

To what extent does the continued reliance of the Caribbean on global powers inhibit decolonisation in the region?

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade propelled the Caribbean into the centre of the world economy; with the wealth that European nations boast today stemming from the process of slavery and political, cultural and economic domination of territories for decades thereafter. The result is an archipelago of islands that can be categorised as proportionally one of the most colonised regions in the world (Heuman, 2018). By the 21st century, most of the Caribbean region has become independent, however the very nature of this independence is a point of contention. My research aims to evaluate the meaning of 'independence' and 'the decolonised states' of the Caribbean, by looking specifically at its economies.

It was recently announced by the Caribbean Development Bank that the Caribbean could become the poorest region in the world by 2050. This represents a stark difference from The West Indies previously defined as the wealth-generating machine of the New World and the 'hub of the British Empire' (Beckles, 2013). However, Caribbean economies have become characterised as dependent on external economies, vulnerable to economic shocks and undiversified by nature. Indeed, the very survival of Caribbean economies exist in direct relation to the prosperity but also the whims of global powers that are invested in it. The overarching question I wish to pursue is the following: does the continued dependence and reliance on the former imperial and colonial powers, inhibit the Caribbean from achieving a fully decolonised state in practice, regardless of its political status?

The Caribbean economy heavily depends on travel and tourism, in fact it is the sub-region with the highest economic contribution from tourism in the world. This dependence is dangerous as when external factors affect the stream of tourists to the region, so too is the economic stability of the islands. West Indian states have become an area of interest for rising global powers, such as China, as a region prime for heavy economic investment. Due to the difficulties experienced in Caribbean economies, these states have welcomed such interest. This leads me to question not only the continuing dominance of former colonial powers but also what this newfound interest by this new power means for the Caribbean and full control over their economy. Additionally, the fate of Caribbean economies is often decided *on behalf* of them rather than *in their best interests* and perhaps represent the extent of neo-colonial control which still persists to this day (Joseph, 2015).

My project aims not to simply be a theoretical consideration of the concepts of 'decolonisation' and 'independence', but rather to probe the following question: how can West Indian economies regain full economic control and stand alone on the world stage? In order to do this, I will be considering the role of reparations: why are reparations important? How should they be administered so they do not become another tool of colonial control? Are they a sustainable mechanism to lead to lasting economic freedom in the region? The question of reparations has cropped up repeatedly after the spate of Caribbean states gaining their independence in the mid to late 20th century, however, often times it has been met with hollow 'statements of regret', rather than formal apologies and intangible economic compensation for the societies and peoples affected.

Whilst there have been analyses of the economic issues plaguing the Caribbean region, by prominent political economists such as Tennyson Joseph, a solution-orientated study which seeks to solve the problems and the methods by which to do so is lacking. Furthermore, although Caribbean scholars have set the scene outlining the case for reparations for the region, it is difficult to find work which sets out concrete methods for how reparations should be dispensed, which areas of Caribbean society they should be geared towards and how Caribbean states can avoid them being a form of neo-colonial control. I believe the integration of these two questions in one research study will create a project which seeks to answer the most pressing questions of Caribbean economics. In order to do this, will be drawing on the work by the economic historian Hilary McD. Beckles for the questions surrounding reparations, the work of CARICOM and the Caribbean Development Bank for fiscal figures and political economists such as Tennyson Joseph. I will also draw on sources in the field of International Relations and Geopolitics which concern the Caribbean region in particular. I will then seek to conduct interviews with policy-makers and activists in the region to analyse the feasibility of conclusions and what they would mean for the decolonisation effort. These interviews can take place either in the Caribbean or remotely. I will also look at what other countries reparations have been successfully administered and if those models are sustainable for Caribbean economic development.

A comprehensive study of Caribbean economies and the solutions needed to promote lasting prosperity of the region is needed so that the Caribbean can enjoy a full decolonised status, both in name and in practice.

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