

Cuesta Pride Podcast Rights in the Americas, Barbados

By Dylan Michael Canterbury Baker

This essay will be discussing LGBTQ+ rights in Barbados; It will also be going over a bit of Barbados's history. First, off it must be noted that the author is not from Barbados. The reason this nation was chosen for the first of the new series is the author's education and the unique history of Quakers and Irish people or "Redlegs" on Barbados going back to the 1650s. The main reason for this podcast and essay is to facilitate awareness for LGBTQ+ Barbadians.

The West Indies is a region well-known for its extreme natural beauty. The West Indies was the place Europeans used as their foothold in the new world. While European colonialism is, for the most part, dead, many of the laws of their former colonies remain in practice. This practice of keeping colonial-era laws is by no means limited to the smaller nations of the West Indies. For example, in 2018, India repealed a Victorian-era law regarding the same issues that will be discussed today. Such laws are also present in other former British colonies throughout the globe.

This quote from an LGBTQ+ person from the nation of Dominica provides some context on the nations and overarching culture of the Lesser Antilles and the West Indies as a whole. "Every day I fear for my safety living in this country because of my sexual orientation. I am alive but if anyone ever find out and wanted to find out, they can kill me ...I am an easy target for anything."

—Peter, Dominica, February 21, 2017

England’s relationship with Barbados goes back centuries. The English first came to the Island in 1627, and their rule lasted uninterrupted till 1966. During the 300+ years of English and subsequent British rule, many cultural changes occurred. From Cricket to tea, English culture was cemented. Part of that was the British administration’s use of “Gross Indecency” and “Buggery” laws implemented in the mid-1800s. These laws are still very much part of Barbados’s laws despite becoming a nation in 1966. Like some former colonies, it kept many of

the old laws, and in a place where homosexuality is looked at as sickness and a detriment, it is no surprise that such laws would be kept. For a bit of context, in 2018, India repealed essentially the same law regarding same sex activity, and such laws are still present in many other former colonies.

The Island, its self, is roughly 2.5 times the size of Washington DC. For another reference, the Island is a bit smaller than the Island of



Guam. In a place this size, news travels fast, and close knit communities are the norm. Christianity is by far the dominant religion of Barbados. On the Island, churches and religious leaders have considerable influence on people and politics. That itself is nothing new; the western hemisphere still stands within Christendom. Like the United States and Mexico, the church plays an integral role in keeping communities whole. Whether it be shaming a person for being gay or giving food to the poor, the church's role on the Island is undeniable.

A big thing you are going to hear is that these laws are simply unenforced and are therefore irrelevant. That argument is flawed because they can be enforced and are, to this day, laws in Barbados. In this nation, consenting same sex activity is punishable up to life in prison. Something else that has given policymakers and excuses to keep the colonial laws is the "saving clause" of Barbados's national constitution, which allows it to retain any existing colonial law. Another factor is that often when LGBTQ+ come to the police, they will just get written off, or they will not come to the police because it will lead to more problems. The very fact that these laws still exist, coupled with a culture that allows LGBTQ+ people to be marginalized and often physically harmed for not being straight. Note the term "not being straight" references anything that is not the explicit norm of society and culture. Therefore, it is a plague on society, justifying harassment, harm, and marginalization of LGBTQ+ people. Another problem is that same-sex couples can't report any kind of abuse. Both the family structure and law enforcement are often non-caring or outright aggressive toward LGBTQ+ people.

Ernest, a 20-year-old gay man from Barbados, suffered a traumatic coming out experience that included physical violence from family members. In 2011 he came out to his

mother, who shouted: “how could you like men, that’s nasty, you give up that shit, you’re nasty, you’re nasty!”

Ernest also said,

“I think they were trying to beat it out of me, convert me, but this is who I am, I can’t change it... They’d keep on coming and beating me... Bajans [Barbadians] use the bible to justify their actions. I would call the police, but because my mother knew the police at that station, if I called, then she would call them back and then they would not come. I was a voice in the wilderness and nobody’s paying me any attention.

On one occasion my three uncles beat me up because of being gay. One was in front, one was on the right and one was on the left, and they beat me until I spat blood. They cut my face in all directions. I called my grandfather and he did nothing.

After that my mother put me out. I was on the street for a night. And when my grandmother heard about it she came for me. I had to sleep on grandmother’s floor, she gives me food, but doesn’t support me emotionally. I wish to get away from my family. I have to see my uncles - who beat me - and my mother almost every day.”

This is just one of dozens of examples, and often this sad outcome is the norm. Another common outcome is children being kicked out of their homes. Jamaica is probably more well known as a place with homeless LGBTQ+ youth. However, it also occurs in Barbados far too often.

Something else that is extremely common is bullying in schools. While this is by no means limited to Barbados, it is often tolerated and more extreme than places like New Zealand or South Africa. Another factor is the teacher's accepting or complacent mentality when bullying is reported. This can lead to fragility and distrust of the world around you. Something else that plays into all of this is class; in Barbados, you will not face harassment if you are at a certain economic level. Something that wealthy Barbadians will do is send their LGBTQ+ kids to schools abroad to avoid the homophobic environment of the Island. While things like anti-bullying laws for LGBTQ+

people have been implemented in many former British colonies, getting such a law passed in a nation like Barbados is still many years away. As of 2019, the government has said they will have some kind of referendum on civil unions. A big factor in doing this is because the economy is tourism-dependent, and the nation is often blacklisted on human rights issues. While not necessarily ethically or morally motivated, the referendum



presents an opportunity nonetheless. With the advent of Covid 19, the referendum and the upcoming Pride event in Bridgetown, the nation's capital, was put on hold indefinitely.

The delay may be an asset to those who want to end human rights violations by allowing advocates more time to change the minds of those opposing the new referendum—— those who hold firm in their belief that Barbados will not be influenced by the cultures of “gay-friendly” countries.

In conclusion, Barbados is a dangerous and challenging place to be LGBTQ+, but there is potential for change. Whether it will be driven by activism or the need to support tourism, change for the better will hopefully occur.

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