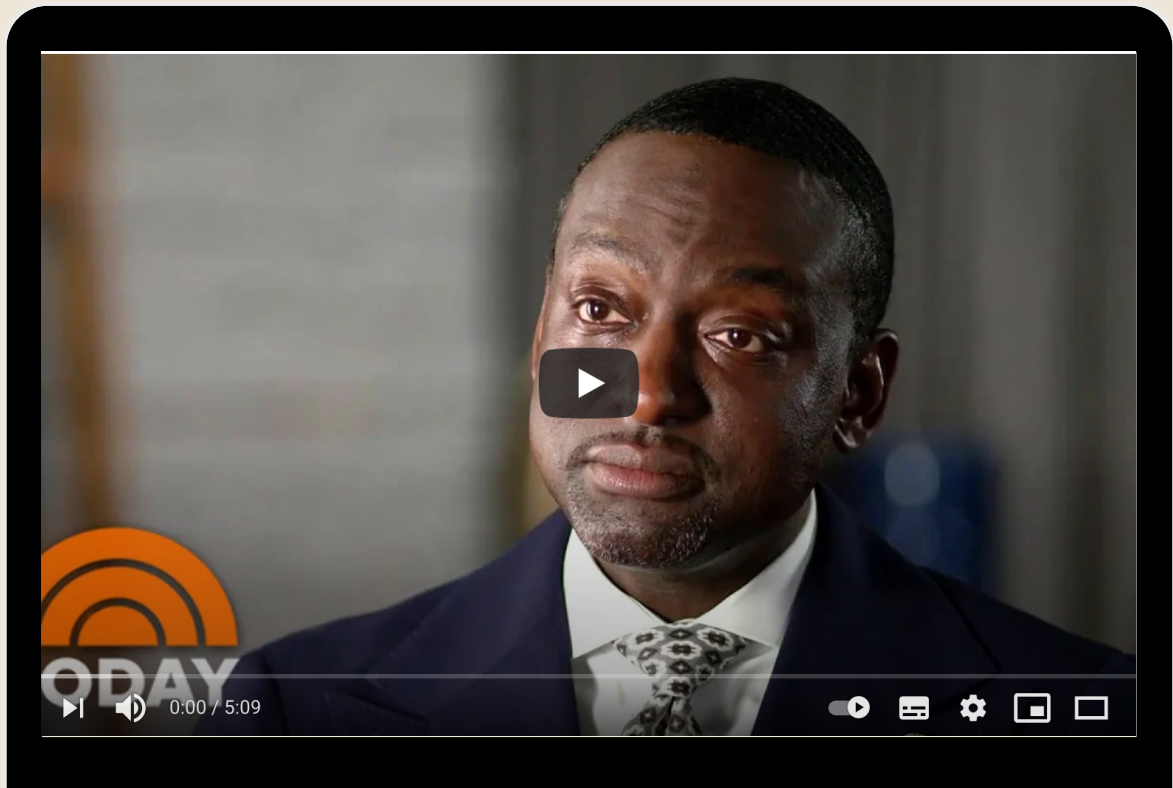
- 1.** In the introduction, Yusef Salaam writes, “I believe that everything that’s happening to you is actually happening for you.” What does he mean by this, and what are some examples of the ways it applies to Yusef’s story? Can you think of instances in your own life where you’ve held this perspective?
- 2.** What are your thoughts on your sense of purpose after reading *Better, Not Bitter*?
- 3.** In chapter two, Yusef states that at the very heart of the systems and structures that uphold white supremacy is the mission to affirm the false notion of Black people’s inferiority. By holding on to the truth of who he was and other people’s definitions of him, Yusef was able to mentally escape the bondage of prison. How did Yusef ensure that other people’s definitions did not affect the way he defined himself? How did it help him survive?
- 4.** What was Yusef’s mother’s line, “I was raised in the Jim Crow South,” meant to teach and remind her children?
- 5.** Discuss the idea that incarceration is the “social machete to chop down the marginalized” and how that is supported by the multitude of systems in our society today.
- 6.** Throughout his life, Yusef has had a village of people who really see him: his mother, his wife, his friends. However, this often required a significant amount of vulnerability and trust. Discuss the ways in which being vulnerable has allowed you to be seen, to be understood better, and to create lifelong relationships.
- 7.** Yusef Salaam describes the power of correctional officer Ms. Eleanore Faulkner acknowledging his humanity in even tiny ways such as a smile. What are some other instances where Yusef experienced this kind of acknowledgment? Describe the power that this acknowledgment can have. Have you experienced similar moments, and what impact did they have on you?

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- 8.** Discuss why the author describes the Central Park jogger case as “actually a love story between God and His people.”
- 9.** For Yusef, he was a teenage boy stripped of his youth and innocence, which had a ripple effect throughout his life even after being exonerated. Describe the ways that this adultification has worked to uphold the tenets of white supremacy, not just for the Exonerated Five but throughout American society.
- 10.** The author describes how his experience taught him to deal with fear and use it as a tool for growth. Discuss some of the ways Yusef was able to channel his fear into something productive. What are some of the ways you can use fear in your life to grow through an experience?
- 11.** The author asks, “How do you survive as a Black person in this country?” For Yusef, while prayer has been paramount in feeling mentally and spiritually free, finding a way to document his experience and pulling the emotions out of his body and onto the page have been vital. Do you have ways to document your feelings? What form does that documentation take and how does that give you mental or spiritual freedom?
- 12.** The author mentions some of the ways in which incarcerated people can be rehabilitated into society, addressing the psychological and emotional needs and challenges that they’ll face. Discuss how white supremacy supports recidivism.
- 13.** How do you use your present-day privilege to help the cause of racial injustice?
- 14.** There is a Suggested Reading List at the end of *Better, Not Bitter*. What are some other books you would suggest to a reader educating themselves on subjects such as systemic racism, bias, and microaggressions?
- 15.** Which of the lessons in the book resonated with you most and why? How will you implement them in your life?

# MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB



[Watch Yusef discuss the book on The Today Show](#)



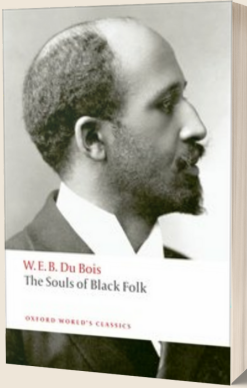
[Listen to Yusef's  
interview on  
Fresh Air!](#)



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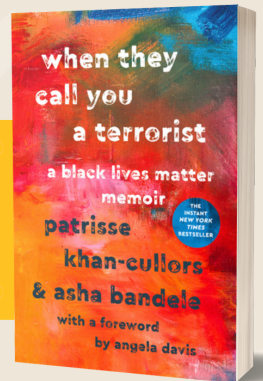


# SUGGESTED READING

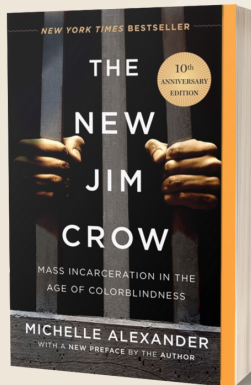


*The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B DuBois

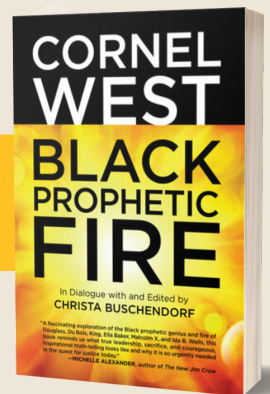
*When They Call You a Terrorist* by  
Patrice Khan-Cullors & Asha Bandele



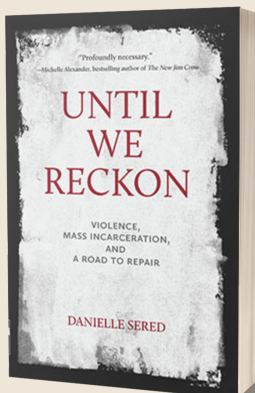
*The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander



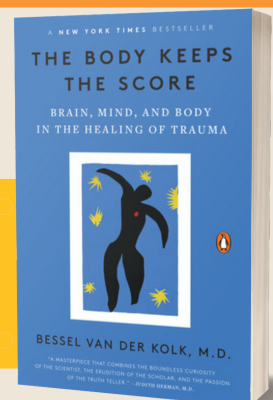
*Black Prophetic Fire* by Cornel West



*Until We Reckon* by Danielle Sered



*The Body Keeps the Score* by  
Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD



# PLAYLIST

*Fight the Power by Public Enemy*  
*What's Going On by Marvin Gaye*  
*So Much Things to Say by Bob Marley*  
*I Can't Go to Sleep by Wu-Tang Clan*  
*What Goes Around by Nas*  
*This Woman's Work by Maxwell*  
*All the Stars by Kendrick Lamar*  
*Confrontation by Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley*  
*Love's Gonna Getcha by KRS One*  
*Love Supreme by John Coltrane*  
*Symphony No. 5 by Ludwig van Beethoven*

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN!](#)

