

## The Talking Drum

**Lisa Braxton**

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Lisa Braxton's historical novel *The Talking Drum* captures a vibrant immigrant community in its death throes.

Petite Africa is in trouble. The city of Bellport plans to demolish this rundown, immigrant-majority neighborhood and build a civic center in its place. In addition to this crisis, an arsonist is targeting apartment buildings on the chopping block. The people who live in and around Petite Africa deal with each threat in their own ways, either coming together or breaking apart in the face of an uncertain, even dangerous future.

Set in the early 1970s, the story revolves around three couples: Sydney and Malachi, newlyweds who are planning to open a bookstore and cultural center; Della and Kwamé, whose unhealthy relationship founders when Della begins to assert herself; and Natalie and Omar, whose marriage is crumbling under the weight of their poverty. Each individual has their own problems, goals, hopes, and fears to contend with, even as their neighborhood fights to survive.

Each character brings a distinct perspective. Uncertain but determined Sydney, steady Omar, and jaded yet hopeful Della see the happenings in Petite Africa and neighboring Liberty Hill through the lenses of their previous experiences, both good and bad. They struggle to improve their lives in the face of loss, racism, betrayal, and government indifference.

Petite Africa is a unique blend of activists and business owners, of dynamic outdoor markets and burned-out buildings. Despite the challenges presented by slumlords and bureaucrats, the residents go about their lives as best they can, fighting for what they believe in. All they have is their resilience, their memories, and each other. But perhaps, in the end, that is all they need.

*The Talking Drum* is an absorbing historical novel about the importance of community in shaping who you are and what you can accomplish.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2020)

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