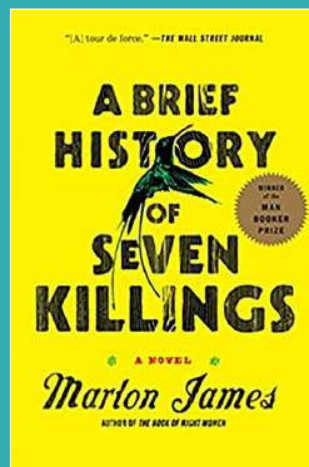
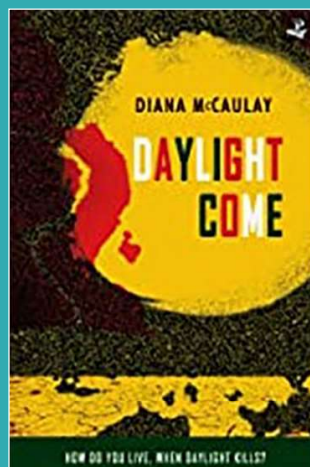
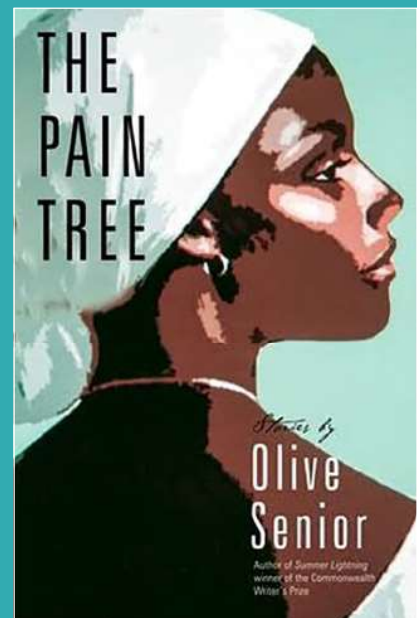
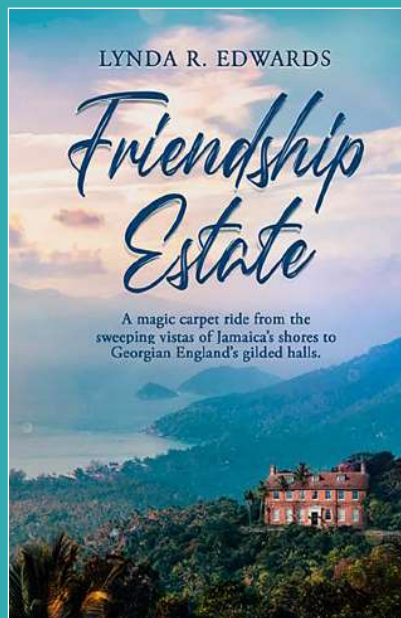
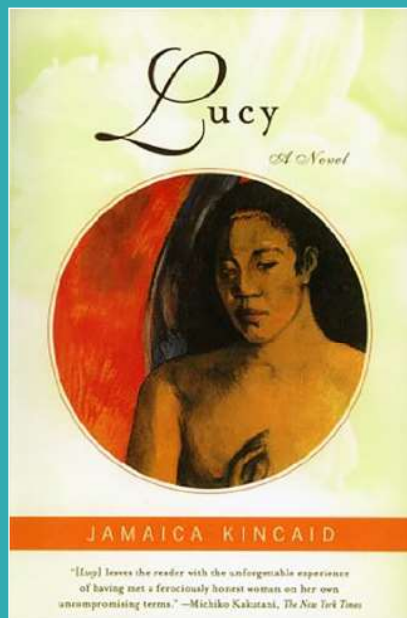


BY LYNDA R. EDWARDS

LOST VOICES OF THE WEST INDIES



As the pandemic held us in its grasp, we turned to that which gave us refuge and comfort. For the approximately ten million West Indian immigrants worldwide, it was our culture. Our food, our music, and our stories. We looked for the nourishment our transplanted roots desperately needed in a time when our world shrank to the size of the screens on our phones.

Then there are the tens of millions who come to our shores drawn by the brilliance of our sun, the warmth of the sand on our beaches, and the cerulean colours in our sea. But that's not what keeps them coming back. They return, time and again, because of the bond that begins as a low drumbeat in their soul, pulling them to the place where the worst of humanity called home until the better angels among us found a voice. They come back because they see themselves in the society we created.

To understand why Jamaican and West Indian stories are so crucial in today's world, we have to understand the history of the Caribbean. The fall of plantocracy was caused by more than the abolition of slaves. To fund the military campaign against the Americans, England raised import duties on sugar. London merchants withdrew credit extended to West Indian plantations. The personal and financial risks to planters were no longer worth the meagre returns. When sugar died and colonial masters abandoned the islands, those left behind had to band together to survive or die in despair alone and discarded.

Our African heritage gave us the gift of storytelling. But our European heritage gave us respect for the written word. Gifted orators were given pen and paper to record and preserve the rich legacy born of a people who fought, struggled, and ultimately not only survived but thrived by building a culture and society based on inclusion, steeped in one love.

If you are lucky enough to be in a room with two Jamaicans meeting for the first time, you will witness the popular game all Jamaicans play – six degrees of separation. Within a maximum of six turns, most Jamaicans

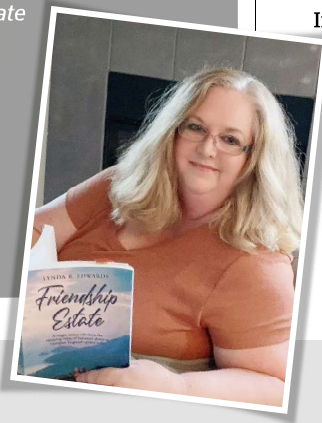
will find a common denominator of family, friends, and experiences. We connect because of our shared birthright and the comingling of the roots that draw us together when we hear our voice in another, be it across a room or a continent. And it will never, and I mean never, be based on the colour of our skin but based on a feeling of connection – my spirit jus tek to yu.

Why you may ask, are West Indian stories so important now? We are where the worldwide trading system began. We are where the ruthless exploitation of human and natural resources began.

'Sadly, we have no home to tell our stories, no banana tree atop a gentle incline from which to enthrall with the cadence of our voice and the enchantment of our tomes. We are adrift on a raft in the middle of the Caribbean Sea, waiting to be rescued.'

ABOUT LYNDA

Lynda R. Edwards is a Jamaican writer. To date, she has written three novels, *Redemption Songs*, *Friendship Estate* and soon to be released, *I am Cuba*. She currently lives in Orlando, Florida, with her husband of twenty-five years.



We are where the world collided with intense heat and pressure, crystalizing to form the brilliant diamonds that are the islands of the Caribbean. We are the bridge to reconciling our past and healing our future.

But sadly, we have no home to tell our stories, no banana tree atop a gentle incline from which to enthrall with the cadence of our voice and the enchantment of our tomes. We are adrift on a raft in the middle of the Caribbean Sea, waiting to be rescued.

Those in the West Indian Diaspora, who write novels, are an untapped market, begging for organization and representation. This vibrant and passionate community includes many writers who set their stories in their native land. Their stories range from the nostalgic to what may still be. But while finding their voice is easy, finding their audience is not. Finding a literary agent or even a trustworthy publisher for their books is next to impossible. Current world events have created a demand for these books, not to mention the opportunity to turn these books into movies or shows for online streaming services desperate for content.

The Roaring Twenties of the last century was a period of economic prosperity with a distinctive cultural edge in the United States and Europe. This period saw large-scale development with rapid industrial and economic growth and significant new lifestyle and culture trends. Everything seemed possible through modern technology, now accessible to a large part of the world's population.

Jamaica is now entering the roaring twenties; with all the fissures and ruptures the pandemic revealed and simmering below is the same heated magma that created our West Indian society. It is time for us

to tell our stories of how we came together when all seemed lost, to build a culture and society based on the many becoming one.

We are ready to show the world how to live in the spirit of 'one love'. So, let me tell you a story...