

Who 'decolonised' in Jamaica?

Enquiry: Who 'decolonised' in the twentieth century?

Ms Apps



‘Decolonising’ the British Empire

Throughout the twentieth century the British government faced a series of protests and rebellions throughout the British Empire. These were largely inspired by growing **nationalist** movements.

Jamaica had been a British colony since the seventeenth-century when it was seized from the Spanish during the time of Oliver Cromwell. An economy based on slavery soon developed as sugar became the main crop.



Abolition and its aftermath

Whilst slavery was abolished in Britain in 1807, this was not the case in her colonies. In Jamaica a large enslaved population still toiled on sugar plantations. This was challenged by the Baptists War (also known as Sam Sharpe's Rebellion). In a mass uprising enslaved people went on strike demanding wages and greater freedom. Violence followed and the rebellion was repressed cruelly. Today the rebellion's leader, Sam Sharpe, is one of Jamaica's six official national heroes.



Jamaica in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The rebellion forced Britain to announce the end of enslavement with the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. Yet this did not end the hardships of Jamaica's people. The formerly enslaved population were forced to undergo **apprenticeships** before they could take on paying jobs. The end of slavery also resulted in many wealthy former owners deciding to close their sugar plantations, which led to a reduction of possible jobs.

Hardship and unemployment continued into the twentieth century. Workers in the sugar industry received pitiful wages. Unemployment was rife too. Later boosts to the economy created by the popularity of the banana and sugar were ruined by an inability to sell these products during WWI and WWII.



Activism in twentieth century Jamaica

A strong **activist** movement began in Jamaica in the twentieth century. Marcus Garvey set up the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914. The group sought to increase pride in blackness, push for an independent African state and improve the economic situation for black people. Garvey's work was an inspiration to millions around the world. Two more men, Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley Sr. would become central to Jamaican rights and independence.



Bustamante and Manley

The 1930s were a time of great economic hardship for Jamaica. In 1938 a series of strikes happened across the island in the sugar and transport industries.

Alexander Bustamante, a **trade unionist**, became a vocal supporter of workers.

Bustamante wrote for newspapers and helped organise **trade unions**. He was arrested on numerous occasions by the British authorities for his work. In 1943 he helped to establish the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP).

Another key figure was Norman Manley. Manley was a gifted student and lawyer who had been educated in Britain. Manley became the leader of People's National Party (PNP) during the strikes of 1938. The party campaigned for self-government.



By the end of the 1940s the PNP and JLP had become the two main political parties in Jamaica. Manley as leader of the PNP and Bustamante as leader of the JLP worked together to achieve greater independence.

Manley, using his legal skills, campaigned to change Jamaican law to allow for **universal suffrage**. In 1944 the strict British rules on who could vote were overturned and all Jamaicans were given the right to vote. In the first full election the JLP won. An executive council was set up to run the island with Alexander Bustamante as the Premier (leader). Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Bustamante and Manley worked within the law to create new rules to govern Jamaica and slowly make it an independent state.



Awarding independence

The British were concerned about awarding the people of the Caribbean full governance for each separate island. They suggested that all the islands come together in a 'West Indian Federation'.

This proved unpopular. **Referendums** were held and by 1962 it was clear Jamaica wished to be its own nation. Jamaica was officially made an independent state in August 1962 with Alexander Bustamante the first Prime Minister.



Glossary

Activist - A person who campaigns to bring about political change.

Labour - Work! Labour parties often focus on the rights of workers.

Nationalism - A person who believes in the rights to control your own country.

Marxism - Marxists believe in the theories of Karl Marx. Marx believed the state should own all businesses and share the wealth.

Pan-African - A belief that all of the peoples of Africa should work together.

Referendum - A vote on a key decision.

Trade Unions - Organised groups of workers who campaigned for better conditions and rights.

Trade Unionist - A person involved in trade unions.

Universal Suffrage - When all have the right to vote.



Comprehension Questions

1. What were the aims of Garvey's UNIA?

Sentence starter: The aims of Garvey's UNIA were...

2. Why was life for ordinary Jamaicans hard in the 1930s?
3. What issues did Alexander Bustamante begin his political career campaigning for?
4. What party was Norman Manley leader of and what were its aims?
5. Challenge: Why was Manley's experience as a lawyer so important to Jamaican independence?

