



# An Activist Teacher and Researcher Walking the Decolonial Peace Education Path

*Hakim Mohandas Amani Williams*

## INTRODUCTION

Everybody violent!!

(Youth Participant from my dissertation research in Trinidad, 2010).

I am obsessed with violence. I grew up with it all around me. I study and research it. I search for tools to mitigate or reduce it. And because violence causes so much harm and trauma, I am driven by a need for catharsis, for healing. All that I do in and through peace education is ultimately animated by that deep desire for healing, for myself and others. My purpose on this blessed Earth is to transform the ways in which I relate to others and the planet, and to offer that as a healing model for social change. I do believe that part of transforming relationalities will necessitate uprooting structural violences (and vice versa).

During my doctoral dissertation research in Trinidad, I conversed with youth about their views on school violence and a host of related topics. An incredibly succinct but potent macro-structural critique by a young

---

H. M. A. Williams (✉)

Daria L. & Eric J. Wallach Professor of Peace & Justice Studies & Associate  
Professor of Africana Studies, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA, USA

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature  
Switzerland AG 2026

S. S. Mehdi, M. Meyer (eds.), *Building Peace*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-11104-3\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-11104-3_9)

participant has stayed with me throughout these years; he matter-of-factly opined that *“Everybody violent”*. Regardless of his intended meaning, his response implicates us all in the entangled web of violences, and because of our complicity in the perpetuation of varied violences, I believe that it is the work of us all to engage indefatigably in projects of peacebuilding and co-liberation.

The book in your hands, edited by Mehdi and Meyer, features an array of peace educators, and asks what our visions of peace are, how they are actualized/attained, and what our contributions to peace studies and peacebuilding are. Exploring answers to these and other related questions is intimately bound up with my own upbringing in Trinidad and Tobago (TT), revealing an unsurprisingly direct connection between that and what I study and research, how I teach, and how I aspire to be a model for decolonial relationality. In this reflection, I foreground details of my early life which scaffold my eventual foray into peace education.

### EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY SACRIFICES

My students often ask me how I ended up being a professor and how and why I ‘chose’ the fields of education and peace and conflict studies; implicit in their question is what were my intentions and how did I chart my pathway to this current point. Spoiler alert: growing up I had never heard of the field of peace education, therefore there was no coherent plan to become a peace educator. But I do believe that the contours of my early life fed an interest in understanding some of life’s imbalances and potential remedies; as a kid, I was intellectually curious, ambitious, persistent, and uncomfortable with the social inequalities that framed my childhood. As a result, I have long been interested in (and now quite committed to) shaking up the world just a little bit, and co-learning with students about the ways in which we can co-craft more just and sustainable futures.

The place that birthed me is called Laventille: a vast area that sits on the hills in and around Port of Spain, the capital of TT. According to Neundorf and Smets (2015), early life experiences, including many factors such as education, parents’ socio-economic status, social media, and peers (among others) influence our political socialization (i.e. part of the foundation of our political values, identities, engagement, and behaviors). Laventille absolutely informs the basis of my political values and identities.

When slavery was abolished in 1834 in TT, many of the formerly enslaved settled in the forested hills of Laventille (*The Trinidad & Tobago*

*Guardian*, 2019). In the subsequent years, many immigrants from other Caribbean islands (including my family from St. Vincent) also took up residence in Laventille. Laventille, one may add here, is known for creativity and resistance (i.e. involvement in the creation/evolution of the steelpan, our national instrument), as well as poverty, crime, and drugs (Morgan, 2017). Celebrated Caribbean writer, poet and Nobel Laureate in Literature Derek Walcott (1965) wrote of Laventille: “where the inheritors of the middle passage stewed, five to a room, still clamped below their hatch...The middle passage never guessed its end. This is the height of poverty for the desperate and black...”.

These lines remind me of my family (four of us) huddled on one bed for many years in Laventille. Our lives and those of our predecessors were shaped (not deterministically but indelibly) by Caribbean colonialism and slavery. I therefore take pride in speaking about Laventille and the crucible it provided for shaping who I am today. (As an aside, I admit that I do take a special delight to see the slight wince when I tell fellow Trinbagonians—the colloquial term that combines Trinidadian and Tobagonian—that I am from Laventille, exposing their assumptions and biases.)

My mom got pregnant at the age of 16 and had me when she was 17. She had dropped out of high school and therefore could not attain her high school diploma. Prior to my mother’s own birth, her biological mother had experienced acute mental unwellness, so the woman I would come to affectionately know as granny adopted my mother. We rented three very small rooms (a bedroom, living room, and adjoining kitchen), in a large, moderately dilapidated house, in which several other families resided; the outdoor toilet and bath were communal.

In our space, were granny, mom, my little brother, and me. We survived off granny’s pension, and whatever odds and ends mom could cobble together. My young mother was necessarily a hustler, but in the 1980s—with international financial crises, and without a high school diploma—it became more difficult for her to support us all. With her back up against a wall, she went to the US Embassy, and despite the seeming capricious nature of visa approvals and without a proper penny to her name really, she secured a visa. In a few days thereafter, she had booked her flight from Trinidad, leaving my brother and me in the care of our ailing granny.

I remember standing with granny at the airport, watching mom’s plane disappear into the Caribbean skies, wondering about what would come next. Then and there, something sank in my stomach, because it was

dawning on me how much my world would be changing. I was nine years old and my brother almost two. I sort of became the ‘man of the house’. I would plait my granny’s hair and iron her clothes to take her to the community clinic; she had severe asthma, and she had a pretty pronounced belly, which we found out years later, might have been a massive tumor (perhaps missed by our threadbare healthcare system).

About three years later my brother and I were living with a different caretaker because granny’s son was experiencing drug addiction, and his frequent visits had imperiled our own safety. However, every morning, I would still pass by to and/from my way to school to check in on granny. One morning during October of 1992 (I was 13 at this point), I encountered granny sitting at the edge of the bed, her head hung low, and blood was running down her legs. She was taken to the hospital that day, but she never left. Granny’s death represented less light in my world. My mom also couldn’t attend the funeral, because she was close to sorting out her US residency documentation. She had two options: return to bury her mother and most likely end our dreams of going to the USA or stay and continue laying a foundation for her children. It was a devastatingly unenviable choice, one from which I don’t think she ever recovered fully. She ended up not coming for the funeral. That December however (a mere two months later), she was able to visit Trinidad; it was our first time seeing her in four years. I don’t think any of us have ever fully processed the weight of the different losses we each bore.

Life felt suffocatingly complicated, especially when I factored in my queerness. It was a very religiously conservative country, and I didn’t have the vocabulary and understanding of my nascent sexual identity, or in fact, anyone with whom I could openly and honestly discuss questions about it. There was significant verbal bullying from kids and adults about my perceived queerness, and I felt like the closet was stifling me to death. As a dark skinned, queer, poor Black kid, I felt as if education was my main route to accrue capital to navigate out of this web of poverty and confusion about my identity.

### AWARENESS OF INJUSTICES COMES INTO FOCUS

From ages 14 to 18, I attended a school in Trinidad called Queen’s Royal College, and it is at that school that I met a wide cross-section of people, in terms of socio-economic status. I was genuinely stunned to see other Black people of significant means, and that contrast with my life I think

sharpened my keen awareness of inequality. This school and similar others (most of which are religiously affiliated) were built in the colonial era and maintained their hegemony into the modern era; the top performing students (at the age of about 11 or 12) on the national exam, gaining entrance to (and thus socio-cultural capital from) these types of schools. I have argued elsewhere (Williams, 2013; Williams, 2016a) that this bifurcated educational system partially maintains TT's class stratified society. Not surprisingly (in retrospect) I ended up studying the structural violence of this educational system for my doctoral dissertation.

It would take a total of ten years before mom finally secured her US citizenship and was able to save enough money to send for us. By this time, she had had another son. I was accepted to Morehouse College and received a scholarship to study there. As I left Trinidad, I swore to myself that I would never return; there was just too much trauma associated with that place.

As the first-born son, I was very close to my mother; yet (and quite understandably why) she did not share the struggles she was enduring in the USA; we would discover these much later when she figured that we could handle hearing about them. But while in Trinidad, I would write letters to her. I understood that she was trying to make a better life for us, so I buried my own anxieties, traumas, and fears, and focused on school and nurturing the hope that we would see her again. All of this was against the backdrop of my quiet concern that we could have been possibly abandoned by her; we would occasionally hear stories of other parents who had done this.

I haven't talked about my father yet, but his absence also played a key role in my own development. For as long as I could remember as a child, my father lived close by with another family. But he was never an anchoring part of my life. He would often promise "I'm gonna bring money for your school books", but I don't think he ever did. I think he was disappointed in me as well because I didn't fulfill the stereotypical dictates of hegemonic masculinity. The last time I remember seeing my father (I was about preteen/early teens), he said something rather derogatory to me in front of a woman who was accompanying him: "I hear you're wearing bras and panties now?!" (a reference to my supposed queerness). Aside from not knowing how exactly to respond to this, I felt utterly diminished. It took me many years to process this wounding. He would eventually pass away from AIDS-related complications. Years later, and as part of my own

trauma processing, I presumed that he must have had his own unprocessed trauma.

All of this just cemented my desire to escape Trinidad and never return. I arrived giddily, but nervously, at Morehouse (an almost all Black and male institution, where Dr. MLK Jr. had attended) to study psychology because I wanted to be a therapist (I suspect as a compensatory conduit to better comprehend my own trauma). While growing up in TT, I internalized the constant (colonial) obsession with what was perceived to be the triad of worthwhile careers: doctors, engineers, and lawyers. I thus initially had become transfixed on becoming a medical doctor; I had excelled in biology but physics and chemistry were a challenge for me (in addition to my repulsion at blood and gore). I therefore abandoned that pursuit of medicine, and pivoted to psychology. Psychology felt like a perfect fit; with my arrival to the USA, the future looked very promising.

#### ADAPTING AND DISCOVERING NEW SELVES IN THE USA: PEACE FINDS ME

I spent one semester (Fall 1998) at Morehouse, then transferred to St. Francis College in Brooklyn, New York (primarily due to financial issues, and frankly, unbearable homophobia). At this point, mom was still living in Delaware, so I had to live with one of her friends (Kathleen, who kindly took me in to her two-bedroom apartment with her five daughters and two grandchildren; they treated me like a brother; that full embrace and deep love, I will never forget). Because of the Hollywood/Disney exported images of a 'gilded' USA, I had thought that by coming to the USA that my family's material conditions would improve, but this quickly proved to be not the case. E.g. mom, who was a nurse's aide in Delaware, tried to find work in NYC to be closer to me, but finding full-time employment was difficult. She returned to being a part-time live-in nanny (during the week days) for a family in New Jersey. She would return to us in Brooklyn during weekends, awaiting a call on Sundays from the family inviting her to return for work on Monday. Without solid income, we could only rent a room in a three-bedroom apartment we shared with a man who also was contending with drug addiction and mental health issues. We slept on a mattress on the floor in this room, hoping for a positive turn in our fortunes. Throughout all this, I maintained two part-time jobs, went to college full time, and ensured that my brothers got to and from school and

did their homework. One could say, that, with the usual gusto of an immigrant hustler, I became dead-focused on the putative American dream.

I don't think transferring to St. Francis was by accident. This notion of Franciscanism (and learning about St. Francis as a bridge-builder) inspired an interest in peace. Growing up as a child living with different caretakers, I had learned to walk on eggshells; it was stressful but I believe it is there that I gleaned the ability to pay close attention to people. It was a survival mechanism but out of that trauma emerged this heightened sense of being able to 'read' others (which I thought would serve me well as a therapist or psychologist).

I enjoyed studying psychology; it equipped me with myriad theorizations about the human condition. I was still grappling with my sexuality (as it came into clearer focus in undergrad) but I was also beginning to understand the ways in which racism was structured in the USA. I grew up in a country where our leaders looked like me, and here I was now living in a different country, where my blackness was minoritized. I also had to navigate Caribbean people making a pejorative distinction between ourselves and African Americans (e.g. that African Americans were wasting their opportunities for education and social mobility). Something troubled me about that, but I didn't have the analytical tools to interrogate this crabs-in-a-barrel drivél.

I had some wonderful professors at St. Francis but what I received was the conventional canon of psychology and not so much of the other critical aspects. The conventional canon felt incomplete so I started to search further afield. The tale of St. Francis giving up a life of riches, speaking to animals, and reaching out to other faith communities, spoke to me, rather strongly. I began reading more about Nelson Mandela, Mohandas Gandhi and the like, which culminated in a literal online search with the words 'education' and 'peace', stumbling upon the peace education program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I devoured the program's description and instantaneously knew that this was for me. I applied and completed two master's degrees there, and after four attempts, eventually secured admission to the doctoral program. It was via my time at Teachers College that I met Monisha Bajaj, Lesley Bartlett, Peter Coleman, Morton Deutch, Tony Jenkins, and Betty Reardon; Bajaj, Bartlett, and Coleman were especially instrumental in shaping my critical consciousness. Their own research, writing, teaching, and advocacy have inspired me in some form or fashion.

It was in the peace education program that I encountered *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a text that opened my eyes to understanding the structural violence in which I grew up (and the globalized nature of oppression). I extrapolated from the text to critique the (neo)colonial education and bifurcated educational system that was damaging the prospects (and self-esteem) of thousands and thousands of children in TT. While major sectors of Trinbagonian society were asking “Why do we have a gang problem? Why are so many kids being recruited into gangs? Why are so many kids dropping out of school? Why are the boys performing so poorly on national exams?”, and despite my promise that I would never return, I realized that I couldn’t pursue peace and peace studies anywhere unless I started with ‘home’. People were concerned with physical violence among the youth, which perturbed me as well, since I had many memories of growing up in a fairly violent community. But now, I was also curious in peeling back the discursive veil to lay bare the historical and socio-cultural environment in which varied types of violences were incubating.

My seven-month dissertation study (de)centered a discursive violence that suppressed contemporary critique of and significant action against the structural violence of the TT educational system, by highlighting the ways in which people narrowly defined violence; narrow constructions of violence beckoned narrow interventions, most of which were (unsurprisingly) not working. For example, some teachers called youth in their classes ‘stupid’ if they weren’t able to follow along the lesson plans or do well on exams, but few persons considered this to be a form of violence. I argued that the system was telegraphing a message of ‘disposability’ to the youth, which, when internalized, ruptured a sense of belonging in the youth, eventually leading to high dropout rates. When you systemically cluster many youth from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds into perennially under-resourced schools, you create fertile ground for dysfunction and disempowerment.

Conducting this work in TT was simultaneously re-traumatizing and cathartic, and it served as my comprehensive foray into peace education. As I was finishing at Teachers College, I applied for a job in Caribbean studies at Gettysburg College. I have now been at Gettysburg College for 14 years, teaching Caribbean Studies (within the Africana Studies program) and directing the College’s Peace and Justice Studies Program. It is from this intersection of Caribbean/Black studies and critical education that I challenge the Western hegemonic iterations of peace education as a field with decolonial interpolations. I return to TT often to conduct more

research and offer workshops to students, parents, teachers and community leaders (often in Laventille or similar communities) on conflict resolution, restorative circles, leadership and development; I encourage them to share what they learn with others so that these tools might be customized and perhaps take root. This is my small way of giving back to a country that gave me so much.

### MY VISION AND WORK FOR PEACE: EMBODYING THE THEORIZATION

My vision of and work for peace can be traced directly to my life in and inheritance from Laventille. Because I grew up witnessing so many violences in Laventille (and the wider society) I am quite sensitive to how people's dreams, ambitions, and basic needs are curtailed by structural violence. I cannot therefore conceive of peace *without* justice because justice is key to healing (Ginwright, 2022; Huskić et al., 2024). Ginwright writes that "...eliminating things that harm us is not the same as creating things that heal us" (2022, p. 7). If peace, in my estimation, is about the dismantling of all types of violences, and the co-creation of environments where all entities on Earth can thrive, then it means that healing and justice must be central.

Justice is about reparations to historically disenfranchised and minoritized groups *and* to the Earth (for our incredible abuse and neglect). Peace, to me, is of course part destinational (i.e. securing certain ends) but more vitally, it is ever processual (i.e. means, attitudes, dispositions etc.): we are forever striving to widen conceptions of rights, entitlements, and deep care for all entities on Earth. The constant striving is consonant with Freire's (1970) notion of praxis: the feedback loop created by critical reflection plus critical action. We are called to be constantly vigilant about the ways in which hegemonic powers strive to coopt, erase and suppress; as a counterhegemonic but also generative tool, praxis becomes a cornerstone of sustainable peace. Peace therefore is at once outcome, way of being, and practice. There are multiple modalities for co-constructing peace: policy, advocacy, education, research, intrapersonal work, music and art, international diplomacy, and as seemingly simple as taking up space in heretofore forbidden spaces (e.g. queer representation in media, or people of color serving on boards of influential institutions).

My work for peace and justice is primarily through teaching, research, and the way I try to live my life. I deem all three spheres as forms of peace activism. As a queer, Black, immigrant man from a working-class background living and working in a politically conservative and historic part of the USA called Gettysburg, that in itself is a small act of resistance. To teach mostly White students in that space with these positionalities constitutes what I call decolonial micro-revolutions (Williams, 2025). When I teach, I bring all of my selves into the classroom. I speak openly about mental health struggles, internalized colonialism and homophobia, and racial microaggressions; this is a micro-revolutionary invitation to students to do the same because I ardently believe that deeper and more resonant co-learning occurs when we dare to live lives that are not compartmentalized. I lean boldly into a pedagogy of vulnerability (Brantmeier & McKenna, 2020)—pedagogical risk taking, self-disclosures about oppression and privileges, etc.—which humanizes me to my students, and disrupts the toxic hierarchies that divide students and teachers that keep us from co-building necessary coalitions to tackle intractable hindrances to peace and justice and co-birthing more just and sustainable tomorrows.

Within peace education, I have intentionally contributed to the decolonial turn with my research, interventions in communities similar to Laventille, and consultancies (on restorative practices in Guyana, Ghana, and elsewhere). I research and write in peace education with the spirit of the ancestors, those who endured colonialism, slavery, and indentureship. My pan-Caribbean socio-cultural inheritances are the foundation for my decolonial work: I am the product of the Caribbean forged through and impacted by mercantilist and capitalist experimentation; occupations/interventions; structural adjustment programs; diverse fragmentations (political, linguistic etc.); natural disasters and disproportionate effects of climate change; but also by profound syncretisms (ethnic, religious etc.) (Benitez-Rojo, 1997), such as Vodou, Santería and Obeah; by the Haitian Revolution and maroonage (the history and legacy of enslaved persons who escaped from plantations and created free communities in forests, mountains, and swamplands) on other islands; by roti and callaloo (Trinbagonian foods shaped by those descended from East Indian indentured laborers and African enslaved persons on other islands); by the intellectual inheritances from Eric Williams (see *Capitalism and Slavery*, Williams, 1994), ANR Robinson, V.S. Naipaul, Sir Arthur Lewis, Derek Walcott, Sylvia Wynter, Peter Minshall, George Padmore, and CLR James; and by the tetrad of cultural art forms spawned through resistance and

innovation: the steelpan, mas, calypso, and limbo (see Best, 2001 for an interesting take on these).

As for my research and writing, specifically, I have co-/theorized on: peace education as a field (Hantzopoulos & Williams, 2017); justice grounded leadership (Huskić et al., 2024), disrupting hierarchies in education (Williams et al., 2024a); education for revolutionary nonviolence (Williams et al., 2024b); Caribbean immigrant faculty experiences in the US academy (Louis et al., 2017); critically assessing forms of resistance in music education (Talbot & Williams, 2019); pluriversal rights education (Williams & Bermeo, 2020a, 2020b); decolonial praxes of care in schools (Williams, 2017); neocolonial warps in education (Williams, 2016a); resurgent hyper positivism in education (Williams, 2015a); neocolonial hegemonic masculinity (Williams, 2014); prefigurative maroonage (Williams, 2022); lingering colonialities (Williams, 2016b); and peaceableness as *raison d'être*, process and evaluation (Williams, 2015b).

As some of the aforementioned illustrates, I try to also introduce peace education postulates into other fields as well (such as critical music education); these interdisciplinary conversations are vital if we are to more fully tackle the polycrisis (of climate change, political polarization, and economic disruption from AI) facing the planet. However, I am not pessimistic about these crises, because my spiritual inheritances (from Laventille and all the way through my lineage) fortify my belief in living peace education, and not just teaching about it; part of this living of peace education involves helping others unlock their potential so that they too can heal and bloom. I use peace education as a conduit for healing, in communities, in my classroom, in relationships.

### CARRYING THE BATON TOGETHER: REVOLUTIONARY PEACE EDUCATION

I cannot predict where the field of peace education is heading, but I do sense in my spirit that I am on the trajectory that I am supposed to be on. The Global Campaign for Peace Education has been engaging in a project to map peace education globally; a partial impetus of this has been a concern with the porosity around defining and operationalizing the field. Personally, I do not share that concern (although, I am pleased that someone has taken up that task).

My intervention into peace education practice however is centered on youth work. The planet is on fire, and we are handing it as such to the next generation. In what I am calling a revolutionary peace education, I think it irresponsible to simply pass the baton of activism and advocacy to the next generation; I want to carry the baton *with* youth, so that there is intergenerational co-learning and changemaking. As such, I have been co-creating projects and opportunities with youth so that they can convene and organize, equipping them with skills necessary to transform this world.

A few examples include: (1) co-editing a book with students/former students, (2) co-creating and co-leading the first iteration of the Peace and Justice Transformative Leaders Fellowship, and (3) attempting to co-build a national consortium of undergraduate student peace programs, (4) including students in the core planning of an international peace research conference.

- 1) For a number of years, I have taught an undergraduate course called Education for Social Change. The central text is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, accompanied by a set of readings on critical pedagogy. In the course, we co-investigate the varied violences of educational systems and discuss ways to mitigate and transform them. I had concocted an idea for an edited book that would feature examples of students and their teachers working on social change projects. For this book they would have to co-write the chapter documenting the work they did together. However, I did not want to edit such a book by myself because that would not be in alignment with the ethos of the project. A student, Hana Huskić, and a former student, Christina Noto (both of whom took this course) agreed to co-edit this book with me, which was eventually published in 2024, entitled, *Disrupting Hierarchies in Education: Students and Teachers Collaborating for Social Change*. This project (an enactment of the belief that teachers are also students and students are also teachers, Freire, 1970) took three years because power sharing with undergraduates requires intentionality, vulnerability, patience, and multi-directional mentorship.
- 2) In 2021, I co-created and co-led the first iteration of the Peace and Justice Transformative Leaders Fellowship with Daniel Jones (who was then a current student of mine). Approximately 80 undergraduate students from across North America applied to this program, and we selected 11, who were offered an all-expenses-paid trip to

Gettysburg College for a week-long intensive workshop such as building and sustaining social movements; grant writing; conflict resolution etc. Then the fellows were tasked with conducting a social change project back on their respective campuses. Daniel and I wanted to model intergenerational leadership development.

- 3) In 2020, a team of students and myself were expecting about 100 undergraduate students from across North America to attend the inaugural CONAPP Conference at Gettysburg College. At this conference, CONAPP would have been officially launched (Consortium of North American Peace Programs). However, the COVID pandemic had greater ambitions; the conference was canceled. We had raised \$30,000 to cover some of the attendees' costs related to registration, accommodation, and meals; we did not want finances to preclude students from attending. The presentation model for this conference would have intentionally reflected the Freirean notion of praxis: reflection and action. Presentations would have been half-critical reflections on the students' ideas/research etc., and half discussion on how to operationalize some of those reflections. We had hoped to create a North American network of students advancing critical peace leadership. Although this didn't entirely come to fruition, the successful fundraising and the organizing we did seeded skill sets and ideas among those who were involved.
- 4) From 2021 to 2023, I was co-chair (along with IPRA's Secretary General Matt Meyer) of the planning committee for the 2023 International Peace Research Association (IPRA) conference. From the very start I involved undergraduate students at the very core of this organizing; they had a front row seat to conceptualizing the call for papers, fundraising for scholarships for students and junior scholars from the Global South, and creating the program, etc. In the end, their imprint was threaded throughout the entire conference.

These are the small ways in which I enact a revolutionary peace education: working alongside youth to activate their brilliant visions for this world.

One of the next steps I wish to focus on is the intersection of peace studies, peace education and the role of artificial intelligence, data justice and ethics. I think many are spooked by artificial intelligence; some colleagues are quietly concerned that AI might one day even replace them. I

am working on not feeding these fears. Human beings are constantly evolving, and just as we encourage students to constantly sharpen the tools in their toolkit, the same goes for the professors/teachers. I think we also have to be widening our skill sets as a way of modeling to our students (we actually should not be asking anything of students that we are not first willing to attempt ourselves). I want to look forward, not with fear, but with possibility. While I make no claims to being fearless (because I do possess my fair share of fears and anxieties), it is the possibilities of dreaming *and* enacting the world anew *with* students that invigorate me (and in fact sustain me through my journey with suicidal ideation).

### FULL CIRCLE: AN ODE TO LAVENTILLE, MY FIRST REVOLUTIONARY PEACE EDUCATOR

My work with students has blessed me with purpose. As a child growing up in Laventille, I could not have predicted how my life has unfolded. Of my birthplace, many have said “nothing good comes from Laventille”. With this in mind, Granny would tell me “you might own one school uniform, but you wash and iron them and walk with your head held high”. Despite being supremely under-resourced (materially), Granny and Mom taught me the meaning and internal locus of dignity. Laventille has a history of resistance, and still today, it resists being ‘tamed’ as governable and docile (see Foucault, 1995 for an explication of governmentality). Laventille’s fighting spirit infuses my focus on decolonization; in essence, Laventille made me into a radical peace educator long before I ever encountered the term. And while I believe that decolonization is an important endeavor, it must not be the only project to which the (neo) colonized must tend.

At an event in January 2024, “Lacouray in Lakou Wi: Conversations on TT Carnival”, coordinated by Attilah and Dara Springer, Performing Artist and Adjunct Lecturer Omari Ashby challenged the audience to stop focusing on decolonization because it means that we remain in a position of reacting, but to instead channel our energies on celebrating and amplifying our ancestral and extant wisdoms and strengths. In that moment, I was reminded of my own email signature that ends with “Stand tall in your beautiful skin!” As a revolutionary peace educator, I bring to bear remarkable ancestral power as I freedom-dream (Kelley, 2003) alongside my fellow ‘wretched of the Earth’ (Fanon, 2005).

## To/From/With My Unsung Educator, Laventille

for the gods of cement, so much spilled time (the wrong libation),  
 wrestling against my geminian self,  
 to resolve polarities: respectable or jammette,  
 raucous joy, that heals through its giddy light or  
 ensnaring depression, that can heal through its anchoring shadow.  
 but i am blossoming into the truth, that my life-force  
 is emergent from the pull and tug of these polarities.  
 Laventille, constantly escaping from neat binaries and hierarchies,  
 I sense you more fully now as my mind-body-spirit is unlearning how  
 to flinch...  
 (by hmaw)

## REFERENCES

- Benitez-Rojo, A. (1997). *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Duke University Press.
- Best, L. (2001). *Race, Class and Ethnicity: A Caribbean Interpretation*. The Third Annual Jagan Lecture, presented at York University on March 3, 2001.
- Brantmeier, E., & McKenna, M. (Eds.). (2020). *Pedagogy of Vulnerability*. IAP.
- Fanon, F. (2005). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.
- Ginwright, S. (2022). *The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves*. North Atlantic Books.
- Hantzopoulos, M., & Williams, H. M. A. (2017). *Peace Education as a Field*. In M. Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Springer Publishing.
- Huskić, H., Noto, C., & Williams, H. M. A. (2024). Editors' Reflection: We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting for: Justice-Grounded Leadership. In H. M. A. Williams, H. Huskić, & C. Noto (Eds.), *Disrupting Hierarchy: Students and Teachers Collaborating for Social Change*. Teachers College Press.
- Kelley, R. (2003). *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Beacon Press.
- Louis, D., Thompson, K., Smith, P., Williams, H. M. A., & Watson, J. (2017). Afro-Caribbean Immigrant Faculty Experiences in the American Academy: Voices of an Invisible Black Population. *The Urban Review*, 49(4), 668–691. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-0170414-0>
- Morgan, P. (2017). *Laventille: A Living Vibration*. Accessed January 5, 2024, from [https://sta.uwi.edu/uwitoday/archive/december\\_2017/article7.asp](https://sta.uwi.edu/uwitoday/archive/december_2017/article7.asp)

- Neundorf, A., & Smets, K. (2015, August 6). Political Socialization and the Making of Citizens. In *Oxford Handbook Topics in Politics* (online ed.). Oxford Academic. Accessed January 4, 2024, from <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxford/hbh/9780199935307.013.98>
- Talbot, B., & Williams, H. M. A. (2019). Critically Assessing Forms of Resistance in Music Education. In D. Elliott, M. Silverman, & G. McPherson (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical and Qualitative Perspectives on Assessment in Music Education* (pp. 82–100). Oxford University Press.
- The Trinidad & Tobago Guardian. (2019). *Laventille's Rich History*. Accessed January 5, 2024, from <https://www.guardian.co.tt/news/laventilles-rich-history-6.2.896087.692f5b1939>
- Walcott, D. (1965). *Laventille Poem from the Castaway and Other Poems*. Jonathan Cape Publishers.
- Williams, E. (1994). *Capitalism and Slavery*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Williams, H. M. A. (2013). Postcolonial Structural Violence: A Study of School Violence in Trinidad & Tobago. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 18(2), 39–64.
- Williams, H. M. A. (2014). “Pullin’ Rank”: School Violence and Neocolonial Hegemonic Masculinity. *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies: A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender & Feminism*, 8, 113–156. <https://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/december2014/index.asp#editorialpdf>
- Williams, H. M. A. (2015a). Fighting a Resurgent Hyper-Positivism in Education is Music to My Ears. *Action, Criticism, and Theory in Music Education*, 14(1), 19–43.
- Williams, H. M. A. (2015b). Peaceableness as Raison d’être, Process and Evaluation. In C. Del Felice, A. Karako, & A. Wisler (Eds.), *Peace Education Evaluation: Learning from experience and exploring Prospects* (pp. 3–18). Information Age Publishing.
- Williams, H. M. A. (2016a). A Neocolonial Warp of Outmoded Hierarchies, Curricula and Disciplinary Technologies in Trinidad’s Educational System. *Critical Studies in Education*, 60(1), 93–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/017508487.2016.1237982>
- Williams, H. M. A. (2016b). Lingerin’ Colonialities as Blockades to Peace Education: School Violence in Trinidad. In M. Bajaj & M. Hantzopoulos (Eds.), *Peace Education: International Perspectives* (pp. 141–156). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Williams, H. M. A. (2017). Teachers’ Nascent Praxes of Care: Potentially Decolonizing Approaches to School Violence in Trinidad. *Journal of Peace Education*, 14(1), 69–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2016.1245656>
- Williams, H. M. A. (2022). Afterword: Revolutionary Nonviolences as Prefigurative Maroonage. In M. Meyer & W. Marshall (Eds.), *Insurrectionary Uprisings: A Reader in Revolutionary Nonviolence & Decolonization* (pp. 383–386). Daraja Press.

- Williams, H. M. A. (2025). Decolonial Micro-Revolutions: A Brief Note on Peace Education in Trinidad and the United States. *Peace & Change: A Journal of Peace Research*, 50(1), 20–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12736>
- Williams, H. M. A., & Bermeo, M. J. (2020a). Co-Editor, Special Issue of *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, 4(1): Decolonizing Human Rights and Peace Education: Recognizing and Re-envisioning Radical Praxes. <https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol4/iss1/>
- Williams, H. M. A., & Bermeo, M. J. (2020b). A Decolonial Imperative: Pluriversal Rights Education. *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, 4(1) <https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol4/iss1/14/>
- Williams, H. M. A., Huskić, H., & Noto, C. (Eds.). (2024a). *Disrupting Hierarchy: Students and Teachers Collaborating for Social Change*. Teachers College Press.
- Williams, H. M. A., Noto, C., & Jones, D. (2024b). Education for Revolutionary Nonviolence. In H. M. A. Williams, H. Huskić, & C. Noto (Eds.), *Disrupting Hierarchy: Students and Teachers Collaborating for Social Change*. Teachers College Press.