

# THE JAMAICAN DYSTOPIA

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TOURISM TROPICALIZATION AND THE ARCHITECTURAL  
IMAGE  
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A quick overview of Jamaica's history. Skillsphere Education. (2019, February 20). Retrieved December 15, 2021, from <https://www.skillsphere.org/global-jigyasa/jamaica-from-past-to-present/>

Figure 1: The image above depicts the impact the British had over the Jamaican land. As they claimed the land and its native people, the British began to impose their values and way of life onto the preexisting order present.

Likewise other countries within the Caribbean, Jamaica is infamous for the beautiful landscape that it offers. As one of the top vacation destinations in the world, Jamaica is home to many beaches and resorts and makes for the perfect tourist destination. This island is often depicted as a picturesque environment that provides great culture, plentiful resources, moments of leisure and treasurable experiences through media, film, and literature. Sure this depiction holds truth for temporary visitors, however many fail to acknowledge how the portrayal and upkeep of such fabricated environment affects the natives of the island. One might assume the overall success within the tourism industry of Jamaica is a direct reflection of the island in its entirety. The opportunities and revenue that result from the surge of tourism over the years would presume the equivalent success and wealth through the entirety of the island. However, dating decades back, it is a recurring theme that Jamaica's fortune and fantasy reputation has failed to benefit its local communities and native residents. Jamaica remains as one of the poorest and underdevelopment countries within the Caribbean Islands. How could that be with such high tourism rates and heavy cruise commotion? With that, one must dissect how the romanticization and glorification of such an island directly contradicts those native to the land.

## HISTORY

Jamaica was initially obtained from the Native Americans by the British in 1655. Due to the vast production of sugar, Jamaica was of great significance to the British colonies. With that, European traders were heavily reliant on the labor of imported slaves from West Africa. As victims of enslavement, these workers were severely mistreated and overworked for the continuous production of sugar, the newly established commodity of the British empire.

Ultimately, slave trade was abolished in 1807 and their

emancipation was won in 1838. With the end of slavery coincided the collapse of the plantation system. Although the industry slowed down, it did not come to a complete stop. As sugar was still in demand and an effective business, those eager to work migrated to Jamaica for opportunities of labor. Both Chinese and Indian workers migrated to Jamaica. Along with providing employment, Jamaica was also sought out as an escape from other countries. People from middle eastern countries, including Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon began to migrate to Jamaica in search for political and religious freedom, and a better way of life. Such a diverse community birthed the Jamaican motto: "Out of many, one people." Such phrase speaks to Jamaica's ambiguous culture and obscure heritage.

## EMIGRATION

Jamaica quickly became a melting pot of different ethnicities and backgrounds. However, the migration of outside people, essentially, sparked the emigration of those native to the land. Due to lack of opportunities, Jamaicans native to the land began to move to countries including the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada in hopes for more employment opportunities. This process is known as the Jamaican Diaspora, or the Jamaican movement. One or more members from a household typically made sacrifices to move abroad in hopes to better support their family. This movement resulted in approximately 637,000 Jamaicans in the United States and 150,000 in the United Kingdom in 2008 and 123,500 Jamaicans in Canada in 2006. These statistics, although recently dated, serve as proof of the amount of Jamaicans who initially emigrated from their home lands. Unable to prosper in the comfort of their country of origin, they were obligated to relocate.

## BRAIN DRAIN

With the Jamaican population being so high in other countries outside of the Caribbean, it's evident that many Jamaicans didn't return to their homeland. Many that emigrated found great success and opportunities within these countries that were further developed. This exposure contributed to the brain drain of the country, as Jamaica is now losing those essential to the progression of the country to emigration. In turn, this brain drain



Arslanian, S. (2014, June 10). Exploring Jamaican architecture: Colonial, tropical and contemporary. Culture Trip. Retrieved December 14, 2021, from <https://theculturetrip.com/caribbean/jamaica/articles/exploring-jamaican-architecture-colonial-tropical-and-contemporary/>

Figure 2: This image showcases the Post Colonial Architecture prevalent in Jamaican developments. This style in specific is known as Jamaican Georgian Architecture

negatively impacts the local government, as the failure to return hurt the healthcare and education system.

## POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM

As immigration and emigration play a huge role in Jamaica's history, it is important to analyze the relationship between both the people and the given environment. Postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizes the correlation between human history and the history of natural landscapes as the human experience is greatly influenced by the environment they occupy. In this case, it's the concept that once the native Jamaican environment was invaded and manipulated by the Europeans there then was a growing disconnect between Jamaicans and their native territory. As the British began to superimpose their specific lifestyle and values onto a previously defined territory, the natives to the land naturally began to surrender their emotional and physical association to the environment as a form of rejection and refusal to the unfamiliar implementations. For example, when initially obtained, the British superimposed their agriculture and deped the existing crops that they deemed unnecessary or worthless. Along with agriculture, they brought stock and disease that ultimately wiped out what had already been established. Furthermore, with the development of architecture, there are many nods towards colonial

architecture that are found in Jamaica today. The depletion of the standing, authentic, architecture articulations in order to impose Colonial construction with contemporary ideas further separates Jamaicans from their original environment. Detected in all forms of architecture including, commercial, religious, educational, and a range of housing types, British contemporary elements such as wrap around verandas, jalousies and sash windows were utilized to catered towards the conditions of a tropical environment. Although modern British architecture was altered to better fit the tropical environment, elements such as balustrades, lattices, and pineapple roof designs were still found throughout the budding developments. With that, this disconnect establishes cultural displacement and alienation. As one native to the land no longer recognizes the place they once called home, they eventually began to disassociate with reduction to the emotional and physical ties they once had to the land.

## ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Regardless of the many manipulations that have been made to plantations and agriculture in the past, Jamaica has always been appreciated for the tropical atmosphere its natural landscape provides. In relation to tourism, the tropical landscape serves as the main appeal. For the smooth blue ocean water, the warm smooth sand on the beaches and the beautiful tropical trees, Jamaica makes for the perfect vacation getaway. Interesting enough, Jamaica suffers from great deforestation due to both agriculture expansion and tourism, despite the alluring qualities of such greenery. The absurd irony sits in the fact that the main element that attracts people to the land is the same natural element that is being demolished, essential for the wellbeing of the islands permanent inhabitants. This is where environmental racism comes into play. The sacrifice of such an imperative natural element, such a trees, due to the prioritization of tourism and meeting the demands of the travelers.

The reduction of trees in such an environment holds immense detrimental effects. The lack of trees makes the local communities more susceptible to natural disasters which have the potential to result in the destruction of infrastructure, homelessness and death. The manipulation of vegetation also impacts the soil. Accelerated soil erosion causes downstream sedimentation, flooding, and degradation of coral reefs which are essential elements of ocean life.

In addition to the deterioration of local natural resources in response to tourism supremacy, mining is another factor that contributes to the environmental neglect of the local communities and the built environment. Bauxite mining is the island's second largest foreign exchange. This industry is one of the main businesses responsible for deforestation in Jamaica. As bauxite, the world's main source of aluminum and gallium, is extracted by open cast mining, the process of extraction involves the removal of both topsoil and vegetation. This process also requires access roads into the forest, of which construction of the roads further contribute to deforestation and the destruction of the natural resources necessary for the wellbeing of local residents.

## CURRENT EFFORTS



Reaping what they sow, one Jamaican community is harvesting peace and produce. U.S. Agency for International Development. (2021, June 10). Retrieved December 13, 2021, from <https://www.usaid.gov/jamaica/news/reaping-what-they-sow-one-jamaican-community-harvesting-peace-and-produce>

Figure 3: Initiatives towards the restoration of the built environment have been emerged within the education systems to ensure the youth participate in the positive movement.

Sure tourism is a great industry that allows others to engage in new cultures and experience new environments, but at what cost? Jamaica's past history as well as more current events proves evident that Jamaica's thriving industry tends to abandon both the people and the given built environment. Linking back to the British reign in Jamaica, those native to the land have continuously grown to detach and disengage from their land due to alterations that are consequential with the wave of foreigners.

As an accumulation of occurrences have contributed to the neglect of Jamaicans, there are current movements working towards the rehabilitation of the lifestyle and resources provided for those who call Jamaica home. Evolution of organizations that have the common goal of restoring the local communities. These Organizations include the Migration and Adaptation to Climate Change Organization (MACC), the Global Green grants fund, and the Jamaica Adaptation Fund Programme whose focus is, enhancing the resilience of the agricultural sector and coastal areas to protect livelihoods and improve food security. Such organizations focus on developing knowledge of the issues at hand as well as

raise funds to address poverty, unemployment, climate change, access to clean water, and waste management within local communities. The Jamaica Adaptation Fund Programme, in particular, recently embarked on a \$5.3 million project to build the country's resilience to climate change. with specific concentration on physical assets within local towns, coastal and riverline flooding, deforestation, and retreat of the coastline. Furthermore, a Jamaica Diaspora Foundation and Jamaica Diaspora Advisory Board has been established with the goal of reinforcing support systems that link those abroad to those who are still on the island.

### IMPORTANCE OF REHABILITATION

Often viewed as an utopian tropical getaway, Jamaica's native people are generally misrepresented and overlooked. Although such extensive island has plenty to offer for its tourist visitors, the built environment no longer provides for Jamaica's permanent residents. Due to manipulation alterations, and modifications made to the natural built environment in attempts to maintain the image of tourist gaze and appeal, Jamaica's restored implications fails to support the natives and is unsuccessful in protecting them from the money hungry industry.



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Figure 4: Pictured is the master plan of an affordable housing project established in the late 1950s. Such project serves as an example of the efforts being made to restore the wellbeing of native Jamaicans and reclaim affordability of local livelihood.

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