

*“Reparations and 21st Century Development: The Silence
is Broken and We Speak to the World.”*

**16th ANNUAL ERIC WILLIAMS MEMORIAL
LECTURE**

Presented By

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REPARATORY JUSTICE

I am honoured tonight to have the opportunity to speak on the theme of Reparatory Justice for the people of African descent in the Caribbean, the wider Americas, and beyond.

It is arguably the most intense discourse within the global black community at the present time, and for good and compelling reasons.

Its importance, however, resonates far beyond the boundaries of these communities, and is currently generating considerable anxiety within all the major international centres of the Western world.

This honour, I wish to add, serves to connect my personal academic training as a lawyer with my current status and role as a Caribbean Prime Minister.

In both these roles, I have had to participate in the historical and contemporary debates that have given rise to the Caribbean Reparatory Justice Movement.

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

The historical evidence speaks to Europe's imperial strategy that resulted in genocidal consequences in respect of our native populations.

It also speaks to the human tragedy associated with the global chattel enslavement of over 20 million Africans, and the continuing legacies of harm and

suffering being experienced today by their descendants.

The Caribbean case is but a subset of the wider global experience, though the evidence also shows that it might have been the largest single destination and market, marginally ahead of Brazil, in respect of the transatlantic slave trade.

INTELLECTUAL LEADERSHIP

In comprehending this history and present day realities my training and education at the UWI was fundamentally shaped and determined by the intellectual and political leadership and legacy of the legendary Dr Eric Williams who we honour tonight in this memorial lecture.

It was the “doctor,” as he was called, in his role as pro-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies (UWI) who mandated that all students of the university, irrespective of their faculty should pass the level one course, “The History of the Caribbean”, in order to satisfy the rules and regulations in respect of graduation.

In my journey from student to Prime Minister, I was keenly aware of his lasting impact upon my academic and political development.

Speaking for my generation, he aroused our intellectual curiosity, fired our passion and ignited our imagination. He reminded us and all who came

to know him through his scholarship that black people, the world over, need to understand and interpret their history if they have to come to terms with their condition.

Tonight, I express that gratitude on my own behalf, as well as that of all my colleague Prime Ministers who have made this identical journey.

PRIOR STRUGGLES

I am here tonight, then, on account of the prior struggles of generations against slavery and colonialism, and the on-going opposition to the legacies of racism and marginalization of Afro-descendants.

As a people, we are all still navigating our way through the jet-stream of '*Crimes Against Humanity*' – as slave trading, genocide, and slavery have been defined by the United Nations.

In this regard, the evidence shows that the Caribbean Reparatory Justice Movement is as old as slavery itself.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that all the political actions we have taken as a people towards freedom in the past 300 years can be categorised as integral parts of this movement.

VALUE EXTRACTION

Recently, the young, bright scholar, Ta'Nehezi Coates, in an excellent essay published in the *Atlantic*

Magazine, argued that the most effective way in which to understand slavery is as a systematic process of “*value extraction*,” extraction in the sense that one section of the community, the free section, extracted wealth, labour, liberty, dignity, and everything else, from the enslaved community.

The entire reason and purpose of slavery, he argued, was to enable the free section of the community to extract wealth from enslaved Africans, so as to establish the economic, social, cultural and political power and privileges of the white community.

In the process of “*value extraction*” the black community was degraded, denied, and relegated to inter-generational impoverishment.

In this country, for example, other research has shown that for every dollar of value, the black community owns just six cents, even while making up about 14 per cent of the population.

REDRESS AND DETACHMENT

It is from these legacies, these states of persistent poverty, racial marginalization, and psychological abuse that the reparatory justice movement seeks redress and detachment.

It is equally important to note that there are communities all over the world that have been adversely affected by Europe's imperial expansion

and colonisation that are also seeking reparatory justice.

These communities exist in Africa, North, Central and South America, Australia and the Pacific, and in Asia, including parts of the Middle East. Together, it can be said, they constitute a global reparatory movement.

The general sentiments and expectations of these individual cases connect to the Caribbean movement, and resonate with our citizens who are growing in historical awareness and committed to issues of social justice.

It is interesting to note, in this regard, two very significant events of recent times:

First, just a year ago the Mau Mau freedom fighters of Kenya received reparatory justice from Great Britain, with a settlement in the sum of 20 million pounds sterling; and

Secondly, just last month, reparations of \$455 million was offered by the Supreme Court to an indigenous community in this country in settlement of historical crimes committed against them.

These awards suggest that the world has begun to understand and accept the idea of compensation, howsoever defined and expressed for historical wrongs and injustices, even when generations

separate the former oppressors and from the descendants of the oppressed.

DEMANDED BY THE STRONG

Of course, the most well-known cases of reparations involve the Jewish race, which received large sums of money from Germany due to the Holocaust. Jews from Eastern and Western Europe benefited. In fact, these reparations were critical and indispensable in the formation and development of the state of Israel.

As the point has been made before, reparations are not received by the weak. They are demanded by the strong. Reparations should not be seen as merely aid or grant assistance. It is not a gift. It is that which is owed to you by others for the harm and injury that

they have caused. They cannot be gained by silence and whispers. They are gained by speaking out loudly!

POLITICAL ORIGINS

In the Caribbean, the formal aspects of the legal and political origins of reparatory justice cases began in the 1820s.

The people of Haiti won a war of national liberation, declared a free nation in 1804, abolished slavery and slave trading and declared them crimes in their independence constitution of 1805.

In 1825, as citizens celebrated their 21st anniversary of nationhood, they were forced by the French led pro-slavery international community, to agree to pay

reparations of 90 million gold francs to former slavers in France.

This was the Caribbean's first engagement with slavery reparations. As in slavery, this first engagement with reparations resulted in a massive "value extraction" from blacks and the region.

SLAVE LABOUR

One should first appreciate how important slave labour was to Britain and its colonies. During the 18th century, a staggering six million Africans were enslaved and brought to the Americas, and well over forty percent of those were through British ships. By 1790, nearly one in five inhabitants of the United

States was of African descent, a proportion much higher than today.

It is said that the thirteen American colonies, eager to maintain its slaves in the south, were partly influenced to revolt against British dominion after the 1772 judgment by Lord Mansfield in the Somerset case; a judgment which proclaimed that there was no legal basis for slavery in Britain itself.

At the time, Britain and France depended heavily on their Caribbean colonies for sugar. Sugar in those days represented twenty percent of the value of all imports to Britain and in these terms was worth five times as much as tobacco. So indispensable was the sugar industry then that France had preferred to cede all of Quebec and the Maritime Provinces of Canada

to the British in exchange for its colony of Guadeloupe in the Treaty of Paris.

Sugar, coffee and tobacco became everyday European consumables and cotton became a very necessary input for a European textiles industry during Industrialisation.

A LOSING BATTLE

Meanwhile, in the English case, parliamentary abolitionists were fighting a losing battle for an Emancipation Bill that included reparations for the enslaved.

Led by Thomas Buxton, these political leaders argued that the enslaved had a right to compensation for the crimes committed against them.

They argued in the House of Commons that enslavers were criminals, human degraders, and thieves.

Parliament rejected this argument and in an astonishing abuse of political power offered 20 million pounds of reparations instead to the slave owners. In effect, these owners of slaves in the West Indies, some who themselves sat at the Palace of Westminster, were compensated the equivalent of US 70 billion dollars in today's currency. At that time, this pay-out represented about 40 percent of the national expenditure of the United Kingdom.

CAMPAIGN FOR COMPENSATION

Against this background, the enslaved of the Caribbean, as well as free blacks and the free coloured community, were developing their own campaign for compensation.

They were not satisfied with Emancipation that offered them no financial justice. This dissatisfaction became the basis of another hundred years of revolt and rebellion against colonialism that typified the Caribbean reality.

Rebellions of workers for social justice and economic fairness tore apart every Caribbean society. Freedom

without compensation was rejected as an unsustainable model.

Revolts in St Vincent in 1841, Jamaica in 1865, Barbados in 1876, to name a few, were about landlessness and poverty; anti-black racism and police brutality; and of course, the on-going process of political disenfranchisement.

This is a synopsis of the historical background to the development of the Caribbean Reparatory Justice Movement. At the same time similar developments were taking place in Africa, Australia, and India.

The massacre of peasants in India by British imperial troops in 1857 and the mass killings at Morant Bay in

Jamaica of former enslaved blacks in 1865, for example, bear striking similarities in terms of origins and attitudes, methods and mentalities.

A POWERFUL POLITICAL MESSAGE

In 1934, on the centenary of emancipation in British colonies, the great St Lucian-Caribbean Nobel Laureate in Economics, Sir Arthur Lewis, then a young scholar concerned with the endemic poverty of the region, rose in support of the Great Jamaican-Caribbean pan Africanist, Marcus Garvey, and wrote a definitive statement on the subject.

Lewis was commissioned by the London based Fabian society, a social justice organisation with the labour movement, to examine the condition of the

former enslaved community in the Caribbean and to report on their future prospects.

Lewis was a Caribbean-centred intellectual steeped in West Indian History. Using his expert training as a development economist, Lewis stated in his now famous little but powerful book, "*Labour in the West Indies*," that there was a matter yet to be confronted, discussed, and brought to maturity.

This matter, he wrote, was the two hundred years of unpaid slave labour extracted from Africans in the Caribbean by the British.

This extraction, he noted, was a pillar of Britain's economic success, its imperial military might, and global political supremacy.

He suggested that the issue of compensation for slavery should be acknowledged.

In this regard, he sent a powerful political message that the injustice would one day be the subject of national and international policy.

Caribbean workers, and the black community in general, rose up shortly thereafter against this very legacy.

CONSERVATIVE REFORMS

Between 1934 and 1938, workers were out in rebellions across the region, calling for redress and reparations.

The injustices of non-compensated emancipation had reached maturity on the centenary of the Emancipation Act, and public indignation was violently communicated to Britain.

In typical fashion, the British imperial state responded by sending out a Commission of Enquiry. This was led by Lord Moyne. It submitted its report in 1945, calling for conservative reforms that would alleviate the hardships and poverty of the masses.

But while bombs were being dropped worldwide in the terrible Second World War, one with the greatest short and long term intellectual impact was dropped

in London; that resonated all over the Caribbean and the colonised world.

It was the publication in 1944 of Dr Eric Williams' book, "*Capitalism and Slavery.*"

Its immediate impact shifted the conversation from the expectations of the Moyne Report and British reform to the matter of British debt to the region and black people in general.

Williams, in a nutshell, argued that Britain's industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries was made possible by the effective extraction of slave produced wealth within the regional and global economic and financial system under its control.

Furthermore, he argued, when Britain had extracted enough wealth from the enslaved and the Caribbean trade and productive system, it freed the blacks, continued their social and racial subjugation, and abandoned and ignored them for one hundred years.

PEOPLE WITHOUT RIGHTS & JUSTICE

The black rebellions of the 1930s, then, were the chickens coming home to roost. In other words, Britain owed its oppressed blacks, and the Caribbean people in general, reparatory justice.

But like colonized people everywhere, Caribbean blacks were not in a position to litigate their case.

They were within the Empire. They were a subject people without rights of self-representation. They were not yet an independent people. They were yet to receive justice.

As in India and Africa, they were under the rule of the imperial gun. Under such circumstances a reparatory justice programme was not a feasible proposition.

In fact, it was a political impossibility. Only formal independence from Britain could create the context for a meaningful reparatory justice programme.

Despite the colonial condition, however, there were those within the black community who were calling for reparations.

VANGUARD OF THE MOVEMENT

I refer especially to the brothers and sisters of the Rastafari. They were in the vanguard of the movement from the outset.

The Rastafari never recognised the right of Britain to rule them. They never accepted that they were subjects of an imperial monarch.

They stood their ground and during the 1940s and 1950s spoke and wrote about the enslavement of their ancestors, and the wounding and raping of Africa.

They demanded reparatory justice.

Their message was global. They spoke to all Africans and all colonised people.

They spoke of the universal demand for reparatory justice and insisted that all imperialists should pay up.

His Royal Highness Haile Selassie spoke at the UN, and declared what was long the creed and message of his followers:

“That until the rule of one nation by another nation is ended there shall be war; war in the East; war in the West, war in the north; and war in the south.”

SUBJUGATION OF AFRICA

You must appreciate the historical context of this Ethiopian head of state. He had, decades before, urged a change of practice in what was the continued “*Scramble for Africa*” being led by the European powers. Italy had once before tried to conquer Ethiopia as part of their conquests in the Horn of Africa, and in 1935 under fascist rule once again evidenced their colonial pursuits, even to the point of using chemical warfare.

The European subjugation of Africa was well concerted, with the 1885 Berlin Conference setting the stage for new economic powers such as united Germany to join in the already demarcated colonies created by Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium and Spain. Africa was seen as the new America, a continent that could be carved out, once again, for European settlers, and its mineral wealth and arable gain shipped out to continue the onward industrialisation of the Western world.

Within the ontology of Rastafari, then, the issue of reparatory justice was global, inclusive of all colonised people who had suffered imperial crimes.

PRESS FOR INDEPENDENCE

Against this background, the West Indian colonies opted to press for national independence from Britain.

The intensity with which this path was pursued suggested the enormity of desire to break free of all colonial links.

One by one, Caribbean colonies sought their independence acutely aware that they had been repeatedly betrayed by the imperial power.

This sense of betrayal was first in respect of the Emancipation Act of the 1830s, and then the

inadequate response contained within the Moyne Report that followed the labour unrest of the 1930s.

These were followed by the implicit “*mean spiritedness*” that seemed obvious in respect of Britain funding a viable Federation of the colonies as their best means to sustainable Independence.

Against these related but diverse events, Williams’ “Capitalism and Slavery” represented a clarion call for reparatory justice.

BRITISH CAPITALISM FLOURISHED

While post-war British-influenced capitalism flourished, the Caribbean post slavery world

crumbled further as blacks descended into greater poverty.

Britain had turned its back on any obligation towards a development plan for the Caribbean, the economic space it had colonised and from where it had extracted wealth for three centuries.

By then, the concept of empire changed dramatically. Politically, the British Empire was crumbling. Britain as a state was near bankrupt. However, its capitalism, language, wealth and influence had been transplanted or translated through new economic centres, with the United States being the world leader. Britain remained strongly tied to its wealth in the colonies, even while direct political control was no more. In fact, according to US Census data, up

until 1990, the UK remained one of the top-ten sources for migrants into the USA.

This strong socio-economic influence was reflected in countries that did not even have English as its first language. The countries of South America bear strong testimony to this. This influence is seen in who owns the businesses, who controls the levers of commerce and trade, and who owns the land.

And so, while in the aftermath of the second World War, Britain pressed the Americans for a Marshall Plan for Europe, an aggressive development operation to rebuild the western economy, and to restore economic viability for a new world order, it saw in the Caribbean no need for serious economic engagement.

What was left in the colonies of the Caribbean were islands that were originally built on forced manual labour now severely overpopulated, with little industry and little means of sustaining a decent quality of life. Their diets were heavily influenced by sugar on the one hand, as it was the primary product, and salt on the other, as most protein had to be imported. I leave you to conclude the current situation of chronic non-communicable diseases we currently face in the Caribbean today.

BREACH OF GOOD FAITH

Caribbean leaders, meanwhile, keen to sever constitutional links pressed on, even though it was

obvious to them that there was a breach of good faith in respect of the colonial legacy.

Errol Barrow of Barbados in a grand speech on the eve of national independence declared that he would not be found *“loitering on colonial premises after closing time.”*

Williams pushed for republican status as did Burnham in Guyana.

So determined they were to express an indigenous opinion on the sense of betrayal, they parted ways without a conversation about reparations.

But it was precisely this independence that would create the context for a renewal of the reparatory justice movement.

First, the newly independent countries had to settle themselves and build confidence and courage in order to call for a meaningful conversation with Britain about the past and present.

They understood that this was not an easy matter. Conversations with former oppressors are never easy. There was still considerable unease and uncertainty in the Caribbean in the aftermath of the Independence process.

Some colonies moved slowly, while others opted to remain within the colonial embrace.

For some, it was a matter of seeking the right time, given the inadequacy of resources with which to build a nation and to move forward confidently.

But all political leaders knew, instinctively, that Britain owed the region and people a settlement within the context of the history so scientifically presented by Williams in his book, *“Capitalism and Slavery.”*

COMMON CAUSE

As they watched the rebuilding of war torn Europe, they pondered upon the significance of Caribbean neglect.

It was not difficult to conclude that Europeans across the North Atlantic were looking after their kith and kin, and that within the context of their white supremacy, history and culture, the Caribbean was considered a subordinate space.

It was only a matter of time, however, before the second generation of postcolonial leaders, more engaged with civil society groups and organisations, would find common cause in respect of the movement for reparatory justice.

A more historically informed public, deeper social and political connections with other global movements, stronger bonds with African political processes, and the search for indigenous economic

and social development models, all contributed to the resurgence of intensity around reparatory justice.

POSITIONS OF CONSENSUS

By the time of the UN conference on race held in South Africa in 2001, the Caribbean was more organised to come to the table with coherent determination.

In the build- up to the conference, there were several preparatory meetings in which civil society and governments met to devise positions of consensus.

These meetings served as an incubator for the new ideas necessary for political mobilization on a regional and global scale.

The consensus reached at Durban among the Caribbean delegates in respect of the call for reparations was already hammered out across the region in consultation with the Latin American community.

From Cuba to Antigua; Barbados to Belize; and from Columbia to Chile, there was an agreement that the post slavery world should discuss and push for reparatory justice.

Only the exercise of raw political power from former slave owning nations could prevent formal conversations within the organs of the UN.

The effect of such an exercise of power drove the conversation into informal communities where they gained further strength and determination.

COLONIAL BAGGAGE

Everywhere in the post-colonial world, the conversation turned to the crippling injustices of these historical crimes that continue to cause considerable harm and suffering amongst African descendants.

The Caribbean world was left, as Professor Hilary Beckles has said, *“in an underdeveloped mess with no real chance of breaking free and rising on the basis of its own internal investments.”*

The crisis, he noted, exists on all fronts- the social, cultural, political, intellectual, as well as the economic.

Governments, Beckles concluded, soon discovered that the enormity of the colonial baggage required more than an 'aid' response from Britain, but calls for a structured programme of development cooperation rooted in the imperative of reparatory justice.

In this regard he called for a return to source.

For three decades, Caribbean development economists spoke about the cause of Caribbean poverty and dependency, and had identified

structural reasons for the inadequacy of development achievements.

It is undoubtedly true that the post-colonial Caribbean inherited from Britain infrastructures and superstructures inadequate for sustainable development.

We all know the circumstance of the 1960s; massive illiteracy, poor public health, primitive transport and communications, and disgraceful rural deprivation in terms of housing, water supply, electricity, and basic sanitation.

The struggle to uproot this scenario and modernise town and country has been heroic.

Some analysts have said that there has been a monumental failure.

IMPLOSION OF EFFORTS

But the truth is that governments have overextended themselves in order to clean up the colonial mess and bring development to the people of a region.

Across the postcolonial, post-slavery world the experiences have been the same. Legacies of slavery and colonialism have served as breaks upon development efforts, and subversive of projects and projections.

Indigenous efforts at development have been made less effective as a result of these legacies, resulting in social tension, low productivity, and political indifference in some instances.

Rising crime speaks to a sense of despair, as well as the inadequacy of systems to deliver upon public expectations.

One obvious result has been the implosion of efforts. This circumstance has triggered an inward search for explanations that focuses upon the inability of political leadership and corporate managers to drag the region out of poverty.

While the political leadership since independence must take its fair share of any such criticism, it remains unfair to place the full burden of less than satisfactory results upon its door step.

The paucity of productive factors inherited by each government in transition, when placed alongside the chronic nature of social and economic circumstances, clearly illustrates that sustainable development was going to be an enormous task, especially given global economic volatility and imperial indifference.

Conversations in metropolises about failed states in the Caribbean and elsewhere conceal the fact that developed countries were less than helpful, in fact, sometimes hostile, to indigenous efforts at economic and social development.

The defeat of the region's sugar and bananas industries by global conglomerates in collusion with leading industrial nations is an obvious example of this reality.

In all instances, the social and economic consequence has been a near institutionalisation of black poverty, and further marginalization of the region.

FORMALIZATION OF EFFORTS

Against this background the CARICOM nations have called for the formalization of efforts in having reparatory justice conversations at the highest levels.

In establishing a Regional Commission on Reparation, CARICOM is calling for a fuller understanding of the development drag upon the region resulting from the legacies of slavery, genocide and colonization.

Furthermore, it is calling for an engagement with former colonial powers in respect of the social and cultural legacies that have haunted and halted the normal development of black individuals, families and communities.

While we may have underestimated the deep impact of this legacy upon the consciousness of our people, the literary and intellectual work that details this damage cannot be set aside, but fully embraced in a professional fashion in search for solutions.

TEN POINT PLAN

The Ten Point Plan submitted by The CARICOM Reparations Commission sets out the case in a clear and precise manner. It has been endorsed by Heads of Governments.

It calls for:

- 1) Formal apology for these crimes, rather than statements of regret that have been offered thus far:
- 2) A funded repatriation programme for those who wish to return to Africa. Many African nations, such as Ghana, Gambia, Ethiopia, and Senegal, have agreed to be welcoming nations;

- 3) An indigenous peoples development programme;
- 4) A funded Public Health initiative; designed to halt especially the pandemic of hypertension and type 2 diabetes in the black community;
- 5) An illiteracy eradication programme; 70% of blacks were left illiterate by Britain in the 1960s.
- 6) Building of cultural institutions such as museums;
- 7) A funded Pan-African Knowledge Network to facilitate knowledge access to educational materials about Africa, especially for schools and the youth;
- 8) Technology transfers; the slave trade was a major transfer of technology, science and the arts from Africa to the West; this must now be reciprocated in order to build black nations that have arisen from the slave trade.

- 9) Psychological programmes for identity and esteem building;
- 10) Debt cancelation; Caribbean Governments have incurred fiscal debts in an effort to clean up the colonial mess; these debts should be cancelled.

This plan calls for a new phase in the history of development cooperation between the Caribbean and its former imperial wealth extractors. It is clear and consistent with global actions that have taken place in known reparatory justice cases.

It is a radical departure from the past and sets out a future path.

ON THE SAME SIDE

This moment in our history constitutes a coming together of governments and civil society on that which matters most, the future of the most vulnerable section of our communities, the indigenous people and the descendants of the enslaved Africans.

The struggle for reparatory justice has entered a new stage, one in which the governments and civic society are on the same side, though from time to time there might be differences in respect of strategies and methods.

The work of the Commission has gone global. Last month, its chairman Professor Beckles gave an address at the British House of Commons, as well as

to this country's Congressional Black Caucus in Washington.

Other members such as Professor Verene Shepherd have spoken in Africa and across Europe.

Everywhere, there is support for the Caribbean initiative. Here in the USA, a decision has been taken following Beckles' address to the Congressional Black Caucus to establish a National Reparations Commission, and to host the Caribbean Commission in New York in the very near future.

Brazil is working towards a similar objective, as are many African countries.

Together, these efforts represent the growing infrastructure of a global movement that will shape and determine the relations between nations during this century. It's an item whose time has come.

Nations will no longer be intimidated by fear of reprisal, but will do their very best to push forward in a manner suited to the time.

CARICOM has consistently said that it's a subject best discussed within the halls of intergovernmental diplomacy, and consistent with the political culture of multilateralism that shapes contemporary politics.

Reparatory justice is a process that seeks to repair and heal both the victim and the victimiser.

Both sides must strive for closure that is mutually empowering and respectful. This has been the position also of the CARICOM Commission.

In this regard, the movement for reparatory justice is poised to take the high moral and political ground.

And furthermore, it seeks a lasting and sustainable reconciliation of the world while uplifting those who have been the victims of the worst human rights abuses in modern history.

SUSTAINING HIS LEGACY

I believe that the good Dr Williams would have endorsed all of what I have said tonight.

Since he left us, we have seen an end to Apartheid in South Africa, and a country that then embraced reconciliation. We have seen an African American become the president of the United States of America, twice. Yet, when we look about the world and see continuation of injustice and prejudice towards people because of the colour of their skin, we know that the struggle is still very real; and it dictates the continuation of our best efforts in this twenty-first century.

There can be no psychological peace if there is no reconciliation with the history that made and shaped us.

Within this context, we cannot remain silent. I believe that this contribution to the sustaining the legacy of Eric Williams as a great scholar, Caribbean leader, humanist and visionary, sits well with the manner in which he has contributed in his own way towards global reparatory justice.

I thank you.