

Jamaica should ‘move on from painful legacy of slavery’, says Cameron

British prime minister ducks official calls for UK to apologise for its role in the slave trade or pay reparations

5 David Cameron has called for Jamaica and the UK to
 “move on” from the deep wounds caused by slavery
 but ducked official calls for Britain to apologise for its
 role or pay reparations. Speaking to the Caribbean
 country’s parliament, the prime minister struck a
 defiant note as he spoke of his pride that Britain had
 10 played a part in abolishing the “abhorrent” trade,
 without highlighting its historic involvement in the
 transfer of slaves from west Africa and ownership of
 slaves in the Caribbean. He called for the two
 countries to “move on from this painful legacy and
 15 continue to build for the future”.

His trade trip to Jamaica, the first for 14 years by a
 UK prime minister, has been overshadowed by the
 issue of slavery. Cameron was warmly received by a
 military band playing God Save the Queen on arrival at
 20 the airport and received a hug from the country’s prime
 minister, Portia Simpson Miller. However, during the
 trip, high-profile politicians and campaigners drew
 attention to a distant relative of Cameron’s, Gen Sir
 James Duff, who was compensated for losing 202
 25 Jamaican slaves in 1833 when the trade was
 abolished. He has also been pressed to “atone” for
 slavery personally and on behalf of the UK by Bert
 Samuels, a member of the National Reparations
 Commission, and Simpson Miller publicly raised the
 30 issue of compensation after their bilateral talks. In
 response, Cameron initially did not address the issue
 of reparations or an apology, telling UK media he was
 in the country to talk about trade and the future.

But speaking to the national parliament in Kingston,
 35 he made clear the UK wanted to draw a line under the
 legacy of slavery. “While there is indeed much to
 celebrate about our past, it would be wrong to do so
 while ignoring the most painful aspects of it – a period
 which should never be forgotten, and from which
 40 history has drawn the bitterest of lessons,” Cameron
 said. “Slavery was and is abhorrent in all its forms. It
 has no place whatsoever in any civilised society, and
 Britain is proud to have eventually led the way in its
 abolition. That the Caribbean has emerged from the
 45 long shadow it cast is testament to the resilience and
 spirit of its people. I acknowledge that these wounds
 run very deep indeed. But I do hope that, as friends
 who have gone through so much together since those
 darkest of times, we can move on from this painful
 50 legacy and continue to build for the future.”

Cameron said his reason for wanting to come
 to Jamaica was because of the need to
 strengthen the bonds between the UK and the
 Caribbean. A No 10 spokesman said Cameron
 told the Jamaican prime minister that the
 55 “longstanding position of the United Kingdom is
 that we do not believe reparations is the right
 approach”. During the trip, Cameron announced
 the UK would give £300m to the Caribbean to
 pay for infrastructure. The UK will also build a
 60 £25m prison in Jamaica using the foreign aid
 budget to house about 300 of the country’s
 citizens currently serving sentences in the UK.

He also pressed Caribbean countries to help
 stand up for the rights of small islands, including
 65 the Falklands, to enjoy the self-determination
 that has been “so hard won in the Caribbean”
 amid UK diplomatic fears that Argentina is
 gaining influence in the region. Some Jamaican
 MPs shook their heads vigorously as Cameron
 70 said he hoped the two countries could move on
 from slavery, although they loudly applauded his
 commitments on foreign aid. In her speech to
 introduce Cameron, Simpson Miller said there
 was more that united the UK and Jamaica than
 75 separates the two countries and invited him to
 holiday with his family on the island.

But she also underlined that there were
 differences on the “difficult issue of reparations”
 as they seek to “actively engage the UK on the
 80 matter”. Her comments on reparations provoked
 loud banging on the table by MPs in the
 parliament, which was far from full for Cameron’s
 speech. Andrew Holness, the Jamaican leader of
 the opposition, told the parliament that there
 85 “must be ways of repairing what is universally
 agreed to be the wrongs of the past”. In contrast
 to Cameron, the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn,
 who lived in Jamaica for two years in his youth,
 said the UK “should apologise for the slave trade
 90 and understand that the history of Jamaica is,
 yes, one of amazing joy and achievement since
 independence in 1962, but it’s also a history of
 the most gross exploitation of people”. Asked
 whether he thought the UK should pay
 95 reparations, Corbyn said: “We should be doing
 all we can to try and right the wrongs of the past
 – improve trade facilities and arrangements,
 improve support for Jamaica. That is, in a sense,
 a form of reparation, though I would be
 100 interested to hear what the proposals are and
 what the discussions are.” (858 words)

Annotations

- line 1: **to duck** – to avoid, to evade
- line 9: **defiant** – aggressive, challenging
- line 10: **abhorrent** – terrible, despicable
- line 26: **to atone** – to apologise
- line 29: **Portia Simpson Miller** – Jamaican Prime Minister
- line 34: **Kingston** – capital of Jamaica
- line 45: **to cast a long shadow** – to have a long-lasting effect
- line 45: **resilience** – capability to resist hardship
- line 54: **No. 10 Downing Street** – official residence and office of the British Prime Minister
- line 66: **Falkland Islands** – group of islands in the Atlantic Ocean, 300 km off Argentina
(British overseas territory with internal self-governance; Argentina has made frequent claims to the islands; an Argentine occupation of the main islands lead to the Falklands War in 1982, won by Britain two months later)

Tasks

1 Content/Comprehension

- a) Outline Cameron’s position on the British-Jamaican relationship in the past, the present and the future.
- b) Sum up the Jamaican position on the British-Jamaican relationship in the past, the present and the future.

2 Form/Analysis

Based on the excerpts from Cameron’s speech in lines 36–50, analyse his choice of words and expressions as he tries to convey his stance on the question of reparations.

3 Comment

Discuss Cameron’s visit from a Jamaican point of view.

4 Visuals

- a) Analyse the cartoon.
- b) Comment on the cartoon, taking into consideration the information gained from the text.



Erwartungshorizont

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1 Content/Comprehension

a) Outline Cameron's position on the British-Jamaican relationship in the past, the present and the future.

Cameron wants to establish a good relationship between Britain and Jamaica. He admits that Britain was entangled in slavery in Jamaica, however he tries to distance himself from "those darkest of times" (l. 48f), stressing proudly the leading role that the British played in abolishing slavery (ll. 41–44). He underlines that the British-Jamaican relationship has long been close (ll. 47–49) and that now is the time to strengthen it (ll. 52–54). According to the Prime Minister this can be achieved by leaving the "painful legacy" of slavery behind (l. 5, ll. 35f), ll. 49f, ll. 71f), by focussing on "trade and the future" (l. 33), and offering British foreign aid (ll. 58–63).

b) Sum up the Jamaican position on the British-Jamaican relationship in the past, the present and the future.

Jamaican politicians regard the present British-Jamaican relationship as quite good, stressing that common interests are greater than the differences (ll. 75f). One great difference though is the Jamaican stance on the slavery issue as Jamaicans point to the deep (long term) wounds caused by slavery, not to the role that Britain played in eventually abolishing slavery (ll. 21–30). Focussing on the British "wrongs of the past" (l. 87), many Jamaicans call for reparations instead of just "moving on" from "this painful legacy" as Cameron had suggested. They believe that a closer British-Jamaican relationship can be achieved in the future only if Britain pays compensations and atones for the cruelties committed in the past.

2 Form/Analysis

Based on the excerpts from Cameron's speech in lines 36–50, analyse his choice of words and expressions as he tries to convey his stance on the question of reparations.

Cameron carefully avoids directly addressing Britain's crucial role in the slave trade. Instead he refers to slavery with rather abstract expressions ("painful legacy", l. 50; "painful aspects", l. 38; "it", ll. 41, 43, 45). This is quite clever as it gives his opponents no ground on which they could base their claim for reparations. By using superlatives such as "bitterest of lessons" (l. 40) and "darkest of times" (l. 49) he stresses that he understands the pain of the Jamaicans, while distancing himself (and his country) from "those darkest of times" (ll. 48f). At the same time he praises the Jamaicans in formal, almost poetical language by stating "That the Caribbean has emerged from the long shadow it [slavery] cast is testament to the resilience and spirit of its people". (ll. 44–46). He probably hopes to ingratiate himself with his audience, as he does when he speaks of the Britain-Jamaican relationship as a long friendship (ll. 47–49). His wish to "move on" (l. 50) to create a better future implies that dealing with the past would mean the opposite of motion, i.e. stagnation.

3 Comment

Discuss Cameron's visit from a Jamaican point of view.

Cameron's visit to Jamaica reveals that Britain still behaves like an imperial power of the past. Cameron stubbornly refused to talk about Britain's crucial role in the slave trade that made Britain rich and powerful. He vaguely talked about "painful aspects" of Britain's past, but lauded Britain's role in the eventual abolition of slavery. This really is a joke – how can you be proud of abolishing a hellish institution that you had introduced and perfected in the first place? And how come Mr Cameron, as a descendant of slave owners himself, never mentioned the fact that the only ones ever receiving any compensation were not the slaves but former slave

owners?! Why does he refuse to talk about British guilt in the past? Why does he insist on moving from “this painful legacy” to talk about “trade and the future”? The answer is quite clear: Britain still regards its Empire as a leader in the civilisation of the world and she is afraid of having to pay for her past sins. Just imagine Britain had to pay even small compensations to all its former colonies! Although, as a Jamaican, I do think that Britain owes reparations to its former colonies, I can understand that Britain (as other former colonial powers) tries to avoid any form of atonement. I cannot understand, though, why Britain is still behaving like an imperial power of the past – “generously” paying 25 million pounds – in order to build prisons so that Britain can send “criminal” Jamaicans home! That really is a disgrace and it shows that Britain is neither willing nor able to treat its former colonies as equals. Therefore I would call Cameron’s visit to Jamaica a total failure as far as our hopes for a sincere, good relationship between our two countries are concerned.

4 Visuals

a) Analyse the cartoon.

The cartoon was created in response to Cameron’s visit to Jamaica. The cartoon depicts an ankle shackle with a huge black iron ball inscribed “SLAVERY”. A small person is chained to the ball. A closer look reveals that this person is the British Prime Minister David Cameron. He is raising his left hand, pointing, but in a general direction. He is talking, and his speech bubble reads “TIME TO MOVE ON”. The area at his feet is painted black with some red, too. The black colour could be interpreted as the shadow of the ball, and the red colour might refer to blood. The cartoon clearly makes fun of Cameron’s repeated call to forget the “painful legacy” of slavery and to move on instead. Both Cameron’s chain and the proportions of the cartoon (huge “ball” of slavery vs. small Cameron) show in an exaggerated way that Cameron (and Britain) cannot easily escape the past sins of slavery. Cameron’s statement “TIME TO MOVE ON” is ridiculed by this depiction, underlining the message that denying the past by not talking about it cannot be the solution in dealing with the issue of slavery.

b) Comment on the cartoon, taking into consideration the information gained from the text.

The cartoon succeeds in criticising and ridiculing Cameron’s attempt at escaping the issue of slavery by his insistence on “moving on” (and away from the past). His huge ankle shackle shows that there is no easy way out, that Britain cannot escape its past and that it really is time for Cameron and Britain to deal with the past. Cameron and Britain have to break those chains (maybe by paying reparations?) in order to become free; simple rhetoric (as seen in Cameron’s speech) is not the answer.