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"The rich should be obliged to give to the poor because they don't deserve what they have."

Whilst the rich certainly have an economic and a moral obligation to give to the poor, this is not necessarily because they do not deserve what they have, but because what they have may not have been achieved without the help of those who work for them.

An example which clearly demonstrates the rich being helped into wealth by those who work for them is the slave trade. In 2015, Britain finished paying off its compensation for slave trade, none of which went to the people or families affected by enslavement but to those who had previously owned slaves and had to be remunerated for their loss of 'property'. In 1830, the West India interest, a group of 80 MPs<sup>1</sup> opposed abolition, declaring that Parliament should not intrude on the slave owners' right to property and presenting "compensated emancipation"<sup>2</sup> as a way of protecting their property rights. The law was backed by the argument that, for example, when the government took control of fields for public works, they were obliged to pay compensation to the landowners who previously had possession rights over the land. Similarly, the government was now obliged to pay slave owners for taking over their 'property'. Thus, the country and its citizens benefitted from the slave trade: the country from the proceeds of trade and individuals, from the compensation. Britain could not have, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, become the wealthiest country in the world without having control of the largest slave plantation economies, with more than 800,000 people enslaved. Consequently, the families and the wider populations of countries who lost citizens to slavery would've suffered a massive reduction in workforce, hampering their ability to build up their own economy, whilst helping Britain become an economic superpower by the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Furthermore, the economic effects of the slave trade and the compensation which followed its abolition further demonstrate that the rich owe part of their wealth to those without whom they may not have acquired it. The slave trade not only brought benefits to Britain's economy as a whole, but also provided a substantial boost to the finances of many individuals. George Orwell once likened Britain to a wealthy family who maintains a guilty silence about the source of its wealth<sup>3</sup>, a hardly debatable truth. His father, Richard W Blair, oversaw the production of opium on plantations and supervised the exportation of this opium to China. John Gladstone, the father of prime minister William Ewart Gladstone received 106,769 pounds in compensation, whilst Charles Blair, great-grandfather of Orwell received 4,442 pounds. In Britain, slave ownership was not, like the vote or being in Parliament, a right reserved for upper class males. Everyone could afford to own a slave and make a living out of it. According to the national archives, there were 46,000 slave owners who received compensation and these owners were not concentrated in London; compensation receivers were found in Bristol, Liverpool, Glasgow, Cornwall and in Scotland. David Cameron, whose family also benefitted from the emancipation compensation, visited Jamaica in July 2015, and declared that it was time to "move on from this painful legacy and continue to build for the future"<sup>4</sup>. No talks or meetings were held to compensate those who had been affected. Instead, a Slavery Compensation Commission was set up in 1834 - to benefit slave owners rather than slave families. Thus, Britain and those who owned slaves became wealthy from the profits made from slave trade, compensation dished out to individual families, and from colonisation of African countries which the slave trade

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/29/slavery-abolition-compensation-when-will-britain-face-up-to-its-crimes-against-humanity>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/rights/emancipation.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/12/british-history-slavery-buried-scale-revealed>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34401412>

preceded. If 'deserve' is to be defined as "to have earned or to be given something because of your actions"<sup>5</sup>, then we can certainly conclude that Britain did not deserve such wealth. This wealth was not earned through the hard-work of the British population but rather the abuse of Africans and this human labour was not gifted upon the British from African governments, it was forced out of these governments. Therefore, Britain should pay some form of reparations to those affected by forced enslavement, as it does not deserve the wealth made from slavery and would not have obtained it, at least so quickly, without the work of slaves.

Contrastingly, the detrimental effect which this slave trade had on the economies of African countries supports the argument that those who benefitted from it are obliged to help those it robbed. There is evidence which suggests that countries in Africa which experienced slave trade to a lesser extent are those with the more 'developed' economies<sup>6</sup>. Walter Rodney's book even puts forward the thesis that as Africa helped facilitate Europe's industrialisation, Europe had the opposite effect on African countries, robbing them of the ability to fully develop. This relationship does not suggest that Europe's industrialisation was solely based on the slave trade but it does show that the work of these slaves aided and sped up process, whilst, and possibly to a greater extent, limiting the development of African countries.

According to Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, the richest 85 people in the world are as wealthy as the bottom half of the world' population. Any money-making industry requires workers in order to thrive economically and with this, comes the duty to generate wealth without exploiting those who facilitate this economic growth. By law, everyone is entitled to a minimum wage which, backed up by the 2010 Equality Act<sup>7</sup> reinforces that all employees deserve to be paid the same wages. Thus, if we are to learn from past mistakes in history, the rich should give to the poor, not because they do not deserve what they have but primarily because they would not have this without the input of those working for them.

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<sup>5</sup> Cambridge English dictionary

<sup>6</sup> [https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/hup\\_africa\\_slave\\_trade10.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/hup_africa_slave_trade10.pdf)

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