
Please Call Me by My True Name: A Journey for Understanding

Ken Williams

Abstract

Who are you? Our identities are constantly evolving. They are complex and complicated and beautiful, like the tangled branches of a vine that intertwines. This poem is a critical journey into identity and the historical pieces that produce the whole. It chronicles the uprooting of a people, physically dispossessed and, worst, psychologically traumatized by personas invented by the oppressor to justify their displacement. It tells the tale of uncomfortable truths and personal triumphs, bearing witness to the cognitive dissonance that feeds inhumanity and violence. As painful as it can be, journeying through the darkness to reclaim your truth can be a liberatory step for healing and self-love. With this in mind, below I offer a response to the unrelenting encounters of anti-Black racism, the hypocrisy and hegemony in dominant discourses, the constant self-proving and emotional violence one must navigate as a means of survival, all too familiar with Canada's unique brand of subtle and polite racism. This poem represents an ancestral journey of personal rebirth, wherein I engage in a rediscovery of identity and the vestiges of various forms of oppression that reside within us, offering an ontological and epistemological journey into the self that provides a comprehensive understanding of who I am.

Keywords

journey, Africa, Caribbean, life, identity

I am the embodied spirit of my ancestors

I am the rich, red, soil of Nigeria, Cameroon, Benin, Togo, Mali –

Africa I am the offspring of West African Kings and Queens

I am the earth, the air, the fire, and the

water I am life

I am the slave master and the occupant of his ship

I am the offspring of abduction, displacement, and human
trafficking I am the ship, the bow, the stern, the rudder, the coal

I am life

I am the sun that dances and kisses the mountainous ridges of the

Caribbean I am the colonizer and the colonized

I am their supremacist thoughts that influenced my
upbringing

I am the product of the volcanic soil deep within my Caribbean

ancestors I am life

I am the plantation owner, the stevedore, the worker, and the field hand picking bananas

and cutting sugar cane

I am the offspring of hard-working resilient strong people

I am my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, my father, my brother, my
family I am my mother's tenderness and my father's fire and persistence

I am life

I am the pain I feel from living in this racist white supremacist

society I am of sound mind and ability to see it and not be

gaslighted by it

I am the friend to my pain, it guides me and protects me

I am what I am, a survivor, vulnerable, connected healthy thriver, take no bullshit social
justice fighter, disrupter, educator, program developer, researcher, storyteller, friend.

I am what I am, I am, I

am, I am life.

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Author Biography

Ken Williams has spent over a decade working with young people and adults at various stages of development in preventative interventions. He is a lifelong learner who appreciates studying and listening to people's life stories and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Social Work at York University. He also enjoys the visual and performing arts, music, technology, and travel. Ken is interested in learning more about how Black youth in or out of the justice system have experienced systemic harm and the relationship between healing and justice in this context. He is curious about the intersections of justice, well-being, and art and non-traditional approaches to promoting critical healing in the lives of Black youth.