

Will and Kate's Tour Hides the Real Problem With Jamaican Government

Great Britain's Prince William and his wife, Kate Middleton, recently concluded a tour of the Caribbean to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's platinum jubilee. Though the visit was slated to be a cordial event, William and Kate were greeted with hostility by Jamaican politicians and protesters who denounced Britain's involvement in the slave trade and colonialism.

International [outlets](#) ran stories describing the tour as misguided and [tone-deaf](#), while some commentators contended that the trip was orchestrated to highlight the relevance of the monarchy in a region where the demand for republican status is escalating. What many failed to appreciate, however, is that Jamaican officials were putting on a charade to obscure years of their own mismanagement.

Jamaica became independent in the 1960s, as did Singapore and Botswana, yet unlike those two [success stories](#), years of political ineptitude transformed Jamaica into an economic basket case. [Stories](#) in the local media are replete with cases of corruption. The problem is so pervasive that corruption and related crimes account for around [five percent](#) of gross domestic product (GDP). Government inefficiencies are also [misusing billions of taxpayer dollars](#).

To make matters worse, Jamaicans are victims of garrison politics. Unlike other Caribbean countries, Jamaican politicians bastardized the political system by creating tribal enclaves that provide permanent support to political parties. The explosion of this system has ignited a wave of

[crime, violence, and intimidation.](#)

“Unfortunately and sadly, it’s the case that some of our most serious criminal organisations are still well connected into the political process,” criminologist [Anthony Clayton said](#) in 2016. “You have this rather strange spectacle of low-level criminals, bag carriers, being arrested, and some of the most high-priced attorneys in the country turn up to defend them. ... The person who is being arrested never heard of that attorney in their life. Somebody is making that connection for them.”

Jamaicans have yet to receive compensation for the debilitating effects of such garrison politics or the inept management of the government, yet politicians and public intellectuals were quick to demand that William and Kate [apologize for slavery](#). The Advocates Network writes in an open letter to the British royals,

We are of the view that an apology for British crimes against humanity, including but not limited to, the exploitation of the indigenous people of Jamaica, the transatlantic trafficking of Africans, the enslavement of Africans, indentureship and colonisation is necessary to begin a process of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and compensation.

The hypocrisy on display is quite jarring, and serious students of history can see that this screed is just empty grandstanding. The fact is that slavery is an ancient African [institution](#) that actually withered under British [rule](#). In 1845, for example, the British compelled King Akitoye of Lagos to abolish the slave trade, and after many political interruptions, the two nations signed a treaty to that effect in 1852.

The British were so opposed to trafficking humans that they devoted energy to eliminating the slave trade on a global scale, Tom Lansford explains in [the Encyclopedia of Emancipation and Abolition in the Transatlantic World](#). In

order to accomplish this, the British had to make treaties with other slave-trading nations, and “through a treaty provision known as the ‘equipment clause,’ British ships could also stop and impound ships that were outfitted as slaving vessels.”

The fact is, colonialism was never unique to Europeans. Indeed, Africans also subjugated each other, the empires of [Asante](#) and [Benin](#) being classic examples of African imperialism. Furthermore, the British colonies are generally better [off today](#), at least financially, for their lingering attachment to Europe. It is worth noting that you do not see Jamaicans lobbying for the European Union and Britain to cease aid allocations to their country. As I explained in a recent article, the problem for Jamaica is not the legacy of British colonialism but that Jamaica veered off track during the [years](#) of Prime Minister Michael Manley’s administration. During that period, the economy contracted by 25 percent, and Manley’s anti-capitalist rhetoric forced elites to flee the country with resources and human capital.

It is troubling that activists who protested during William and Kate’s visit remained incognizant of the reality that without colonialism, Jamaica would not exist. The Taíno people, who settled in Jamaica prior to colonialism, were not on par with the Aztecs, Mayans, Incas, Olmecs, or other civilizations in the Americas. Therefore, when Jamaica was colonized by first the Spanish and then the British, the country became relatively richer.

Jamaican slaves were overwhelmingly taken from [West Africa](#), and this region, like [Africa](#) more broadly, lagged behind Europe before the transatlantic slave trade. Despite the brutality that slaves in Jamaica endured, the reality is that Jamaicans today are exposed to higher living standards than Africans because their ancestors were exported as slaves. Africans today have benefitted from [exposure](#) to European technology, yet they are grappling with an [environment](#) that is

less conducive to economic growth.

Instead of making their guests feel welcome, Jamaican officials sought to elevate Will and Kate's discomfort by raising controversial issues like reparations and acquiring republican status. Yet Jamaica is suffering from a chronic [implementation](#) deficit and has been talking about becoming a republic for years, so if the political establishment had the political will, this would have been done decades ago. Furthermore, online responses indicate that Jamaicans really don't care about their country's transition to republican status. Jamaica is still a basket case after attaining independence 60 years ago, so it's unlikely that becoming a republic would change anything.

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