

Behind the smiles and glamour, discontent over the Cambridges' Caribbean tour was unmissable

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's eight-day tour featured protests, cancelled events and controversial images

By

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IN THE BAHAMAS

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The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge arrive for a visit of Sybil Strachan Primary School in Nassau, Bahamas CREDIT: Samir Hussein/WireImage

There have been claims that it was “tone deaf”, a “disaster” even. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's eight-day tour of the Caribbean was certainly not without controversy.

There were protests, calls for [reparations](#), and an awkward face-to-face encounter with a prime minister who all but told them the monarchy was no longer for his country.

Yet Royal tours are curious beasts, often perceived from afar in a very different light to those travelling alongside them.

Photographs of the couple touching the fingers of Jamaican children through a wire fence proved a case in point.

Optics are everything and this was not a good look. The images triggered a social media storm amid claims it looked like a “white saviour parody” and was an “embarrassing farce”. It was undoubtedly a PR fail.



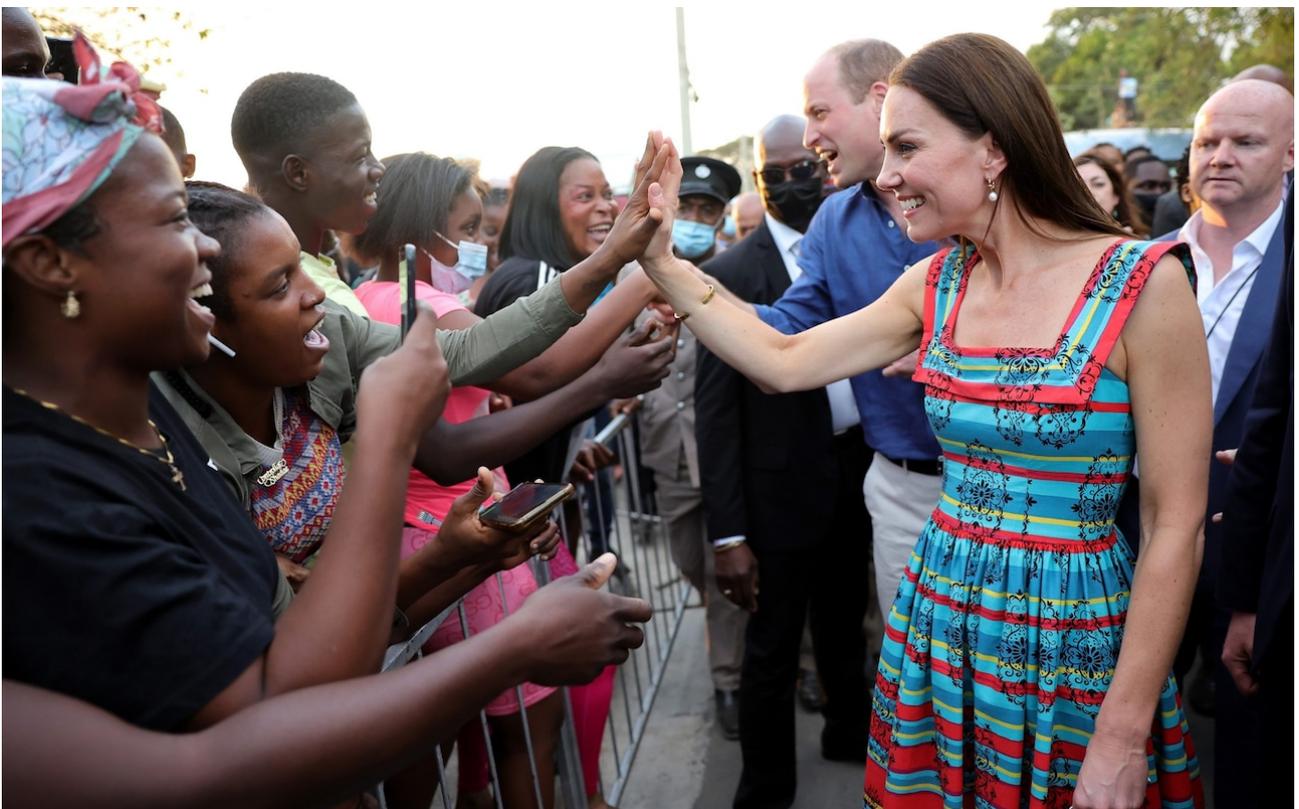
One of the pictures that sparked a social media storm

But step back slightly and you see that it was here, in Trench Town, that the royals received their most raucous welcome. It was vibrant, colourful, loud.

Hundreds lined the streets, stood on rooftops and banged drums.

By straying over to the perimeter fence of a football field to greet the crowds chanting their names, the Cambridges inadvertently walked into controversy.

The cameras clicked away and the photographs were online within minutes, the broader context immediately lost.



Hundreds lined the streets to greet the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on their visit to Trench Town in Jamaica CREDIT: Chris Jackson/Getty Images Europe



Raheem Sterling interacts with the crowds ahead of the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in Trench Town CREDIT: Karwai Tang/WireImage

The Duke and Duchess may represent an archaic institution which many on these island nations believe no longer represents them.

Yet they were met throughout this tour of Belize, Jamaica and the Bahamas with open arms.

It had all the ingredients of a successful Royal tour; high fives with school children, dancing and maracas, a chocolate farm, Mayan archeological ruins and a sailing regatta.



Duke and Duchess of Cambridge listen to Belize's foreign minister during a special reception at the Mayan ruins of Cahal Pech CREDIT: REUTERS



The Duchess of Cambridge speaks with guests at an event hosted by the Governor General of Belize Froyla Tzalam CREDIT: REUTERS

Everyone they encountered, bar none, gushed afterwards about the honour, the privilege.

But for all the smiles, the glamour, the pomp and ceremony, it was impossible to avoid the undercurrent of discontent, the feeling that this may well be the last Royal tour of its kind to this beautiful part of the world.

It started badly, with their [first major engagement in Belize cancelled](#) at the last minute due to a protest over indigenous land rights. Unfortunately, it involved Flora and Fauna International, a charity of which the Duke is patron.

Perhaps, it could have been dealt with differently. The Royals could have met the protesters, acknowledged the issues.

Instead, the volte-face shone a spotlight on the row, prompting more questions than it answered. In many ways, the clunky way it was handled set the tone for the days ahead.

Visits to Hopkins, a coastal village in Indian Creek, Caracol – an ancient Mayan archaeological site in the Chiquibul Forest - and a British Army Training Support Unit in the jungle, went off without a hitch.

But then it was off to Jamaica where protesters demanded an apology from the royal couple, accusing the Queen of perpetuating “the greatest human rights tragedy in history”.



People calling for slavery reparations protest outside the entrance of the British High Commission during the Duke and Duchess' visit to Jamaica CREDIT: RICARDO MAKYNA/AFP

The royals had barely landed when prime minister Andrew Holness told them, to their faces, that [the island nation would sever ties](#) with the British monarchy as soon as possible.

“We are very very happy to have you and I hope you will have seen the warm welcome of the people,” he said.

“Jamaica is, as you can see, a country that is very proud of its history, very proud of what we have achieved and we are moving on... we intend to attain our developing goals and to fulfil our true ambitions as an independent, developed, prosperous country.”



Andrew Holness, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, told Prince William that the country intended to attain its independence CREDIT: Getty Images South America

The couple did not flinch. They knew this tour would prompt debate and in a speech the following night, the Duke carefully addressed the elephant in the room.

“I want to express [my profound sorrow](#),” he told assembled dignitaries at a black tie dinner.

“Slavery was abhorrent. And it should never have happened.”



The Duke also made a point of celebrating the contribution the Windrush Generation have made to Britain in the years since the Second World War.

The delicate speech, which the Duke had pored over for many hours, served as a reminder of the complex issues at stake. It went down well. But for others, it was not enough.

Professor Verene Shepherd, Jamaica's leading voice for reparation, said the statement did not go beyond sentiments voiced by other British leaders.

"I'm sure he got instructions – 'Please don't say 'apology', don't use that word, because you're going to commit the British state to reparation,'" she said.

For many, the following day's [homage to the Queen](#) in the form of a ride in her ceremonial Land Rover at a military commissioning parade struck yet another off-note by reinforcing colonial values.

The images of the Duke, in the white tropical dress of the Blues and Royals, and the Duchess resplendent in cream, were likened to "a relic of the past and could have been taken in the 1800s".



The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge attend the Caribbean Military Academy commissioning parade in Kingston, Jamaica CREDIT: RICARDO MAKYN/AFP

Prof Rosalea Hamilton, a civil rights campaigner and founding director of the Institute of Law and Economics in Jamaica, said: “They signify this young generation is continuing the monarchical traditions of holding one race superior and another inferior.”

The four independent Caribbean Commonwealth countries that have already become republics - Barbados, Dominica, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago - were not required to hold referendums.

The constitutions of the eight remaining monarchies, including Jamaica, require referenda to remove the Queen as head of state.

Timelines for such votes have not yet been given but despite the warm welcome the Royals received on the streets, it is thought that most feel the time has come to move forward and make that change.

The Duke and Duchess fly home from the Bahamas on Saturday and there will undoubtedly be many debrief sessions in the depths of Kensington Palace over the coming days.



The Duchess of Cambridge onboard a boat from the Bahamas Platinum Jubilee Sailing Regatta at Montagu Bay CREDIT: Jane Barlow/PA



The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge meet Jamaica's national bobsleigh team during a visit to Trench Town in Jamaica CREDIT: REUTERS

One aide described the negative coverage as “really unfair” and in many ways, they were right. Those who encountered the couple in all three countries were dazzled by the inimitable sprinkling of royal magic they brought.

Yet the issues they represent remain.

Chris Stokes, 58, an original member of the “Cool Runnings” 1988 Olympic bobsleigh team, who met the couple in Trench Town, summed up the general feeling, noting that regardless of the past, Jamaica would always shower visitors with affection.

“Things have happened that can’t be undone, great inhumanities by African slave traders,” he said.

“There are issues in our own country that we have to resolve. But the relevant question is what do I do tomorrow? What kind of interaction do we want with William and the Princess? How do we relate to each other going forward?”