
The Caribbean Reparation Movement and British Slavery Apologies

An Appraisal

GELIEN MATTHEWS

Abstract

For more than forty years, historians have historicized reparation demands for Europe's involvement in transatlantic slavery. This scholarship has highlighted, among other issues, slavery's devastating legacies. Despite the vigour of this research, little attention has been directed to European apologies for slavery. Yet, an interrogation of these apologies is vital considering the specific manner in which Caribbean descendants of the formerly enslaved have called upon former European enslavers to apologize. Consequently, this article, using as its main point of reference the Ten Point Plan of the Caribbean Reparation Justice Program (CRJP) launched in 2014, scrutinizes the five slavery apologies and statements of regret which the United Kingdom issued from 1999 to 2007.

In 2013, the fifteen countries that constitute the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) established the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC). The Chair of the CRC is History Professor and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Sir Hilary Beckles. A major objective of the CRC is to prepare the case for reparatory justice for the first peoples and African descended communities of the Caribbean whose ancestors suffered genocide, capture from Africa followed by enslavement in the Americas and racial apartheid. The major demands of the Caribbean architects of reparation include dialogue on the subject with former slaving countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Caribbean expectations on the subject encompass the offer of an explicit formal apology from each of the European governments formerly involved in colonization in the region, diplomatic assistance to facilitate repatriation to Africa, a development plan to rehabilitate survivors of the first peoples, Caribbean based cultural institutions to promote research on the crimes