



Call for Papers

44th Annual West Indian Literature Conference

Freedom, Creative Spirit, & the Poetic Imagination

October 7-11, 2026

Where: University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus

When: October 8-11, 2026

Abstracts: Proposals are to be submitted [here](#) by June 1, 2026

How can you free people? . . . When every move you make is to get them to accept conditions of unfreedom, when you use power to twist and corrupt what it is to be human, when you ask people to accept shame as triumph and indignity as progress?

—Earl Lovelace, *Salt* (1996)

The Institute of Caribbean Studies and the Department of English at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus are delighted to host the 44th Annual West Indian Literature Conference, which will be held in San Juan from October 8-11, 2026. This year's conference is convened around the tripartite theme, "Freedom, Creative Spirit, & the Poetic Imagination." In its broadest sense, the conference asks what Caribbean writers and literary works tell us with respect to a central question: *what does it mean to be free?*

West Indian literature is a multi-faceted artistic and aesthetic tradition that challenges many of our quotidian assumptions about freedom, including narratives that define it in narrow terms of individual choice and hard-earned collective rights that are sanctioned by law. Showcasing a rich tapestry of imaginaries and sensibilities that are neither monolithic nor necessarily complete, the creative spirit embodied in the literature of the region invites us to appreciate freedom's emancipatory potential at the same time that we pursue ways of being that are different from those that we know. Dionne Brand, Édouard Glissant, Jamaica Kincaid, Earl Lovelace, Sylvia Wynter, and others assist us in questioning how it is that contexts rife with fragmentation and inequality can still be the homes of people who are free.

As we contemplate the marvelous contours of human freedom as a trajectory of lifeworlds that is still unrealized, we recall that Aimé Césaire embraced "poetic knowledge" as an

approach to understanding that points beyond rational thought, formal research, and academic discourse. He held that such knowledge emerges from emotional and sensory experiences that enable individuals to connect with the complexities of life beyond logical reasoning. In similar fashion, another Martinican critic, Suzanne Césaire argued that the task of the people of Martinique was not only to “dare to know themselves” but to “dare to ask who they want to be.”

We point out that the relevance of poetic knowledge extends beyond any single genre or way of reading the world. As Gary Wilder writes in *Freedom Time*, “[P]oetic knowledge thus reveals how past and future, heritage and destiny, may be contemporaneous with one another . . . even as it also produces such contemporaneity.” These forms of knowledge are deeply rooted in cultural heritage and social history. They sustain traditions of struggle and resistance, including forms of literary expression that celebrate the rejection of dominant narratives and have the potential to elevate cooperation, well-being, and democracy.

As a group of Caribbean critics with a deep commitment to the region, we will respond to questions about freedom as we navigate the plethora of serious challenges facing the region in recent years—including natural disasters, political violence, and the defunding of public education—and engage optimism as a practice of freedom. The organizers are particularly interested in papers, creative projects, and literature-focused panels that approach the theme in a broad context. Critical considerations include but are not limited to engagement with these topics:

- Freedom in the work of Caribbean writers and artists
- Legacies of freedom and the creative spirit
- Textual, oral, performative, and filmic representations of freedom
- Freedom in the literature from smaller places
- The poetic imagination
- Caribbean literature and abolitionist justice
- Regional links
- Belonging and unbelonging
- Beyond the postcolonial
- Oral literatures
- Reconceptualizing race and racial identity

- Inter-regional dialogues on freedom and social change
- Writing freedom and revolution
- Unfreedom and limits of the imagination

We welcome abstracts of 250-300 words in length. Individual abstracts should include a title for the paper or project to be presented, the name of the presenter, their academic affiliation, contact information, and a short bio of 150 words or less. A panel proposal should be treated as a group of four individual presentations, each of which complies with the aforementioned guidelines. We will send notification of acceptance by June 15, 2026.

Please note that membership in WILC's umbrella association WIACLALS (the West Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies) is required for presentation at the West Indian Literature Conference. If your proposal is accepted, you will need to confirm paid membership in WIACLALS within two weeks of acceptance. You may become a member [here](#). Included in membership is a year's subscription to the *Journal of West Indian Literature*.

The conference will take place on the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus. The organizers are planning a rich set of activities. These include keynote addresses, a poetry reading, a book and journal exhibit, workshops, and a cultural activity that will take place off campus, among others. Presenters will have the opportunity to submit their work for publication following the conference.

For the homepage of the West Indian Literature Conference, please visit: <https://westindianlitconference.com/>

For details about events associated with this year's conference at UPR-RP, please visit: <https://sociales.uprrp.edu/iec/wilc/>

To submit a proposal, please do so by June 1, 2026 using this form: <https://tinyurl.com/4h6bwft5>

Queries concerning submissions and other matters related to the 2026 Conference at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras may be sent to wilitconf2026@gmail.com.



