



## Cluelessness, cock-ups and the end of established privilege?

*William and Kate's tone-deaf tour of the Caribbean signalled how oblivious the royals are to a changing world, and how necessary a republic has become.*



*The Duchess Of Cambridge Waves At Children During A Visit Trench Town, Jamaica, March 2022*

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APR 01, 2022

I don't follow the royals. In fact, I do everything I can to avoid them. No to Diana's fairytale wedding. No to the Megxit interview with Oprah. And no to Prince Andrew's claims about sweat. We are what we pay attention to and they don't interest me, so I click away.

But that changed last week, in the final days of William and Kate's week-long tour of the Caribbean, when the tone-deaf nature of both the ceremonial plans and impromptu actions of the royal couple gave hope to Republicans in Jamaica and in Australia.

Much has been made of the shots of the royals glad-handing Black spectators through what looked like a cage but was in fact fencing surrounding a football pitch. But my view is that the staged shots of the royal couple in all white, standing stiffly in the same ceremonial Land Rover that Elizabeth and Philip had used to work the crowds in 1962, were worse. They showed, in a way the impromptu footage did not, how oblivious the royals and those surrounding them are about the sea change in attitudes about race and accountability that have swept the globe in the past 60 years.

While the young royals had a chance to start healing the wounds of slavery caused by their ancestors who financially benefitted, they flubbed it. They flubbed it visually by the white saviour parody of the Land Rover escapade, and by having Kate parade around in stunning outfits that looked like they cost every penny of her £35,000 “budget”, which didn’t include the cost of the priceless jewellery she borrowed from the Queen.

They — or more accurately William — flubbed it verbally too. This was his chance to set the record straight by doing more than just referencing slavery, but acknowledging and apologising for the part his ancestor’s played in in trafficking 600,000 Africans to Jamaica between 1655 and 1809 and benefitting financially from their slave labour. A benefit that, as Kate’s revolving finery made plain, continues today.

No wonder Barbados has become a republic and Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness has been forthright about his intention to do the same, saying as such to William’s face during the tour.

If Holness succeeds, this will leave just 13 countries who have the Queen as their monarch and head of state. In contrast, over the past 70 years, 41, or three times that, have become republics. Barbados was the last to step up, at the end of 2021.

Why does any of this matter?

Australian monarchists are fond of saying it doesn’t, though the tenacity of their resistance to getting on board with a popularly supported change belies this. Certainly, republics are more democratic, giving the people rather than an institution of inherited privilege the final say in determining our head of state. The symbolic change matters, too. I for one will drop to my knees in thanks on the day I never have to hear cringe-worthy terms like “Queen of Australia” and “part of the realm” again.

Indeed, instead of ignoring the royal cluelessness and cock-ups that litter the news cycle most days, I’ve decided to embrace them. Because each reminds us of how far we have come as a global community in accepting the harm of enslavement, trafficking and racism, and how it can’t be long before the reign of established privilege — whether it lives in a castle or socialises at the Australian Club — will end.