



AUTHORING THE ROOTS ROCK REGGAE DAYS

Third Edition

ABOUT BAD FRIDAY

"Nuh worry bout it cous'," Peter said patting him on his back.
"Got to," Delroy replied, "I wanna future, not a cheque every two weeks boss.
"Cho! No future in dis country dread, yuh just have fe guh wid de times
Delroy Bell is about to leave school, the prospects for him and his friends look grim. Will Delroy make it as a professional basketball player, or will he end up hustling and gambling on the streets like his cousin Peter says?
Set in mid 1970s Small Heath, Birmingham, Bad Friday is about their struggle to find a future and an identity they feel was denied their parents.



BAD FRIDAY
NORMAN SAMUDA SMITH

A Novel
Norman Samuda Smith



Samuda Smith Publications

On April 5th 1982 and ironically the same date in 1985, Norman Samuda Smith was confirmed as the first black British born novelist to be published in the United Kingdom when his novel *Bad Friday* hit the streets. He skilfully used the language of his peers. The dialogue spoken by *Bad Friday*'s characters is a black British patois; a dialect developed in the school playgrounds through the 1960's, into the 1970's and is still evolving as the second and third black British born generations emerge.

It is important to understand and realise that *Bad Friday* was published a clear decade before ***X-Press***, (now the largest publishers of black fiction in Britain), came through with their first publications. We caught up with Norman and had a brief interview with him...

Unheard Words: Norman thank you for agreeing to be interviewed on Unheard Words

Norman: It's a pleasure. Thank you for the opportunity.

Unheard Words: Take yourself back to when you originally wrote *Bad Friday* - what was going through your mind as a writer, were you trying to capture what you were experiencing?

Norman: Writing had been a passionate hobby of mine from when I was 10 years of age. I knew I wanted to write and publish a novel, but didn't have a clue how to go about it; but I didn't make not knowing stop me from fulfilling my dream. Around that time the other passion I had was being an active member of a sound system with my friends. From the age of 14 we built our sound from scratch and it took us 5 years to become one of the best youth sound systems in Birmingham, entertaining our communities playing the sweet sounds of Roots, Rock Reggae music.

When I left school at 16 in 1975, the recession had well and truly kicked in. Unemployment nationally was at a record high, especially with black youth. The National Front was on the rampage encouraging racial tension and at one stage were the third biggest political party in Britain. There was the energy crisis, mass union strikes, plenty redundancies being dished out, the three-day working week, the 'sus law', the inner-city riots, teenage pregnancies and some of our parent's varied reactions to becoming grandparents. Within this environment, I was one of the unemployed, sometimes bored and disillusioned about not knowing what my future would be. I sometimes questioned my place as a young black man in British society.

While all this was going on, a revival was happening. The Rasta musical uprising in Jamaica was influencing us to follow the teaching and glory of Rastafari. This led to a moral conflict between the generations and turned mother against daughter and father against son. While our parents went to church to praise the lord, we the children born of the Windrush Generation, packed out the dance halls to dance and listen to the sounds systems play the musical bible of Rastafari. At this point in the timeline, I was 19 and wrote my first draft of *Bad Friday*. I threw the characters into the surroundings and circumstances I was experiencing.

Unheard Words: And, in amongst your body of work, I see you've returned to release *Bad Friday* in the 80's and now in the 21st century - why? Do you believe it still has relevance?

Norman: When *Bad Friday* was first published in 1982, it was only a small print run of 1,000 copies. We were amazed when it was short-listed for the Young Observer Fiction Prize later that year. That tiny print-run created a lot of excitement with black teachers in Birmingham and created a wave of inspiration with my friends in Small Heath.

When the 1,000 copies sold out, I approached New Beacon Books. After they read the revised manuscript, they expressed their commitment to republishing *Bad Friday*. So republishing it in the 1980s was a natural process. Fast forward to the 21st century, *Bad Friday* is a novel that made history, it chronicles what life was like in the 1970s, and the toil continues; youth unemployment, teenage pregnancies, disillusioned youth etc; different times, same problems. I republished *Bad Friday* to celebrate its 30th Anniversary, and to give a chance for those who missed out on reading it the first two occasions.

Unheard Words: I'm interested in the changes you've seen amongst the communities you've lived and worked in since the 70's (era and setting for *Bad Friday*)?

Norman: In the Small Heath area of Birmingham where I lived for 24 years, everybody knew one another. We went to school together, our parents knew each other, we were a close knit community where family played an important role in our lives, and community spirit was second to none. When we were children in Small Heath, we were raised not just by our parents but by our elder brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles who lived close enough to keep an eye on us; but most importantly, we were raised by the whole community.

When big people spoke to us, we had to have manners. We were told on numerous occasions that we should be seen and not heard, it was something we learned very quickly. Those who never used to hear did feel, and to feel was something we didn't want to experience back in them days. I often think about the iron fist we lived under as children. It did us no harm; we're still here today and have never been incarcerated for any crimes.

'Communities', if we can call them that nowadays have changed since the 1980s grabbed hold. Money is the order of the day, which has gradually been joined by mobile phones, i-phones, android phones, computers, laptops and tablets. Everybody can sit at home now and 'talk' to their friends and families through their digital devices, and the one-to-one reasoning, even phoning and applying for a job has gone digital. Almost everything, everybody, attitudes, manners and discipline have changed big time, some for the better, some worse. For example without the laptop, I wouldn't have self-published my three books this year.

Those who get the chance to read *Bad Friday* will notice the absence of these digital devices they weren't a part of the furniture in the 70s. The reader will notice more person-to-person interaction, a sense of community spirit, and where the youth have respect for their elders.

Unheard Words: What are you currently working on? And, can we expect to see it out here soon?

Norman: I'm planning and preparing a few projects I've been tinkering with for years, like the sequel to *Bad Friday* which already has a title, *Inner-City Blues*. I'm toying with the idea

of it being a trilogy. There could be a couple of spin-off novels another branch of the Bad Friday brand. I'm also considering a follow up to Britannia's Children my collection of short-stories I self-published earlier this year and that will be called (Britannia's Grandchildren); the experimental sketches look and feel good. I hope to publish at least two of these projects in 2014.

Bad Friday by [Norman Samuda-Smith](#)

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