

Jamaican Plan to Abandon Queen Raises Questions

Difficulty:

AVERAGE

Date of release:

Thursday 19th January 2012

Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about Jamaica. What status does the country currently have? What major change is being proposed? By whom? Why? Does everyone agree?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = What is Jamaica celebrating this year? Who has just come to power? What does that person intend doing? Why? Is everyone in agreement?

1. What is being celebrated in Jamaica? Who is the current head of state? Who wants this to change and why?
 - 50 years of independence from Britain.
 - Queen is still head of state.
 - Newly (re-)elected Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller says the "circle of independence" should be completed and Jamaica should detach itself from the Monarchy and have its own indigenous president.

What do you understand by the term "indigenous"?

2. What did we learn about the attitude of Jamaicans to the Monarchy?
 - Many see no point in keeping Queen as head of state because...
 - it doesn't give them an automatic right to British citizenship and...
 - there is still anger over Britain's role in the slave trade.
 - However, Jamaica has always been pro-Monarchy probably thanks to political infighting (Monarchy seen as more stable option).
 - Richard Fitzwilliams thinks that the majority vote would not be in favor of a republic, if they people were given the chance to vote on it (which they have not!)

Do you think there should be a referendum for Jamaicans on this subject? Why?/ Why not?

3. What did we learn about the Queen's rule and the Commonwealth?
 - Queen has been ruling for 60 years.
 - She is head of state of 16 other countries apart from Britain.
 - Commonwealth came about after the end of British Empire.
 - It had 53 members.
 - Most are former colonies.

- Monarchy is currently very popular in the Commonwealth, especially since the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (William and Kate).
- On the other hand the relevance of the Commonwealth in modern times is being questioned.
- Complaints that the Commonwealth (and by extension the Queen) has not been able to prevent human rights violations in its member states.

Do you think the Queen should/ could interfere in such matters?

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = The British Empire.

1. What do you know from history about the British Empire? If you don't know much, take a look here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire
Make a list of what you think are the most important/ interesting/ events and compare you list with a partner.
2. What, if any, were the advantages for countries that were part of the British Empire? (e.g. roads, railways, schools, universities, trade...)
3. What, if any, were the disadvantages for countries that were part of the British Empire? (e.g. people were repressed, forced to work as servants, suffered from racial discrimination...)
4. From what you know about any countries that are former British colonies, do you think they are better or worse off than they were under colonial rule? (e.g. Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Jamaica itself...) Why do you think this?

OR, Topic = The Royal Family.

1. Look at this website: <http://www.royal.gov.uk/>
Choose a topic or a member of the Royal Family and find out as much as you can about it/ them. Describe what you learn in your own words.
2. From what you have just learned, has your opinion on the Royal Family changed from what it was before? Why/ why not? Were you surprised by anything you learned?
3. The report says that the British Royal Family is the world's highest profile. Do you know of any other monarchies? Is your country a monarchy? Can you think of any advantages of a monarchy, compared to a republic?

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Slave Trade.

The report said one of the resentments still held by Jamaicans was over Britain's role in the slave trade.

1. What do you understand by the term "slave trade"? During what periods in history did this take place? Look at this website:
<https://www.freethe slaves.net/SSLPage.aspx?pid=303>
There is an awful lot of detail but what information in particular do you find surprising?

2. Read the two articles from the following websites. The first is from the Jamaican government's website and the second is from the BBC. Both talk about the bicentenary in 2007 of the abolition of the slave trade in the British West Indies.

<http://www.nlj.gov.jm/digitalcollections/slave-trade>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6494717.stm>

What comments do you have on what you have read?

In November 2006 Prime Minister Tony Blair said he felt "deep sorrow" for Britain's role in the slave trade.

In an article for the New Nation newspaper, the prime minister said it had been "profoundly shameful".

But Mr Blair stopped short of issuing a full apology, which some commentators have demanded.

A statement about this from Professor Rex Nettleford, vice- chancellor Emeritus at the University of the West Indies can be read here:

<http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20061212/news/news3.html>

This was followed on August 24, 2007 when Mayor Ken Livingstone of London, United Kingdom apologized publicly for Britain's role in colonial slave trade.

Do you believe that Jamaicans are right to still be angry with Britain?

3. Are there/ were there slaves in your country? Where do they/ did they come from? Why were they brought into the country? How was slavery abolished in your country? Are there any movements to abolish this practice?
4. What do you think of people who have servants nowadays? How is having servants the same as or different from having slaves?

(Interesting postscript:

According to studies done by anti-slavery groups, there are currently more slaves today than at any time in history! Three quarters are female and over half are children. It is believed that there are around 27 million people in slavery right now. Furthermore, this number does not include people who are not technically slaves but are in a form of servitude tantamount to slavery. This is sometimes called "unfree labor". The average slave today costs around \$90 – whereas in the past they cost upwards of \$40,000 (in today's money). A study done at Berkeley University estimates that there are around 10,000 slaves in the United States at the moment. [<http://listverse.com/2009/01/14/10-fascinating-facts-about-slavery/>])

Audioscript

"To the Most Honorable Portia Lucretia Simpson Miller..."

Jamaica is celebrating fifty years of independence from Britain. At her inaugural address, newly elected Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller said the anniversary is an opportunity for Jamaica.

"As we celebrate our achievements as an independent nation we need to complete the circle of independence. In this regard we will, therefore, initiate the process of our detachment from the Monarchy, from the Monarchy to become a republic with our own indigenous president as head of state."

Analysts say many Jamaicans see little point in retaining the Queen as head of state; it gives them no automatic right to British citizenship. There is lingering anger over Britain's role in the slave trade.

Richard Fitzwilliams is an expert on the Monarchy. He says the Jamaican prime minister's announcement was met with surprise in Britain.

"I mean, the republican movement in the Caribbean, and one thinks of Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, there are precedents for it. Equally, Jamaica has a history of being very pro-Monarchy. I suspect that this is something to do with the political infighting there. I would be surprised if it was actually put to the people, that you would be definitely sure that you would get a vote for a republic."

The Queen is celebrating her own anniversary this year. The Diamond Jubilee will mark her sixty years on the throne. Along with Britain, the Monarch is the head of state of sixteen other nations, known as realms. The position is purely ceremonial.

She's also head of the Commonwealth, an organization that rose from the ashes of Britain's Empire. Most of its fifty-three member countries are former colonies like Uganda, where the Queen visited in 2007.

Royal expert Richard Fitzwilliams says last year's wedding between Prince William and Catherine Middleton, gave the Monarchy's image a boost.

"The British Royal Family is the world's most high profile. I do think that in the Commonwealth, where the Queen is head of sixteen realms, the Monarchy is undoubtedly at one of its peaks when it comes to popularity."

But questions are being raised over the Commonwealth's relevance. Ajit Prakash is an Indian human rights activist and former chief justice of the Delhi High Court.

"It must become proactive. (...) There is a need to (re)vitalize the Commonwealth countries. I mean (...) that regime today has really not able* to stop the human rights violations in several countries which are members of the Commonwealth."

To mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, members of the Royal Family will tour Commonwealth countries later this year. Prince Harry will visit Jamaica. By then, the country could well be on its way to abandoning his grandmother as its head of state.

Henry Ridgwell for VOA News, London

* the speaker should say *has not really been able*