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IN DEFENSE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

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Would the world have been better off if there had never been a British Empire? Would North America have been better off if it was never colonized by the British?

The common belief is that the British colonial period was a stain on human history, and some from former British colonies still blame their lack of progress on British colonialism (despite having been free for at least a half of century). Enclosed is a table that lists most of the areas of the globe that the British at one time ruled. (Some non-listed places are tiny islands or have been incorporated into states that were never ruled by Britain or by some other country.)

| CURRENT BRITISH DEPENDENCIES & TERRITORIES | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| JURISDICTION | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS |
| Isle of Man | #10* | #9* | 83,100 (2007) |
| The Bailiwick of Jersey | #10* | #9* | 57,000 (2006) |
| The Bailiwick of Guernsey | #10* | #9* | 52,300 (2014) |
| Anguilla | #10* | #9* | 12,200 (2008) |
| Bermuda | #10* | #9* | 85,700 (2013) |
| British Virgin Islands | #10* | #9* | 42,300 (2010) |
| Cayman Islands | #10* | #9* | 55,808 (2015) |
| Falkland Islands | #10* | #9* | 55,400 (2002) |
| Gibraltar | #10* | #9* | 43,000 (2008) |
| Turks and Caicos Islands | #10* | #9* | 29,100 (2007) |

* -- United Kingdom's rankings are used

Some of my ancestors were involved in the American Revolutionary War against the British – and I am pleased that they won. But that being said, if the present-day U.S. had been successfully colonized by the Spanish, French, or even the Russians (all of whom at one time or another did control much of the present territory of the U.S.), would those who now live on those lands enjoy as much freedom and prosperity? I think not. If Spain (and Portugal) had controlled Canada and the U.S. in the way they did Latin America, with their feudal law system, it is arguable that the U.S. would be much poorer.

The British brought the concept of the rule of law with the “common law,” along with a strong commitment to the protection of private property and individual liberties most everywhere they went, unlike other colonial powers. The idea of the “divine right of kings” was thrown out by the British during the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when the Parliament gained clear supremacy. The English had limited the king’s power from the time of the Magna Carta in 1215. The British had also benefited from the Scottish Enlightenment, which firmly established the concept that the individual had rights that could not be taken away by the state. The American Declaration of Liberty and the Constitution are reflections of this change of thinking.

Implicit in my argument is that if the British had not become the colonial power in all of the areas it took over, some other country would have, given the advances in ship design and construction. It could be argued that the world would have been better off if there had been no foreign colonization. Because of unique circumstances, i.e. weak monarchies, resulting in the development of the protections of private property and commercial law, the industrial revolution began in England and the Netherlands. This led for the first time in history to a sustained rise in innovation and real incomes. There is little reason to believe if the English (and the Dutch) had left the rest of the world alone, other places would have developed any faster or have more freedom than they have now.

The table clearly shows that there are great benefits to living in a British dependency or territory. In almost all cases, the people enjoy a very high standard of living, substantially exceeding that in the British homeland and in many cases in the U.S., while enjoying all or more of the liberties of Englishmen. Caymanians clearly made a wise decision by opting to be a British Overseas Territory, rather than being part of Jamaica. Those former colonies whose populations ended up having a substantial percentage of people of British Isles heritage – the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand – have done very well by any standard because they brought along the ideas of rule of law and private property rights.

PAST BRITISH COLONIES**NORTH AMERICA**

| COUNTRY | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS, 2015 |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| United States | #11 | #20 | 55,805 |
| Canada | #6 | #6 | 45,553 |
| Belize | #118 | #69 | 8,373 |

WEST INDIES AND CARIBBEAN

| COUNTRY | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS, 2015 |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Bahamas | #31 | #49 | 25,167 |
| Barbados | #45 | #57 | 16,575 |
| Jamaica | #48 | #63 | 8,759 |
| Antigua and Barbuda | n/r | n/r | 23,476 |
| Dominica | #53 | n/r | 10,788 |
| St Kitts-Nevis | n/r | n/r | 24,808 |
| Grenada | n/r | n/r | 13,128 |
| Saint Lucia | #38 | n/r | 11,739 |
| St. Vincent and the Grenadines | #40 | n/r | 10,956 |

SOUTH AMERICA

| COUNTRY | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS, 2015 |
|---------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Guyana | #127 | #65 | 7,509 |

AFRICA

| COUNTRY | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS, 2015 |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Sudan / South Sudan | n/r | n/r | 4,344 / 1,992 |
| Lesotho | #152 | #101 | 2,987 |
| Botswana | #30 | #94 | 16,368 |
| Kenya | #115 | #97 | 3,208 |
| Egypt | #125 | #136 | 11,850 |
| Ghana | #72 | #61 | 4,266 |
| Nigeria | #116 | #139 | 6,108 |
| Zambia | #106 | #87 | 3,868 |
| Malawi | #146 | #101 | 1,124 |
| Sierra Leone | #142 | #120 | 1,577 |
| South Africa | #80 | #70 | 13,165 |
| Namibia | #81 | #84 | 11,408 |
| Zimbabwe | #175 | #149 | 2,096 |
| Swaziland | #94 | #137 | 8,453 |
| Tanzania | #110 | #94 | 2,904 |
| Uganda | #102 | #108 | 2,003 |

MIDDLE EAST

| COUNTRY | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS, 2015 |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Bahrain | #18 | #89 | 50,095 |
| Iraq | n/r | n/r | 15,474 |
| Kuwait | #74 | #97 | 70,166 |
| Jordan | #46 | #78 | 12,123 |
| Oman | #52 | #112 | 44,628 |
| Qatar | #34 | #114 | 132,099 |
| Saudi Arabia | #78 | #141 | 53,624 |
| Yemen | n/r | #148 | 2,671 |

INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

| COUNTRY | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS, 2015 |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Bangladesh | #137 | #134 | 3,607 |
| India | #123 | #75 | 6,162 |
| Pakistan | #126 | #140 | 5,000 |
| Burma (Myanmar) | #158 | #150 | 5,469 |
| Sri Lanka | #93 | #122 | 10,566 |

ASIA-PACIFIC

| COUNTRY | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS, 2015 |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Australia | #5 | #7 | 47,389 |
| Brunei | #51 | #77 | 79,587 |
| Fiji | #107 | #59 | 9,044 |
| New Zealand | #3 | #5 | 36,172 |
| Malaysia | #29 | #106 | 26,315 |
| Singapore | #2 | #43 | 85,253 |
| Papua and New Guinea | #140 | #84 | 2,652 |
| Hong Kong | #1 | #1 | 56,701 |

EUROPE

| COUNTRY | INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (RANK) | THE HUMAN FREEDOM INDEX (RANK) | GDP PER CAPITA, PPP BASIS, INTERNATIONAL DOLLARS, 2015 |
|----------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Cyprus | #42 | #36 | 32,785 |
| Ireland | #8 | #8 | 55,533 |
| Malta | #55 | #16 | 36,005 |

Sources:
 2016 Index of Economic Freedom published by Heritage Foundation, 178 countries ranked;
 2016 The Human Freedom Index, published by the Cato Institute, the Frazer Institute, and the Liberales
 Institut at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 152 countries rated;
 2016 IMF World Economic Outlook Database;
 CIA World Factbook

Other than Hong Kong and Singapore, the British were not successful in transferring most of their ideas of economic freedom, the rule of law, and individual liberties to their colonies, despite considerable efforts to do so. These days we refer to the effort as nation building, which for the most part has also been unsuccessful by the U.S. and others in the Middle East and Africa.

Those who blame their lack of development on British colonialism should explain how their country would have done better without being a colony. Would they have adopted the rule of law, private property protections, free markets, free trade, etc. on their own? What is preventing them from doing so now? Singapore and Hong Kong are examples of British colonies that not only adopted British institutions and its legal system, but established even more economic freedom and have become very rich since the end of the colonial period, without having natural resources. The table clearly shows that, other than the oil-rich states, there is a very high relationship between economic freedom and per capita income. The British, like all, have faults, but they are not to blame for economic misery in former colonies, which for better or worse are now masters of their own destinies.

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