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These seven articles were published on Jamaicans.com in 2021-2022, two years marked by profound upheaval and transformation worldwide. They emerged from a place of deep reflection on what the "new normal" might look like. I longed for change. Things needed to change

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***Winter has come, and there are new
guardians at the gate.***

I like to tell my husband my mind is like a bad neighborhood. Down one particularly long street, all the ne'er-do-wells drag race with their loud, unmuffled cars into the wee hours of the morning, and I can't sleep. Several streets over is the gated community where my fears and doubts reside. The residents there also like to sneak out and about during the night's darkest hours and sometimes even during the day. The business district never sleeps, consistently churning out new ideas, some to distract, some that actually turn into something.

But even in the worst neighborhoods, there are always warm and welcoming homes, especially when the frigid winds of winter blow discontent through my neighborhood. Interestingly, I seem to gravitate to the same three houses, with the same three people residing in them—a safe place to soothe my tortured soul.

My cousin Anna is my oldest friend.

She was born two months before I was. I'm not sure when we first met, but we were probably infants. However, I can say that our bond is eternal, even though we are complete opposites. She is the Tinkerbell to my Smee. She is petite with a tinkling laugh, whereas I am tall and stout, like the proverbial teapot. When I get all steamed up, hear me shout. But she does not scream or shout; she has a quiet authority about her.

She is whimsy and joy, where I am practical and contemplative. She follows her heart down every pathway with wild abandon, even as I shout caution to her receding back. She is fearless, unwavering, and true to herself and everyone lucky enough to reside in her circle of love.

So, it is no surprise that I found Aura, who possesses all the qualities I want and need in my Anna. I am convinced if she did a DNA test, she would be part Romany Gypsy. Like Anna, driven by our Portuguese explorer blood, Aura has the travel bug and does not stay still for very long. Like Anna, she is an incredible artist, and like Anna, she is my muse, my port in the storm, and my fiercest

advocate.

Then there is my cousin Wendy. She is four years younger than I, a colossal divide to cross when we were children. But she has grown into the family warrior, our very own Pirate Princess who takes what she wants without apology and protects her own with a vicious intensity. She is loud, brash, and kind to a fault. My Pacey is her counterpart.

I have experienced Pacey pushing me out of the way to go after someone for the slightest infraction against me. Leaving me too shocked to register the insult leveled against me. That is the depth of her loyalty to those she loves.

My cousin Rachel is the quiet one. She is practical and calm, cautious but constant. When I was getting married, she was the only person I wanted as my maid of honor. I knew she would quiet the storm raging around me and hold everyone at bay, and that is precisely what she did. Never leaving my side until I said, "I do." She puts her head down, marches forward, and gets on with what has to be done, composed and unruffled by whatever life throws at her. Enter my

friend Samantha, who was the person standing beside me when I renewed my vows twenty years later.

When I need to confess, I go to her. Samantha has known me the longest of all my American friends, and she can tell from my tone of voice what I am going through at any given moment. She listens, gently prodding until we arrive at the answers I need together.

These are the binds that hold me together, my pit crew. My first friends, my family members, are always with me, joined by the comingling of the blood we share. But friends! Friends are life's greatest gift, and because of my childhood friends, I can recognize the characteristics in the friends I choose to become family.

Someone once said (I can't remember who; it might have been one of the drag racers in my lousy neighborhood) that there are bonds stronger than blood. Whoever it was, I agree. Friends are the family we choose to stand by us, to lift us, to cherish us, and who allow us to do the same for them.

Women are creatures of the heart. I

think it was William Golding who said,
"Whatever you give a woman, she will make
greater. If you give her a house, she'll give
you a home. If you smile at her, she'll give
you her heart. She multiplies and enlarges
what is given to her."

While the world is overrun by the loud
voices of those who fear and fight change,
change has been happening worldwide. Like
a river in perpetual motion, carving a path for
itself through resistant rock and stone, women
have been taking the mantle of leadership
onto their shoulders, and they are quietly
changing the direction of the wind.

From Nepal to Taiwan to Singapore.
From Namibia to Ethiopia to Gabon. From
Denmark to Iceland to Finland. From
Lithuania to Estonia to Serbia to Georgia to
Moldova. From Trinidad and Tobago to
Barbados. Empowered women are changing
the world.

Angela Merkel, Chancellor of
Germany, is leading the world through one
international crisis after another.

Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of

Norway, is championing the call for action on climate change and leading Norway toward a carbon-neutral footprint.

Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, has taken on the challenge of addressing poverty and promoting economic opportunities.

Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland, led her country through the minefield of Brexit.

Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, has defeated COVID-19, all while being a mother to a baby on her hip.

Zuzana Caputova, President of Slovakia, leads the country in promoting equality, LGBT rights, and reproductive rights, which were previously under the control of the old Soviet regime. "If there is an extreme situation and the dilemma is between deciding whether to adopt a legal norm that will intrude upon the personal lives of citizens or leave it to women's responsibility and their personal choice, I choose the responsibility of a woman."

Katerina Sakellaropoulou, Prime

Minister of Greece, has taken on the challenge of addressing the economic crisis that has plagued Greece for years.

Women are now in the room making it happen, finally in a position to address the issues that have lived in our bad neighborhoods for generations: wealth inequality, climate change, human rights, and child welfare. We have been nurturing our families, securing our homes, and building our villages through it all. We know what we need to do.

Michelle Obama once said it wasn't enough that the country's first black family was good; they had to be better. Margaret Thatcher said something similar during her standoff with the Yorkshire miners, but she said she had to be tougher. My question is, better than who? Tougher than who? Who are the who? Who did a better job before them?

President Obama took the reins of power during a soul-crushing recession and a war. When he left office eight years later, the economy was booming, and the war was waning. During her eleven-year tenure,

Margaret Thatcher set her country on a positive economic course, led it to victory in the Falklands War, and helped guide the United States and the Soviet Union through the Cold War's difficult last years.

Before you start screaming that I am marginalizing men to promote women, let me stop you right there. In speaking to Wendy's teenage daughter about relationships, my husband said, "What your aunt and I have is a partnership built by respect and sustained by love."

My husband is strong where I am weak; I am strong where he is weak. We complement each other and work together toward a common goal. It is not easy to find that needle in a haystack, but they are out there. My brother found it, and so did Samantha. Aura and Pacey did too.

So, my point is this. Men and women, women and men, were meant to work together. Not to the exclusion of the other, but together. Sure, men and women may have different priorities, but the end game is always the same. Provide for the home front, raise the hunters along with the gatherers, and

LYNDA R. EDWARDS

position each generation to be better than the one before them.

Winter is here, and it's time to let the women stand side by side with the men as equals, so the next generation recognizes what it takes to be better than the one before.

Did you know that Race is a Social Construct and not a Natural Status?

In 2020, the world descended into chaos. A pandemic crushed us in its grasp. We witnessed a man die, a knee fixed so firmly upon his neck, it extinguished his life as the world watched in shock and horror.

The realization that being a member of the world's largest 'free' society didn't make you free was jolting to me. There are different rules for being white, black, brown, yellow, female, male, transgender, gay, and straight in America. So many rules, I wondered how anyone kept them all aligned in their heads. I wondered who was keeping track of maintaining this status quo.

I longed for the comfort Jamaican shores gave me, away from the hate and anger surrounding me in the year 2020. When I lived in Jamaica, I bristled at being called Whitey, until my father pointed out that my whiteness was nothing more than a

distinguishing feature. Like we call short people, Shorty, or stout people, Bigga.

To steal a line from my good friend, George Graham, "Where Jamaicans may be unique is that we are far less obsessed with skin color and ethnic origin than any other multiracial society I can think of." He is right; Jamaicans never refer to themselves as anything but Jamaican. We are exceptional enough with that title alone.

Jamaica is a land of many firsts that we don't recognize enough to bring us the pride it deserves. Black River was the first town in the Americas to have a telephone exchange. The Waterloo House, then a private residence, was among the first to have electricity in the Western Hemisphere (1893). In 1903, Jamaica's first motor car – a four-cylinder 'New Orleans' made in Twickenham, England – was driven in Black River. Jamaica was the first country in the Western Hemisphere to ban trade and travel with South Africa because of its brutally racist apartheid government system.

Jamaica can easily boast of having one of the best collections of historical significance in the National Archives. The National Library of Jamaica originated from the West India Reference Library (WIRL) collection, founded in 1894 as a section of the Public Library of the Institute of Jamaica. This public library was the first of its kind in Jamaica. The West India Reference Library originated as a small collection of Jamaican and West Indian books under Frank Cundall's guidance, who served as Secretary and Librarian of the Institute from 1891 until he died in 1937. It has evolved into a comprehensive collection, rich in primary source materials that cover all aspects of Caribbean life and society.

Jamaicans have a style about them, a certain panache. We are innovators, creators, and prophets. I don't say this lightly. We have produced a culture complete with a reggae music soundtrack and an outlook on life envied by most. To declare you are Jamaican is to garner another look from everyone in the room. We are proud of our national motto, "out of many, one people,"

and genuinely strive to live up to that standard. We 'mash-up, mash-up,' and the delicious stew we have cooked up has attracted world attention.

We have been able to do what most have not; we have embraced the shared yoke of colonialism as our bond, rejecting what it was meant to do: create irreparable divisions based on class and color. This post-emancipation ideology emphasized individual achievement as the basis for social status, rather than color. Race is a social construct, not a natural state of being. The fact that racism exists at all means it is useful to *someone*. Racism and bigotry have achieved colonialism's final solution: divide and suppress so *someone* can benefit economically and politically.

In Europe, the feudal system of Serfdom began in the tenth century. Serfdom was the forced labor of poor people on the fields of landowners. Serfs were the lowest social class of the feudal society. In most serfdoms, serfs were legally part of the land, and if the land was sold, they were sold with it. In England, Serfdom lasted up to the 1600s. In France

until 1789. In most other European countries, Serfdom lasted until the early 19th century, existing in Russia until February 19, 1861. Europe's legacy of Serfdom lasted for nearly ten centuries, cementing class divisions firmly in place.

Because there were so few European whites compared to the rest of the population, a complex racial hierarchy emerged in Jamaica. Colonials, or whites born on the island, held a status below that of their European counterparts. Mulattoes, people of mixed race, had rights depending on their situation. Many were free, declared white by their loving parents, so they could be educated, hold positions of authority, and guide their island home's future. Slaves, well, slaves were African serfs. By the time abolition was growing in the collective conscience of Europeans, the reality in Jamaica was that there were fewer pure Africans and fewer pure Englishmen. The island consisted of a mixed-race population.

Maybe that is why Jamaica led the way in forging the path for abolishing slavery and what Emancipation would look like by

enacting the Abstract of the Slave Law by the Jamaican House of Assembly in 1826. This law, among other rights, gave slaves twenty-six days off every year, exclusive of Sundays. If owners or overseers disobeyed this law, they were fined twenty pounds. There were penalties for violating the personal property of slaves.

Slaves could receive bequests or legacies, sick or infirmed slaves were to be cared for, including a ten-pound stipend per year, and most importantly, "Every person found guilty of the murder of a slave shall suffer death. Any person committing a rape on a female slave shall suffer death without the benefit of clergy, and that carnal knowledge of a female slave under ten years of age shall be punished with death, without the benefit of clergy."

In this law, there were 139 articles passed by the Assembly on December 7, 1826, signed by David Finlayson, Speaker; further passed by the Council on December 22, 1826, in Manchester parish.

Two Jamaican stories lost to the sands of time, drowned out by louder voices intent on promoting their version of history, illustrate

just how complex Jamaica's society was in the 1800s.

Munro College, in Saint Elizabeth, was founded in 1856 via a Trust. One of its two benefactors, Robert Hugh Munro, died in 1798. The other benefactor was his nephew, Dr. Caleb Dickenson, who died in 1821. Both were men of Color. So, two men of Color, one a learned Doctor of Medicine, founded a school that is reputed to have produced more Rhodes Scholars than any other secondary school in the Caribbean—accomplished BEFORE Emancipation in 1834.

Mary Jane Grant-Seacole was born in Kingston in 1805. Her father was a Scottish soldier, her mother a Jamaican. Mary learned her nursing skills from her mother. In 1854, Mary traveled to England and approached the War Office, asking that she be sent as an army nurse to Crimea. Being of mixed race, she was denied. Undaunted, she traveled alone to Crimea, where she established the British Hotel near Balaclava, providing food and comfortable accommodations for sick and convalescent officers.

She visited the battlefield, sometimes

under fire, to nurse the wounded and became known as 'Mother Seacole.' Her reputation rivaled that of Florence Nightingale. In 1857, she published her memoirs, "The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands."

This continued division of race is going to be our downfall as resources become scarcer and as our climate deteriorates further. The world needs to start working together to rectify the many wrongs of past generations. Learn from the past instead of continually recycling the mistakes history highlights. We can only survive as one race, the human race.

Colonialism is the greatest transgression humanity has propagated on itself. But without it, we would not have the opportunity to create the greatest civilization humankind has ever known. Jamaicans understand what most do not. Through the hardships we have faced together, by remembering to give GOD thanks for the bounty of the island and the sun that always rises to shine upon us, we have created one nation out of many people with one love in our hearts.

What a lesson we have to teach the world!

5 Books Every Jamaican Should Read.

True genius is clothed in the ideas of others. With all the books written about Jamaica, past, present, and future, narrowing down the search to five books seemed impossible. I began my search with high hopes and aspirations, but my head was spinning within two minutes. I wanted to reduce my options, not increase them! How could I possibly find the best while excluding the rest?

So, I went in search of genius minds. Dore Tate runs a Facebook page called *Books about Jamaica-Authors and Writers*. Ms. Tate and her followers know what they are talking about. They are the keepers of the flame, faithfully tending to the fire of Jamaica's written word, making sure it never flickers or dies.

The excellent suggestions from this group led me to Ian Randle Publishers, where I found Mecca. My search began in earnest. My goal was to put together a chronological order of *Jamaica, As It Was, As It Is, and As*

It May Be. So, I decided to start with that very book.

Jamaica, As It Was, As It Is, and As It May Be, by Bernard Senior - 1835.

This book is not easy reading, made even less so for me because my great-great-grandfather wrote it. From the perspective of anti-slavery, anti-bigotry, and anti-racism, reading it was even more excruciating.

I realized I had to read this book carefully to understand the mind of the writer. Listen to his words while trying not to interpret his tone. "That slavery is a curse, none will deny; nor would any mortal, possessing a spark of humanity, degrade himself by advocating the policy, propriety or necessity of its continuance," counsils Mr. Senior.

But dear Bernard was a pragmatist, and he understood that if the institution of slavery were not ended correctly, it would plunge Jamaica into a cycle of violence and poverty that it would not recover from. It was botched. As the end of communism led to

fascism. As untethered capitalism led to unmitigated greed. Poor preparation and leadership led to a pandemic, despite science and technology being able to defeat it. As countless other examples in history, colonialism's last stand led to poverty, decline, resentment, despair, and the human soul's defeat. His pessimism about Jamaica, as he saw it, is juxtaposed with his hopes for its future. Maybe he could foresee the indomitable spirit of the Jamaican people, who would one day take as their national motto, "out of many, one people."

The Sugar Barons by Matthew Parker.

The Sugar Barons delves into the economic windfall the Caribbean provided for struggling European nations, detailing how Jamaica became Britain's most prosperous and most important colony with brutal honesty. But the island's economy was an artificial creation. Sugar Plantations were heavily mortgaged, propped up by political lobbyists rather than the monoculture's actual market price. To fund the military campaign against America, England raised import duties on sugar. London merchants withdrew

credit extended to West Indian plantations, in some cases, recalling debts completely.

The price of essential provisions skyrocketed, causing plantations to fail, and failing to repay the interest on loans, much less the actual debt owed. The shortage of food led to more rebellions and more resentment.

The agricultural system in Jamaica was in decline, and as the decay became more evident, so did the stakeholders' disenchantment. The fall of the plantocracy was caused by more than the abolition of slaves. Devastating rebellions took their toll on lives and property. Disease, hurricanes, and earthquakes ravaged the island. The personal, as well as the financial risks to planters, were no longer worth the meager returns.

England led the Sugar Revolution in the West Indies and, in doing so, became the world's leading slave trader. In an ironic twist of fate, the same country led with its campaign to end slavery altogether. "The celebration of the British abolition movement

has been described as praising someone for putting out a fire he himself started.”

Yet the sugar industry’s success did shape the modern world with the introduction of a worldwide trading system that sold sugar and rum to distant markets; in return, the island received machinery, raw materials, and luxury items. Thus began the era of global commerce, supply chains, and the ruthless exploitation of human and natural resources.

But it is Mr. Parker’s description of this period’s legacy that is most poignant. “Slavery, ‘an inferior social and economic organization of exploiters and exploited,’ had sacrificed human life and its most precious values to the pursuit of immediate gain. The sugar and slave business had encouraged greed, hypocrisy, fear, and brutality, corrupting almost everything it touched.”

Beyond Tradition: Reinterpreting the Caribbean Historical Experience - by Heather Cateau

This book offers a dynamic representation of Caribbean life, spanning migration, nationalism, and identity

formation. Through a series of essays, individual writers aim to present a more nuanced understanding of the historical experience by focusing on marginalized groups, including non-elite men and women, youth, the elderly, Africans, Asians, and Europeans, all of whom were outside the traditional plantation circle of life.

In introducing and discussing the complexities and diversity among the various Caribbean societies and economies, the writers weave an intricate tapestry of all the ethnicities that came together through their shared struggle for equality and fight for enhanced opportunities.

This analysis of social, economic, and political threads highlights our historical experiences that still need to be examined. Making it relevant to the modern-day Caribbean islands' societal makeup and their interconnectedness.

Caribbean Reasonings: Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora – Edited by Brian Meeks

Please make no mistake, Stuart Hall is a scholar in every sense of the word; he is an

actual Rhodes scholar who attended Jamaica College. He is influenced not only by growing up in Jamaica but also by his experiences as a member of the Diaspora. Hall is a creative thinker, a cultural activist, and a teacher.

His post-colonial development is fundamental to his work. “He has interpreted British society and culture from the perspective of someone who was both deeply formed by it, as a colonial citizen, but was also an outsider to it,” says Michael Rustin.

“But I am not and never shall be English.” I know both places (England and Jamaica) intimately, but I am not wholly of either place. And that is precisely the diasporic experience, far away enough to experience the sense of exile and loss, close enough to understand the enigma of an always-postponed “arrival.”

One of his most significant conclusions in this book is that racism is a continually evolving organism. “There have been many different racisms-each historically specific and articulated in a different way within the societies in which they appear. No doubt,

there are general features to racism. But even more significant are how these general features are modified and transformed by the historical specificity of the contexts and environments in which they become active.”

Redefining history as a narrative discourse has significant implications, one of which is an increasing understanding of its structure and role. “Race is not biology, race is not transhistorical, race is not an essence outside of social dynamics and representations, but a social creation.”

His thoughts on the lack of genuine political will, imagination, and a progressive agenda in Jamaica and the Caribbean are illuminating. The contemporary nature of violence in Jamaican society is intertwined with political authority, the very meaning and value of life, and the realization that power assumes various guises.

Stuart Hall is a cultural theorist and political activist. He is dubbed the “godfather of multiculturalism” for his contributions to sociology. This book lays out, analyzes, and decimates his contribution to understanding Jamaican sociology in remarkable detail.

Elections, Violence and the Democratic Process in Jamaica, 1944-2007 - by Amanda Sives

Amanda Sives wasn't born and raised in Jamaica, but her love for the island has prompted her desire to understand its origins and people. The aim of this book, she writes, "is to contribute to the wider debates about political development and political culture in Jamaica and to contextualize partisan violence." In short, it is to help us better understand from whence we came.

Historically, political violence has been used as a tool to overthrow the state or shift the balance of power. But not in Jamaica. Violence has been the weapon of the political parties in the struggle to acquire and maintain control, giving rise to 'partisan political violence.'

This book details the political landscape from personality politics to trade unions to garrison politics. Patronage politics defined political identity. As Norman Manley remarked in the 1967 General Election, "I hate to see Jamaicans killing and maiming Jamaicans...I hate to see the spirit

of Nationhood broken and destroyed.” But this is the very nature of the political violence espoused and encouraged by Jamaica’s political parties.

“How do you fight violence without yourself becoming violent? How do you do it? Needless to say, my supporters wanted to fight it out...and you had the same type of people on both sides,” recalled Dudley Thompson.

The ideological divisions created by both political parties had lasting effects. “One half of the country became convinced that the enemy was a CIA-manipulated set of stooges, and the other half was convinced that the enemy was a set of communist stooges manipulated by Castro. Both sides of the country had seduced each other into a complete departure from reality by then. The whole thing was wildly exaggerated, terribly polarized, and bitter. I think that it had a terrible effect, and I don’t think Jamaica has ever really recovered from it,” Michael Manley said after the 1976 elections.

Partisan identities, formed through loyalty to political leaders, have played a

prominent role in Jamaican politics due to the lack of religious and ethnic differences that politicians typically use to mobilize support.

“Keep them poor and keep them tired, and they’ll never leave.” This mantra appears to be particularly relevant to Jamaican politics. The exploitation of people experiencing poverty for political gain by allocating scarce resources to ‘buy’ votes is regularly utilized. But these words were uttered by Jim Jones, the man who convinced more than nine hundred of his followers to kill themselves in the Guyanese jungle.

Why these five books?

So, why did I choose these five books? As Maya Angelou once said, “I have great respect for the past. If you don’t know where you’ve come from, you don’t know where you’re going.”

I believe the solution to our current problems lies in understanding and correcting past mistakes—these five books, while not the be-all and end-all, are a good starting point.

The Environment in the Pandemic - how can the Diaspora help?

In an interview Dr. Kevin Brown, chair of the Jamaica Diaspora in the UK and the North UK Representative on the Global Jamaica Diaspora Council, Diana McCaulay, CEO of the Jamaica Environmental Trust and author of *Daylight Come*, a dystopian tale that hits close to home, describe in graphic detail the dangers posed to the Caribbean Islands by climate change.

Jamaica, like so many other countries, must balance the demands of a developing economy with the urgent concerns of global climate change and the need to protect a fragile ecosystem.

Members of the Diaspora view with alarm the threats to their treasured island home. Apart from wanting to protect their homeland, many individuals have homes, businesses, and investments they want to safeguard, especially those who have invested all their savings in a planned retirement on the island.

But, so far, apart from signing petitions and protesting on social media, members of the Diaspora have been bystanders in facing the island's environmental dilemma. What, if anything, can they do to help?

Dr Kevin Brown, chair of the Jamaica Diaspora in the UK and the UK North Representative on the Global Jamaica Diaspora Council, believes the Diaspora must get involved.

“The recent devastation to property and roads across the island caused by landslides following heavy rainfall has revealed the impact of growing deforestation,” Dr. Brown said. He warned that rising sea levels and increasing water temperatures, resulting from the global climate crisis, pose a significant risk to the numerous coastal towns and cities across the country.

“Furthermore,” he said, “Jamaica is vulnerable to the more frequent, powerful, and destructive hurricanes caused by warmer sea temperatures.”

He says members of the Diaspora “must increase their advocacy voice and forge alliances with local environmentalists and

campaign groups in the fight to preserve Jamaica's flora and fauna."

In Jamaica, several groups are working to preserve the island's natural heritage. One of the leaders in the crusade is the Jamaican Environmental Trust.

An international organization, the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide, stepped in to help JET when foreign interests attempted to transform the picturesque Goat Islands into a giant shipping center.

"Two Jamaicans went to a six-week course in Costa Rica; both were employed at JET after the training," JET CEO Diana McCaulay said. "They also helped us to review Environmental Impact Assessments, which are large technical documents needing a range of disciplines and expertise that few NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) have on staff. They helped us with legal and scientific advice on many issues and wrote grant proposals with us to fund our law and advocacy programme."

The Goat Island proposal sent shock waves throughout the Diaspora, and now, less than five years after that threat was fought

off, two other projects are raising alarm among Jamaicans abroad as well as at home – bauxite mining in the Cockpit Country and limestone mining in the Puerto Bueno Mountain.

These wilderness areas are home to a vast array of plant and animal species, many of which are found nowhere else. The waterfalls, caves, scenery, and culture are all critical for tourism. There are implications also for the island's water resources. The Cockpit Country watershed, for example, serves Western Jamaica through the Great River, the Black River, the Martha Brae River, and the YS River.

Prime Minister Andrew Holness has repeatedly acknowledged the importance of protecting the island's environment. In a speech at the Denbigh Agricultural and Industrial food show in Clarendon on August 6, 2019, he said, "We are not the Government that will trade off economic benefit for environmental cost; that is not this Government. So yes, we hear the complaints, we hear all that is happening on social media, but I want to reassure the Jamaican people that this Government will be responsible with

our environment because already we are seeing the effects of climate change.”

Yet he is allowing mining in the Cockpit Country region and in the Puerto Bueno Mountain. He insists that the Government has made an “enlightened” decision in confronting the need for economic growth while ensuring sustainable development, especially in a pandemic that has claimed jobs and diminished much-needed revenues.

“There are those who would want to cast the Government in a position as if to say we are bereft of any form of equity and ethics in the making of decisions about environmental assets,” he complained. “I wish to remind the public that it is this Government that put an end to the Goat Island project — a project that we were told would bring immense economic gain, and we chose the environment over that.”

To JET’s McCaulay, that’s not good enough.

“Despite many fine speeches, commitments, reports, and a few good

decisions, there is a big gap between what we say and what we do,” she says.

And Dr. Brown agrees that the Jamaican government’s position on environmental conservation has not been consistent.

“In 2016, the Jamaican Government cancelled plans to construct a transshipment port and industrial park on Goat Island in the Portland Bight protected area; however, the threats to the Jamaican ecosystem persist,” he points out. “Despite protests from citizens and environmentalists, the Government of Jamaica recently reversed the decision of the National Environment and Planning Agency not to allow mining in the ecologically sensitive Dry Harbour Mountains in St Ann. This follows years of devastating environmental impact from bauxite mining.”

They are dismayed by the government’s decision to allow bauxite mining in the Cockpit Country and limestone extraction in Puerto Bueno Mountain.

“I think mining is inevitably destructive to the natural environment, and those impacts are long-term,” McCaulay says.

“And it’s not just the mining but the roads which open up areas to other types of degradation. We must protect our underground water supplies by preserving forests, managing watersheds, and avoiding development in aquifer recharge zones.

“Mining removes all surface vegetation and topsoil. It destroys biological diversity and ecological processes. We talk about rehabilitation and reclamation, and sometimes we do some of that, but those efforts never restore what was there. Forests are incredibly complex ecosystems that evolve over a long period, not merely a collection of trees. We may decide to limit the area mined in a particular project, leaving some parts untouched, but whatever is mined will be destroyed.”

But if exploiting resources such as bauxite and limestone is off the table, how else is Jamaica to earn revenue from abroad?

“Although there are some people who think all mining everywhere is off the table, that is not my view, at least not immediately,” McCaulay responds. “I think there are some places where perhaps mining can be done without too much harm. But it must conform

with planning frameworks, such as development orders and zoning requirements.”

To provide jobs without compromising the environment, she suggests investing in renewable energy projects.

Dr. Brown also views clean energy as a solution to Jamaica’s dilemma. But the government “lacks adequate financial and technological resources to follow such an eco-friendly trajectory,” he says.

The Jamaican Government should harness the knowledge and skills of the Diaspora for support in sustainable development and environmental conservation, he proposes. “This can be done through forums such as the Global Jamaica Diaspora Council (GJDC), which is a consultative body comprised primarily of elected leaders and specialist appointees from Diaspora communities across the globe. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade hosts the council. It makes recommendations to the government about its policies toward the Diaspora and the Sustainable Development Goals (adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015).

“As the UK North representative on the GJDC, I am committed to ensuring that the concerns of the Diaspora regarding environmental protection and climate change are firmly on the agenda. I will be working closely with fellow GJDC members such as Elizabeth Mullings-Smith, Specialist Appointee for Development (at Jamaica’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade), on advocating for a green development agenda for Jamaica.”

The Diaspora could be vital in funding various non-traditional enterprises to fill the void left by traditional ones, such as mining. Therefore, it may be in the government's best interest to consider funding clean energy and knowledge industries through bonds available to members of the Diaspora for purchase, or by selling shares in a publicly traded company on the Jamaican stock exchange.

If Jamaica were to manufacture equipment for wind and solar power, for example, not only would good jobs be created, but the savings from buying oil and gas could go to needed social services across the island.

The answer to mitigating climate change while providing for an ever-increasing population is not an easy one. However, if the increasing intensity of climate disasters is any indication of what the future holds, then the time has come to find a viable solution.

Education in the Pandemic - how can the Diaspora help?

The global pandemic has exacerbated many of Jamaica's inherent problems. One example is the unprecedented challenge to the island's education system. But there may be a silver lining. As the island emerges from the pandemic, it has an opportunity to make significant improvements.

Dramatic change is already apparent. Traditional in-person classroom learning has given way not only to remote learning and virtual reality experiences, but also to live broadcasts and "educational influencers."

The island has established its Educational TV station, and according to Colin Steer, director of Corporate Communication for Jamaica's Education Ministry, "our radio and TV stations recognize their key role in supporting the national education goals."

Computers are playing a significantly larger role in the new system, as students rely

on lessons and assignments sent via WhatsApp or email.

Steer notes that adaptation to the pandemic has increased students' and teachers' digital skills, facilitated access to technological devices and internet service, and enhanced the use of audio-visual learning. And parents have become more involved in their children's education, he says.

Also, educators now "have a much clearer understanding of the gaps and challenges within the education system related to internet connectivity, hardware, integration of digital tools in the curriculum, and effective use of technology."

Learning could now become integrated into daily routines – a habitual lifestyle that prepares students for success, not only in Jamaica but globally.

But what about the children who still don't have access to a computer or the skills required to use one?

"Going forward, the government announced that they are embarking on an

island-wide Wi-Fi project, which is great, but that alone cannot solve the problem,” says Fredrick Charles Wellington, who retired from the Information Technology Department at Northwestern University in Illinois and now lives back home in Mandeville.

“They will need a collaboration with the private sector and NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) to assist in attacking this problem, else we will eventually wind up with half of our students below an acceptable educational level,” he warns.

Professor Wellington was active in Chicago Concerned Jamaicans (CCJ), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting education for the island’s children.

He points out that “the at-home learning program works for some, mostly the resourceful urban area schools, but the rural schools that are less resourceful -- some with no internet connectivity, and some with parents that are unable to assist their children on how to navigate the internet -- are worrisome.”

Almost half a million Jamaican students were unable to access online classes last fall due to a lack of computers, laptops, or Wi-Fi access.

The Diaspora has provided laptops, tablets, and similar hardware to help students cope with the new remote-learning environment. Supplies have come from such groups as:

- The Jamaica Diaspora Taskforce Action Network (JDTAN),
- The Jamaica Canada Association (JCA) and Canada Coast to Coast
- Too Small to Fail
- The Clinton Foundation
- The Union of Jamaica Alumni Association (UJAA)
- The Jamaica Awareness Association of California (JAAC)
- The Alliance of Jamaican High Schools Associations in Toronto

- The UTECH Community Service & Development department
- The LASCO Chin Foundation
- Eye on Jamaica.

Professor Wellington suggests more can be done.

“The Diaspora can use the CCJ (Chicago Concerned Jamaicans) model to help by directly assisting the students, parents, and teachers of the primary/high school they attended,” he says. “In addition, CCJ has around 300 former students who received high school and tertiary scholarships from the organization and are currently working in the US, Canada and Jamaica; CCJ should call upon them to give back to their community schools and students as consultants, or with financial assistance to those students who are now in the position that they were in when we assisted them.”

He suggests that “the government should also look at retired computer professionals who live in the rural areas and can assist students on how to connect and use the internet on an individual basis.”

Steer says the Diaspora “can continue to partner with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information to provide ongoing teacher training, psychosocial support to students and parents through various interventions (using qualified persons with the field), teacher assistant support (volunteer), tools and equipment for primary and secondary schools to aide in the teaching and learning process, assistance with the building/procurement of school furniture and the curation of educational content.”

In emerging countries like Jamaica, where education has traditionally been provided almost exclusively by the government, this approach could lead to increased cooperation among governments, publishers, technology providers, and telecom network operators, utilizing digital platforms.

Now, what about the curriculum?

Over the years, Jamaica’s education has morphed from the old colonial goal of offering “a classical education... so that students would be properly fitted to take their place in society.” In Colonial and post-colonial times, schools focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic, with religious

training and lessons in geography and history. (In some cases, boys were given training in agriculture and other manual arts, and girls were taught sewing and domestic science.)

Increasingly, educators have adopted a more practical approach.

“There is now a paradigm shift from a content/knowledge-based education sphere to a more competency-based system, which embodies knowledge, skills, and attitudes,” Steer says. “The NSC is written to promote the development of the 21st Century skills of communication, collaboration, creativity, strategic and critical thinking, which will ensure our students will have a more global presence.”

In addition to academic education, multi-disciplinary community colleges in Jamaica offer pre-university, professional, commercial, and upper-level vocational training in a variety of fields, as well as community-oriented courses. There is also a growing trend toward internships.

“Jamaica has long positioned itself to ensure the integration of Technical and

Vocational Education and Training in the formal education system,” Steer says.

He notes that “the Apprenticeship Programme was introduced in the Ministry in 2014 and then subsumed under the Housing Opportunity Production & Employment Programme (HOPE) through the Learn Earn Give and Save (LEGS) Programme in 2018.”

This programme facilitates youth participation in internships for a period of one to two years. During the intern’s tenure, students attend in-class training sessions culminating with an assessment at the end for certification.

Students in the high schools are also involved in formal work experience programmes and voluntary service as a means of engagement in service learning.

The Education Ministry’s goals include the ability to use the spoken and written language, Caribbean Standard English, with precision, clarity, and grammatical correctness, and “the ability to use language effectively for communicating.” Also included is the development of critical

thinking and the ability to analyze logical concepts.

The Ministry is guided by the vision of “a customer- centered, performance-oriented education system producing globally competitive, socially conscious Jamaican citizens,” and providing “strategic leadership and policy direction for quality education for all Jamaicans to maximize their potential, contribute to national development and compete effectively in the global economy, as it pursues its developmental goals for the nation.”

This approach has been practical in preparing Jamaican students not only for life at home but also for assimilation into English-speaking societies abroad. The success of Jamaicans in countries like Britain and the US demonstrates the value of this approach.

But times have changed, and even more drastic changes are ahead in the wake of the pandemic. The rapid spread of COVID-19 highlighted the importance of building resilience to face various threats, including disease, climate insecurity, and rapid technological change.

The pandemic also presents an opportunity to focus on the skills students need in this unpredictable world, such as informed decision-making, creative problem-solving, and, perhaps above all, adaptability.

"To ensure those skills remain a priority for all students, resilience must be built into our educational systems," according to Gloria Tam and Diana El-Azar of the Minerva Project, a pioneer in educational transformation.

Of course, this necessary adjustment to post-pandemic conditions must not obscure the core mission of any educational system – to inspire a lifelong learning experience, nurture students' natural talents, and equip them for a productive and enjoyable life.

To this end, Jamaica's Ministry of Education is committed to promoting "an understanding and appreciation of the place and value of the varieties of English and the dialects and creoles of the Caribbean and other regions in different social and cultural contexts; developing an ability to respond to literature for pleasure, to recognise and respond to the writer's craft, and to make

sensitive appraisals of value judgments and other concepts expressed in literature.”

As the Caribbean culture matures, a wealth of literary, musical, and artistic material is achieving international recognition. Jamaica’s educators should have little difficulty in identifying appropriate and rewarding source material as they develop programmes for the years ahead.

Tourism in the Pandemic - how can the Diaspora help?

Few industries have been impacted by COVID-19 as severely as the travel industry. There is no downplaying the effect a global lockdown has had in what CNN Business called the "worst shock since 9/11."

Jamaica's budget planning agency (PIOJ) estimates that it will take two to three years for the industry to recover.

"We expect the industry will come back fully by 2023 or 2024, which will be contingent on the return of all airlift, cruise passengers, and normalcy regarding vaccine availability," PIOJ reported. "Before COVID, Jamaica was on track to record its 10th consecutive year of growth, with a forecast for five million visitors by the end of 2020."

This is consistent with what tour operators are saying.

“We know that vacationers who love Jamaica are incredibly loyal to the destination and to ‘their’ resorts,” says Jackie Marks, Executive Vice President of Trade Sales and Engagement for Apple Leisure Group. “Some vacationers who cancelled initially ended up rebooking their trip for later travel dates. Overall, ALG Vacations offered a "Rebook Now, Recharge Later" incentive, which allowed customers to rebook their vacation at 125% of the original value. ALG Vacations also waived all brand change and cancellation fees. This way, customers could travel when they felt comfortable traveling.”

From the onset of the pandemic, Jamaica adopted an aggressive strategy to ensure the safety of its citizens and visitors alike. The Ministry of Health and Wellness collaborated closely with public and private sector stakeholders to develop comprehensive protocols that enabled the local management of COVID-19. Those practices reflected the guidance of extensive consultations with international partners within and beyond the tourism industry, including the CDC, the

World Bank, PwC, and development finance banks.

“We feel we’ve put the right plans in place and continue to react to unexpected changes as best we can to keep our tourism industry open and welcoming to visitors,” says Director of Tourism Donovan White.

To a large extent, the major players in the Jamaican market agreed.

“Jamaica acted quickly to both close and then reopen the destination, and with mandatory testing,” Ms. Marks said. “Jamaica was seen as having extra safety protocols, which gave the destination an advantage when customers were making destination decisions.”

But some missteps may have long-lasting consequences for the industry’s rebound.

“Unfortunately, there were a lot of fast-changing protocols and policies early on that certainly did not help tourism to Jamaica,” Ms. Marks said. “ALG Vacations often didn’t

have the opportunity to communicate those policies to our travel agent network before they were reversed or changed again. There was confusion regarding the implementation and then cancellation of a \$40 mandatory insurance policy. Travel agents and consumers were confused by these initiatives, and they were unsure what the actual rules were.

“Another miss was the establishment of the ‘resilience corridor.’ This one was especially confusing, and if travel agents are confused, they cannot sell the destination confidently. It was unclear what would happen if a vacationer left the corridor. After years of encouraging vacationers that they should leave their resort and explore Jamaica, it was a complete turnaround to tell them they had to stay in their hotel for safety reasons.”

Jennifer Avey, Vice President of Marketing of Destination Weddings Travel Group, praised the Tourist Board’s response to the crisis.

“The Jamaica Tourist Board is proactive in reaching out to agencies, such as ours, to propose and partner on unique joint marketing efforts to inspire future travel,” Ms. Avey said. “The Jamaica Tourist Board remains one of the most accessible and helpful to consumers and agencies.

“The JTB did keep us updated with frequent emails as to protocol and procedure on the island. Agencies and tour operators then worked with hotels to try and negotiate the best policies to avoid individual and group cancellations.”

Since March 2020, the Jamaica Tourist Board has been aggressive in its efforts to keep the destination “top of mind” and inspire future travel. They utilized technology and implemented several creative innovations. For example, the Escape to Jamaica campaign was a big hit with audiences, featuring cooking demos from well-known chefs, fitness sessions straight from Jamaica, and weekly DJ sessions to bring the island’s musical vibes into audiences’ living rooms.

To keep travel agents engaged, JTB held regular webinars and, in November, restarted its hosted FAM programming with travel agents to educate them and instill confidence that Jamaica has stringent protocols in place while maintaining the authenticity for which JTB has always been known.

The annual JAPEX trade event, organized by the Jamaica Hotel & Tourist Association in collaboration with the JTB, was held virtually for the first time. They had record participation from travel agents, media, and partners. This forum provided an opportunity to update the industry on the product and destination protocols.

“When COVID-19 struck last year, it caused the cancellation and postponement of both domestic and destination weddings,” Ms. Avey said. “To respond to this, Destination Weddings and the Jamaica Tourist Board joined forces to host a virtual wedding for those affected. The result was a fun event that celebrated love in a time of

crisis, featuring the beautiful shores of Jamaica. Additionally, we provided special offers from DestinationWeddings.com and participating resort partners to those who registered to make it easy and affordable for these couples to get married in Jamaica once they felt comfortable traveling.”

But there have been setbacks.

“Before the pandemic, we saw three to four generations of families and friends traveling to Jamaica for weddings, family reunions and celebration vacations, but now we are seeing only one to two generations traveling, so the number of rooms booked and the lengths of stay have decreased by between 50-60%,” said one travel agent.

So, what is an island dependent on tourism for its financial survival to do?

“Launching a branding campaign explaining why people should go to Jamaica and explaining the destination’s safety and sanitation protocols would be a good start,” Ms. Marks suggests. “Another good step

would be to launch a campaign specifically for travel agents, offering commission incentives to encourage bookings to Jamaica.”

Ms. Avey noted that “requiring travelers to get a COVID-19 test before arrival harmed travel as we saw destinations that have not needed a test grow in market share during Q3 and Q4 of 2020 and into 2021. But with the new requirement that all travelers returning to the United States now produce proof of a negative COVID-19 test, this has added another level of fear for the traveling public.

“We have noticed that other destinations have covered the cost of antigen tests for US travelers entirely (such as the Dominican Republic). We believe that if there is the opportunity to introduce hotels and/or JTB covering the cost of antigen testing for the US market, it would help to put the destination on parity with others who are doing so, and that would be a huge win.”

Tour operators and travel agencies worry about predatory practices on behalf of resorts desperate for bookings.

“In these challenging times, hotels and tour operators are pulling out every single strategy from their toolkit to stimulate demand.” Ms. Marks said. “Tour operators and hotels are all focusing on flexible policies, so that once customers buy a vacation, they know they can make changes relatively inexpensively. We’ve seen that all hotels have dropped pricing dramatically to simulate demand, and hotels have also created special incentives for Jamaica residents, and that has been very successful as well.”

But Ms. Avey said she has not noticed this kind of threat.

“As a large agency, we have very close relationships with our hotel partners,” she said. “Although we have seen some price drops on hotels' websites, we are not seeing extensive occurrences of preferential rates or

promotions offered in a consumer-direct capacity.”

What can Jamaica do to build confidence in travel once more?

“We do not believe that Jamaica has lost the confidence of agents and consumers booking the destination,” Ms. Avey said. “Rather, the pandemic has affected some people’s willingness to travel. Continued diligence around safety and sharing of protocols and results will help to gain the confidence of those who have paused their plans.”

And how can the Diaspora help?

“The Diaspora is key to our marketing efforts,” says Tourism Director White. “They are our ambassadors and are critical to helping the Jamaica Tourist Board in promoting the destination and informing those overseas that Jamaica is doing everything to make the destination safe for our visitors.

“They serve to reinforce our message and reassure potential visitors about efforts by the Jamaican government to keep the destination safe by implementing strict protocols to mitigate against the transmission of COVID-19. We welcome their support in encouraging friends and those who are longing to get away, so that they can do so safely in Jamaica.”

Comfort equals Confidence! Holidays, anniversaries, and major milestones were all sacrificed to keep loved ones safe. Stakeholders in Jamaica’s travel industry agree that once the threat of the pandemic passes, the world will emerge from a haze of cabin fever eager to go exploring again.

“Travel connects, inspires, and fuels hope. We will value the freedom to travel more than ever before, but with different priorities and intentions. When we do get back out there, the sand will feel a bit softer, and the ocean will be more playful. The peaks and valleys are even more dramatic. And the

LYNDA R. EDWARDS

smiles exchanged, all the more genuine,” says one South Florida travel agent.

After the Pandemic - how can the Diaspora help?

The horrific scale of the 1918 influenza pandemic, known as the "Spanish flu," was hard to fathom until now. The virus infected 500 million people worldwide and killed an estimated 20 to 50 million victims, more than all of the soldiers and civilians who died during World War I.

While that global Pandemic lasted for two years, a significant number of deaths were packed into three especially cruel months in the fall of 1918. Historians now believe that the fatal severity of the Spanish flu's "second wave" was caused by a mutated virus, similar to the mutations now being seen in the UK and South Africa.

The Roaring Twenties – arguably a reaction to the flu pandemic's repression -- was a period of economic prosperity with a distinctive cultural edge in the United States and Europe. Jazz music floated in the air, the

flapper redefined the modern look for British and American women, and Art Deco peaked.

This period witnessed the widespread development and adoption of automobiles, telephones, movies, radio, and electrical appliances in the lives of millions in the Western world. Aviation became a business. Nations experienced rapid industrial and economic growth, which accelerated consumer demand and led to significant new lifestyle and cultural trends. The media, funded by the latest industry of mass-market advertising driving consumer demand, focused on celebrities, especially sports heroes and movie stars, as cities rooted for their home teams and filled the new palatial cinemas and gigantic sports stadiums. In many central democratic states, women won the right to vote.

The Roaring Twenties' spirit was marked by a general feeling of novelty and a break with tradition. Everything seemed possible through modern technology, such as

automobiles, moving pictures, and radio, now accessible to a large part of the population.

The United States' economy boomed and provided loans that fueled a European boom as well. Some sectors, such as farming and coal mining, were left behind in this new normal, but that did not stop the US from becoming the wealthiest country in the world, with an industry based on mass production, and its society indoctrinated into the consumption of these new goods and services.

What will define our roaring twenties? We all handle volatility differently. Some of us take it in stride, while others have trouble adapting. Chaos can either hinder creativity or feed it. It's either fuel or a distraction. Much of life's growth occurs during these transitions, and we have had numerous opportunities for growth over the past year.

Many did not thrive in times of chaos, faring better when life is in balance. Americans love to work; It is familiar, safe, and comforting. Work provides a sorely

threatened stability, and it has been hard to tune out the noise. Creativity has suffered for some. Finding inspiration has been a challenge.

Yet, others have produced fantastic work during this same period, their creative energy only enhanced by the whole experience. "You must become a student of the storm."

What a fascinating concept! Chaos indeed produces a very different and potentially more interesting type of human energy. Unlike calm, chaos brings out our extremes—fortitude, love, nobility, as well as resistance, anger, and fear. Disorder showcases the best and the worst in all of us.

History cautions us that the exhilaration springing from the release of pent-up emotion can be dangerous. The Roaring Twenties' exuberant investors leveraged financial markets into a fragile bubble, and the inevitable economic collapse brought on the Great Depression.

Will the world learn from history as the current Pandemic recedes? It's a question that our leaders will have to answer. Our social influencers are no longer movie stars or athletes but doctors, nurses, teachers, and first responders. Consumers now crave experiences over 'things'. The desire to spend quality time with loved ones has replaced the need to spend time at the mall. Time that seemed to last forever in 2020 now feels precious.

With the rise of streaming services, we can watch entire seasons of our favorite television shows without the distractions of commercials trying to sell us stuff we can no longer afford, but more importantly, we no longer want. Keeping up with friends during virtual cocktail hours is time we look forward to spending. FaceTime, Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram are where we store our pictures, our videos, and our lives as we share them in real-time with friends across the globe, whom we may not have seen in years, but are now vital links to maintaining our sanity and our humanity.

This Pandemic contracted our world, brought us closer as it strived to keep us apart. Our fear of the unknown was rationalized, and our suspicion that competent leaders were not guiding us was confirmed. We were shut in, yet shut out of having a say in our future. In voicing our fears, we started to listen and learn. We learned from each other that the environment needs our immediate attention. We realized that the way our children learn in school is no longer viable. We need to find a new way to teach, preparing our children for a new normal. We must find a new way to connect, to progress, and to survive. We have to pivot together, as one.

With history as our guide, where will our dangerous yet exhilarating pent-up emotions lead us? Hopefully, we can find better solutions for long-standing problems. How can the Diaspora help Jamaica recover? Stay informed! Get reliable information from reliable sources. Listen, learn, and then get loud. It is no longer enough to throw money at the problem. We must utilize our collective

knowledge and experience to address the issues before implementing the solution. Protect the fragile ecosystem of the island and find a better way to educate our future generations so they don't have to deal with the problems of the past. Go home! Enjoy the resorts, the beautiful beaches, and the island that bore you in all its glory. Tend to your roots, so your foundation grows stronger no matter how far from her shores you go. Jamaica, Jamaica, Jamaica land we love!

LYNDA R. EDWARDS

About the Author

Lynda R. Edwards's novels have garnered critical acclaim for their powerful storytelling, vivid imagery, and insightful exploration of Caribbean society and history.

Critics have praised her ability to weave intricate narratives that captivate readers from start to finish, as well as her skill in exploring the complexities of human relationships and cultural identity, transporting readers to the heart of the Caribbean experience.

She is deeply committed to promoting the unique voices and stories of the Caribbean.

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