

Bernie Grant 25th Memorial Lecture_08_04_2025

[00:00:00]

Introduction and Welcome

Speaker: Can I ask you to give a massive, massive welcome to Bell Ribeiro-Addy .

Speaker: Thank you very much. Everybody. Good evening to you and welcome to The House of Commons.

Beyond Borders: Remembering Bernie Grant and the Fight for Global Reparative Justice

Speaker: It really is a privilege this year to be delivering the Bernie Grant Memorial lecture. You know, we, we gather to honor the life, work, and legacy of a man who helped to pave the path that many of us continue to walk.

Speaker: Certainly myself, he was a giant of British politics and a community champion and one of the most principled voices to sit in parliament. And this is the late great. Bernie Grant, who sadly passed away 25 years ago today it is not just a privilege, but it's also a responsibility to stand before you this evening.

Speaker: And I say responsibility because the work that Bernie began in Parliament and the broad reparation struggle he helped to shape isn't simply to be admired or commemorated. It has to be [00:01:00] continued. And it, it is particularly, wonderful for me to be delivering this in this particular room because I used to work for Diane Abbott for a number of years, and one of the first things she ever let me organize by myself was a reparations event.

Speaker: It was huge like this. A number of people filled the room and it was in 2014, the year that Caron put down their 10 point plan. And, and, and needless to say, since then I've been very, very engaged in the reparations movement.

The Importance of Recording Resistance

Speaker: Now my lecture today is entitled Recording Resistance Bernie Grant Anti-Colonialism in the UK Reparations Movement.

Speaker: And I want us to think seriously about what it means to record, to acknowledge, and to preserve our history of resistance. Not just for the sake of the past, but for the present and especially for the future. For me, this is gonna be a, a lecture about memory, about who gets remembered and how in the systems and structures that prefer silence in the communities who keep speaking.

Speaker: It's also about the truth, about colonialism of, of racism, of injustice, and about those who fought [00:02:00] and still fight to bring that truth to light. And I also want to speak about reparations. What we mean by it, what we don't, and why the fight is still ongoing. I also want this to stop echoing, so

Speaker: it's this. Any better? Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Wonderful.

Reparations: Beyond Financial Compensation

Speaker: Reparations for me is not just about money and it shouldn't be for anybody. Though economic justice is a crucial component is ultimately about repair. It's about truth telling, education, institutional change. It's about remembering what this country would rather forget and then acting on it.

Bernie Grant's Impact and Vision

Speaker: Now, now Bernie himself didn't just make history as one of the first black mps elected to the House of Commons in 1987. He was one of those fighters. He was born in Guyana, shaped by Pan-Africanism elected in Tottenham. And his very presence in this house was a statement. His politics were rooted in traditional tradition of anti-colonial struggle.

Speaker: He was unapologetic about calling for [00:03:00] reparations, not as a fringe demand, but as a necessary part. Justice. He changed history by challenging its telling. He reminded Britain of the truths. It so desperately tried to forget the truths about empire. Oh, you can all hear me? Yeah. Oh, fantastic. Then we can get rid of that.

Speaker: And. About colonialism, those truths about slavery, about the lasting debts owed to peoples of African descent and their, and, and, and all that came after them. And one of his most courageous acts was actually the founding of the African Reparations Movement at UK in 1993. He was the first person to bring the demands for reparations.

Speaker: Directly into British Parliament in the face of ridicule, ignorance and hostility for Bernie reparations weren't just about money. They're about honoring the legacy of resistance, the legacy of our ancestors who fought against enslavement, against colonialism, and who built the wealth of this country with their blood.

Speaker: The work of the all party parliamentary group on African reparations which I'm proud to chair, [00:04:00] continues in Bernie's vision, but it also builds on the work of continuous community organizers, campaigners, and everyday people who've never stopped resisting, who've always known that the fight for justice starts with recognizing.

Speaker: Harm. So tonight, as we remember, Bernie's fierce commitment to anti-colonialism. We remember his belief the struggle for justice was both local and global. And I hope that we recommit ourselves to finishing what he started. So I'm gonna take my lecture in, in, in four parts. I'm gonna begin with kind of grounding ourselves in Bernie's life and work, particularly his anti-colonial politics and his foundational role in the UK reparations movement.

Speaker: Then I want to explore the broader. Anti-colonial tradition in Britain and how resistance has always been linked to, to global struggles. And focus on the Berlin conference as well. Then I want to look at what's happening in the uk reparations movement today and the challenges that we are facing.

Speaker: And then finally, I want us to consider. The importance of recording resistance, the need to tell our own [00:05:00] stories, to preserve our own histories, and to shape our own futures. And why this digital digital archive that's being launched today is so important. And I hope that by the end of this, we'll leave not only with, with a deeper understanding of, of, of Bernie's legacy, but also renewing our commitment to continuing his work.

Speaker: And, you know challenging colonial amnesia, holding institutions to account. Now if, if we are to understand what the current demands are for reparations in Britain, we have to begin with those who laid the groundwork and few figures loom as large in this particular struggle. As, as Bernie Grant what

distinguished Bernie was, how he linked the struggles of Black Britain's with global Pan-African and anti-colonial movements.

Speaker: He recognized. That Britain's racial inequalities stem from the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and empire. And that that real solutions require us confronting his, that history, not relying on tokenism or colorblind policies. And he rose through the ranks of local politics. And in 1987, he was elected at the [00:06:00] MP for Tottenham becoming one of the first four black mps elected to Parliament in modern British history alongside Keith Vase and Paul BARTing and Mike.

Speaker: A great friend and mentor at Diane AB and in his time in Parliament, and even before he entered it, Bernie used his platform to challenge institutional racism and expose it as a systemic feature, not an anomaly. Crucially, Bernie didn't just talk about race, he talked about empire. He boldly named Empire essential to Britain's racial issues.

Speaker: And as I said, in, in 1993, he founded the African reparations movement in the uk Campaigning for Justice for, for, for the descendants of enslaved AF Africans. And this was at a time when reparations were marginalized. But he still managed to bring them into Parliament. He attended that first Pan-African conference of reparations in Abuja at Nigeria.

Speaker: Whether Abuja Pro Proclamation was adopted, calling for reparations for Africa and its diaspora, and he also worked with Caribbean leaders to in internationalize the call I. Bernie didn't just demand justice. He offered concrete proposals, [00:07:00] truth telling public education, a reparations commission, institutional reform material, investment in communities, suffering from the legacy of colonialism as solutions, and for him reparations addressed present date realities such as housing, health, education, incarceration.

Speaker: And, and as, as the afterlife of empire, and despite being sidelined and misre misrepresented, often Bernie's legacy endures in the reparations movement and in our communities. Even after his death. In, in, in, in 2000, the British establishment still struggled to fully recognize his contributions. Now, the Benny Grants Art Center honors him.

Speaker: The real tribute is continuing his work and recording his resistance. And above all, he taught us that Parliament is not the only place resistance lives despite what some mps will say, but it can and must be a site of of struggle. He made sure that for him, parliament was a platform and not a pedestal, and I can't tell you how important that is.

Speaker: His [00:08:00] courage meant that we didn't have to start from scratch. It's not lost on me that I am a member of the most diverse parliament we have ever had. That I get to lean on, on the support of, of, of, of people that came before me. Like, like, like Diane Abbott and that there are many other black mps now that's not lost on me at all.

Speaker: Me after a member who came before and the struggles they had to endure. So we're not starting from scratch. The all party parliamentary group on African reparations exists because of the path that Bernie cleared and all of us actually walk in this path that he cleared not just for him, but for all of those who fought and never saw the halls of power.

Speaker: So let us remember Bernie Grant as a strategist, a Pan-Africanist, and a visionary who dared to demand justice at the heart of Empire.

Anti-Colonial Struggles in the UK

Speaker: Now when it comes to that anti-colonial struggle in the uk and when we think of anti-colonialism, we often focus on liberation struggles abroad, such as Ghana's, independence under Nkrumah, the Mamma Uprising in Kenya, or the armed struggles of [00:09:00] Mozambique and Angola, but anti-colonial resistance.

Speaker: Also lived here in Britain on the streets of Brixton where I'm from on the steps of police stations in community halls, and even in Parliament. As the heart of Empire, the UK was also the site of resistance and colonialism wasn't just out there. It it's aftershocks, racism, inequality, surveillance were felt at home migrants from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia came as British subjects to rebuild a nation enriched by their labor only to face hostility and exclusion.

Speaker: But they didn't stay silent. They organized and they resisted. And they did, they did together. And that's a point I'll come to slightly later. Now I think about people like Claudia Jones. Deported from the US became a key black British leader founding the West Indian Gazette and the Notting Hill Carnival as acts of cultural resistance, the black power movements of the sixties and seventies.

Speaker: Like the black British Panthers and the race today, collective developing their own critiques of British imperialism, challenging [00:10:00] education, policing and deportation. This tradition continued into the 1980s and

when uprisings erupted across the UK in response to racist policing and economic neglect from Brixton to toe, from Hansworth, Toni.

Speaker: These were not just riots as they were framed by the media. They were rebellions expressions of political consciousness that understood Britain's colonial present, not just its past. Thinkers like Stuart Hall gave language to these struggles. While grassroots activists demanded liberation, not assimilation, all of these movements shared one core belief, and that's British racism was structural and rooted in Empire.

Speaker: Bernie politics firmly belonged in this tradition. He brought the call for justice into parliament without diluting its radical message, and, and though often are erased from history, communities preserve their resistance through poetry. Protest radio and oral storytelling. Now there, there was something through all of this that we lost.[00:11:00]

Speaker: And it's not often prop popular in, in, in spaces of African descent.

Political Blackness and Unity

Speaker: But I don't always say popular things, but I, I remember that I came up under a movement working under the United Banner of political blackness. Now, when we talk about political blackness, we're talking about more than a term.

Speaker: We're talking about a tradition of unity, a strategy rooted in solidarity between African, Caribbean and Asian people here in Britain. It came out of necessity because whether you were from Jamaica, Ghana, India, or Pakistan, the racism you faced came from the same structures. And that doesn't mean they were all exactly the same, but it came from the same structures, the same schools that excluded our children, the same police that harassed our communities, the same media that dehumanized us.

Speaker: So we stood together on picket lines in community halls, outside police stations from the GR strike to the mangrove nine. Our shared resistance was powerful because it was united. Political blackness reminded us that our struggles were linked, that we couldn't afford to be divided. And that [00:12:00] truth still holds today because racism hasn't gone away.

Speaker: It's evolved. It shows up in hostile environment, environment policies in racialized health, inequalities in the school to prison pipeline. And it still tries

to divide us. But we should know better. We should know that our strength is collective and that our liberation is bound together. That unity isn't just history.

Speaker: It's a necessity. And as we fight for justice, reparations, and real change, we must continue to stand side by side because in Britain, in Britain's civil rights struggle, we always have. So today's reparations movement isn't a new, new idea, but a continuation of a long struggle that all peoples who have been subject to British imperialism should fight together.

Speaker: Now it's, it's one that links injustice to global exploitation and demands the transformation of every institution that was shaped by empire. And whether this is through educational reform or policing changes, this is all anti-colonial work, and the UK [00:13:00] reparations movement cannot be separate from this.

Speaker: History has to be a national and a natural extension to it. There is a term that's often used to describe chattel, enslavement of African peoples. And, and some of you may know it and some of you may not. It's referred to as the manganese, which is a Swahili word meaning the African holocaust or the great catastrophe.

Speaker: It's expressing that it wasn't just a crime of the past, but it is a living legacy. The, the Stop, the Manganese campaign reminds us that consequences of this system are still with us. And so I'm talking about the underdevelopment of African and Caribbean nations, the displacement and disempowerment of black communities in Britain, and the systemic racism that permeates all of our institutions.

Speaker: I'm talking about the environmental degradation caused by centuries of imperial exploitation the absence of truth and education about Britain's colonial past and the understanding. That the manganese didn't end in 1834 with the so-called abolition of slavery. It [00:14:00] evolved into colonial domination.

Speaker: Whips and metal shackles were replaced with other constraints, neo-colonial debts, structural inequality, state violence. A UN security council in which no African or Caribbean nation has a permanent seat. Punitive and exploitative trade, continued theft and institutional racism, poverty, and, and, and I could go on.

The Berlin Conference and Its Lasting Impact

Speaker: I think it's also very important that we are currently marking 140 years since the Berlin conference. And as you know, the Berlin Conference is something that's known as the Scramble for Africa, where European nations got together and between 1884 and 1885, they literally sat there and carved up the African continent.

Speaker: Now what happened there continues to shape our world in ways we are only beginning to fully understand the division of Africa amongst European powers without regard for the lives, cultures, or ethnic or cultural, political realities or histories of the people who live there. Was, was [00:15:00] extensive. Now, these artificial boundaries fragmented societies, they created ethnic tensions and they set in motion a cascade of conflicts that persist to this very day.

Speaker: What happened? There wasn't just an act of territorial rearrangement, it was an act of violence that echoes through generations, and it wasn't just about drawing borders, it was about power control, exploitation. It was about claiming resources, land minerals, even after having extracted hundreds of years of this through the transatlantic slave trade and using this to fuel the economic growth of European empires at the expense of African lives.

Speaker: The systems of governance that countries are meant to be grateful for, were imposed by colonizers. These were not designed to serve the people, but to, to serve the colonial powers, the legacy of these impositions, economic dependency and social fragmentation. You know, continue today. And 140 years later, too many of us are told that the ills of their nations are entirely their fault.

Speaker: We are [00:16:00] told that, that everything essentially that happens there is their fault, but worse still, we are told to forget. Now we know that if there's anything we love in Europe, it's our history. I mean, look, look at this place. You would cry if you found out just how much your taxpayer's money is used to keep this building.

Speaker: Just so so to those I. Who say that we should move on and forget? I have to ask, why are peoples of African descent the only ones asked to forget? Why are we the only ones expected to heal without justice without recognition

and without repair? Whilst we build monuments have days make movies about pay respects to all other global injustices, we are to forget.

Speaker: Why should we forget when? From racism to economic inequality and climate breakdown. So many of the problems that peoples of African descent face today have their undeniable roots in these crimes against humanity. And we have to be clear that they were crimes because some would have us believe that they were mere.

Speaker: Moments in history. It's also important to recognize that the [00:17:00] Berlin Conference wasn't just an event that affected Africa. It was a key moment in the creation of the global order that we see today. The economic and political structures that emerged from the conference continue to shape international relations and global trade.

Speaker: Those power structures that were forged in Berlin are still in place and they continue to extract resources, exploit labor, and perpetuate inequality. We see this every day in the way global power is distributed, how decisions are made by a small elite far removed from the lives of those who bear the brunt of their policies.

Speaker: How the debt are developed in countries is used as a tool for control, how international institutions shaped by colonial histories continue to serve the interests of the few. Rather than the many. This is why I thought it was important to reflect on the Berlin Conference, not just as a historical event, but as part of a broader conversation about global inequality.

Speaker: It's about understanding how colonialism continues to shape the world and how we can work to dismantle those systems that perpetuate [00:18:00] injustice. And that is why we need reparations and why reparations is about so much more than money.

Reparations: A Comprehensive Approach

Speaker: So what is reparations? Now? Reparations are often reduced to a question of financial compensation, but this view is so narrow and misleading and a huge barrier to progress because when people start talking about money, some people's minds just shut down completely.

Speaker: We always have to start when we are thinking about reparations. I believe with the premise that there are no amount of payments, no collection of acts that could ever fully recompense for the hundreds of years of enslavement,

trafficking, genocide, ecocide, exploitation, degradation, theft of natural resources, colonialism, deliberate underdevelopment, and forms of neocolonialism that persist.

Speaker: Today. There is no. Amount of payments and no collection of acts. Now, these crimes against humanity of enslavement and colonialism were too great, and the impact was too wide to reduce it to mere dollars and pounds, [00:19:00] but it is a continuation of these crimes that have been committed. If we seek to do nothing at all.

Speaker: And I would argue that the focus needs to be on the root of the word. Reparations comes from the Latin *Re* and that literally means to repair. It is as much about repairing global power structures moral and social equity as it is about financial compensation. Reparations in their full sense would involve environmental, educational, economic, psychological, and spiritual repair.

Speaker: They would involve truth telling and transformation. They are a necessary process to begin addressing the legacies of colonialism that continue to shape the present. And we have to be clear that the deliberate underdevelopment of Africa and the Caribbean did not happen in a vacuum. It was a deliberate outcome of European.

Speaker: Imperialism. I, I recently watched a debate of Caribbean students on reparations. And to quote one of these brilliant young people, they said slavery wasn't a glitch in the system. Slavery was the system. It was the foundation [00:20:00] of modern capitalism. The entire financial structure of the west, its banks, insurance companies, shipping lines, and stock markets were built on the backs of enslaved African people.

Speaker: They made us work for free for centuries, and then they said we weren't good with money. Do you wonder why there is such a huge resistance to correcting the narrative on enslavement and colonialism when you hear something like that? This is not only an indictment of historical hypocrisy, but a sharp critique of the continued stereotyping and systemic barriers black people face in accessing economic justice.

Speaker: Now in recent years we've seen renewed momentum on reparations right across the world and definitely in the UK's movement. And we've been able to work with forming the all party parliamentary group on African reparations. Now this was formed in direct response to campaigning by Stop the Manse a campaign which says our secretariat with.

Speaker: Afford. And now the A PPG aims to promote understanding of a priority, [00:21:00] justice, and advocate for policies that respond to the legacies of slavery and colonialism. We are able to bring a lot of people into this house in particular and discuss those issues. There are so many community projects at the moment that are also playing a critical role in documenting histories, renaming public spaces, reclaiming narratives, and providing education outside of state institutions.

Speaker: These acts are reparative in themselves because erasure is a form. Violence and memory in itself is resistance. We've worked closely with campaigners and community leaders to, to push for a UK all party commission of inquiry for truth, from a parity, justice to support motions for local authorities to engage with reparations, including I.

Speaker: At Lambeth and Islington and others, and to develop a wider reparations policy framework that recognizes environmental, educational, cultural, and psychological dimensions. We also call for proper engagement with the un a decade for people of African descent, which the UK has so far failed to honor. This work has grown from grassroots [00:22:00] campaigns like the March from Reparations, which now sees thousands of people mobilizing across the UK every year.

Speaker: The manganese, as I said, the term used for, for, for the African Holocaust has not ended. It continues through structural racism, environmental degradation, and underdevelopment. So, so we have. Continue to do as much as we can to support efforts to decolonize public spaces. You know, the resistance against the statues and, and, and, and enslavers of, of, of, of colonizers coming down isn't about raising history.

Speaker: It's about telling the truth. It's about choosing which legacies we honor and which we refuse to celebrate. So supporting things like that. And we are also exploring how reparations intersect with other justice struggles. It, it's, we need to think of reparations in, in so many different contexts.

Speaker: It was about the total extraction of wealth and opportunity and dignity from black people. So there's so many different dimensions. That means reparations could not even encompass just one single demand. Like money they have to offer. It has to offer rather a framework of rethinking [00:23:00] justice redistribution and historical responsibility.

Speaker: And of course, it's not just a UK issue. Reparations are about a global movement. Across the Caribbean, the Caribbean, the Racom reparations

commission has led the call with a 10 point plan. The plan that we discussed in this house 11 years ago now, and addresses, apologies, repatriation, cultural institutions, health initiatives, debt cancellation, and these demands are directed at formal colonial powers, in particular Britain.

Speaker: We have African nations and the African Union in particular this year, calling for a power of justice, not just for slavery, but colonial looting and cultural theft and the return of stolen artifacts debt cancellation and climate reparations across Europe. Cities and universities are beginning to confront their ties to slavery but we have to really reject the empty gestures.

Speaker: Yes, it's important to go through processes such as plaques and, and renamings, but we need to understand that those are not enough. Reparations have to mean power and redistribution and an end to in, in [00:24:00] inherited injustice. And one of, one of the huge focuses of the A PPG is the return of artifacts in human remains.

Speaker: And quite recently we, we had a report with a Ford called Laying Ancestors to, to, to rest. It was a very, very, IM important part of our work to see to, to, to work towards stopping the sale of human remains and the display of them in our museums. I always say to people when I think of the so-called Egyptian mummies, could you imagine.

Speaker: If somebody went and dug up one of our kings or queens, dug them up from their place of rest, took them to another country and put them on display, I'm sure we would all have something to say about that. And another aspect of the work we do is decolonizing aid, or at least trying to discuss decolonizing aid because what is reparations, not reparations is not aid, it is not charity and it is not a handout.

Speaker: It couldn't possibly be aid because we have to look at where our, our, our aid system or overseas development has [00:25:00] become. It is now become an institution. And what does every institution. Need, it needs supply and demand. Many of our aid agencies, and it's not to say they don't do some good work, but their model is built as most ecosystems like that are on actually creating more work for themselves and keeping their institutions funded.

Speaker: And if that's your model, there is absolutely no way that you can be working fully for, for the, for, for the development of people in, in with lower, from lower. From low, less developed countries, it just doesn't work. And that is a huge, a huge problem. So when we talk about decolonizing aid, I hope that there are more organizations that actually look into what they're doing more,

because if these aid organizations do not have bringing themselves to an end as a strategic aim of their organization, and then they shouldn't exist in the first place.

Educational and Environmental Reparations

Speaker: Now I wanted to touch on environmental reparations and educational reparations as an example of what we could do because I said it's not just about [00:26:00] money. It's about justice and we need to confront those, those deep structural inequalities. Nowhere is clearer on this than the climate crisis.

Speaker: You've seen countries like Kenya and many across the Caribbean on the front line of a disaster that they did almost nothing to cause. Kenya, for example, is responsible for just N point n 3% of global emissions, and yet it faces drought famine and ecological collapse. A few years ago I actually went to Maric County and I saw that devastation firsthand, people are losing their land, their livestock, their livelihood not because they lack solutions, but because they're trapped in debt.

Speaker: In 2021, the year before, Kenya spent five times more on debt repayments than on fighting climate change. That's not just unjust, it's, it's indefensible. Reparations has to be about cancel canceling debt and climate finance, we can't keep letting private creditor creditors profit whilst the planet burns because people are actually paying the highest price for this crisis and they are the ones least [00:27:00] responsible for causing it.

Speaker: Now in terms of educational reparations and the, the, the, that the project being launched today is, is key in that I, like many others never learned black history at school. The majority of my learning and my love for reading meant that I took frequent visits to Brix Sting library. I learnt about so many different things, but mostly initially the American civil rights struggle.

Speaker: And I actually want. British Black British children to learn about our, our, our Black British civil rights struggle. The Brist, Bristol Bus Boycotts, Claudia Jones, Olive Morris, CLR, James. Now those things are becoming more common. But they're still not embedded in our education system now. Now those who don't think maybe it's necessary to learn black history in school or that it should be confined to certain lessons, should really acknowledge how damaging it's not to see yourself reflected in your history and how and how if we don't learn about.

Speaker: Enslavement and [00:28:00] colonialism, the impacts that they had, how we actually truly meant to learn why our country is the way it is today. Now, what we found out a few years ago that the subject of black history or black history being taught in schools actually across five different petitions, got too many, got more signatures than any other subject matter combined.

Speaker: But even with that, the former government refused requests from campaigning organizations to change the curriculum. And at that time they also coupled that with a new guidance about anti-capitalist texts in schools. And that made me really, really suspicious because I also didn't learn about the minor strikes, the poll tax riots or the achievements of trade unions in schools.

Speaker: And, and so when I talk about teaching black history in schools, I, I always want to make clear that decolonizing our education is every bit as much about class as it is race. Because I always think that. They really do think about what we are taught. We are taught what people want us to respect. We [00:29:00] spend a lot of time learning about the tutors and the stewards and some of the people in these paintings here.

Speaker: But you know, heaven forbid that working class kids actually taught about movements for change. They might actually start to get ideas realize that they have power that when they see injustices, they should challenge it. And, you know, if they just persevere that they might win. And I think, I think that's really, really important in terms of how we are moving forward and, and teaching our young people.

Speaker: We have to be willing to, to inform as much as we possibly can. And if we have to take that upon ourselves then we do, because I always say that no one is born racist. Racism is ignorance. And what is education, if not the absence of said ignorant ignorance. And when we learn at this black history, it has to be done properly because we are told so many lies about ourselves or we are not told.

Speaker: Now, for me people take a different view on this. A lie is also admitting the truth. I, I, I, that, that's my personal belief. It depends how some people take that, but [00:30:00] it's important that we learn about our allies. In any movement you have allies. So William Wilberforce Yes. Was great. And what other abolitionists did to help?

Speaker: The struggle was great, but far too often we are erased from our own victories and. We have to understand that the transatlantic slave trade didn't end because Britain all of a sudden became benevolent. They it, they ended because

of the slave revolts. It became so economically invi to maintain the system of slavery that they had to bring it to an end and then colonialism ended because people were no longer to have countries like our own rule over them.

Speaker: Again, they were the architects of their own change. And it's so important that when we look at reparations and how we are going to win in this movement, that we make sure that the demands are coming from those that are most affected. Because I think about how how the slave trade ended and how. As soon as it looked like it was gonna come to an end.

Speaker: What? What happened? Countries like ours said they were bringing it to an end. They took [00:31:00] control of it. When colonialism was being brought to an end in different countries, what happened? Countries went over to hand over countries back to people. And sometimes in the case of francophone countries, they would literally hand back the country, take a whole load of money for them let them have everything above the ground and keep everything below the ground.

Speaker: If reparations is to be done properly, it has to be done on the terms of those that are most affected.

Arguments Against Reparations and Counterpoints

Speaker: Now I always think it's important when making an argument to think about all of the arguments that people make against. So one of the arguments I always hear is that slavery was a long time ago.

Speaker: Why should the current generations be held responsible? All that reparations would be divisive. But is it divisive to tell the truth or divisive to admit? Our institutions, our banks, our universities, even our royal family, was actually enriched by both enslavement and colonialism. Is it divisive to repair harm?

Speaker: All of those harms that continue to manifest in disparities in health, wealth, and education denying [00:32:00] reparations because the crimes against humanity were a long time ago is actually to deny. The very real experience of those of African descent for whom impoverishment and racism continues to exist.

Speaker: Lest we forget that the entire social construct that we operate under without biological meaning existed because of enslavement race in itself. A human invented classification system instituted and enforced primarily for the justification of capitalism. To exploit or owning African human beings for the purpose of free labor, subjugation and theft.

Speaker: So in my view, that is ridiculous. Another thing I'm arts, and this one always gets me, is what about the Nors and the Saxons and the Romans? When, if, if peoples of African descent are going to get reparations, then there are. White people in this country, they should also get reparations from the Norman invasion and the Roman invasion.

Speaker: And I say, okay, if you [00:33:00] show me anybody that suffers the effects of the Norman invasion or the Roman invasion today, please say, I will go and I will stand on their picket line with them and I will campaign for them also. But you, you do not see that. And I, I cannot imagine somebody actually tried to argue with me a couple of weeks ago that.

Speaker: This was the case and that white working class people were struggling with the effects or living the long-term effects of the Norman invasion and the Roman invasion. Yeah. And people make any argument that they want and, and I would say that actually no. Just like people in this country, they are also suffering the effects of cap capitalism.

Speaker: I think we should, we should leave that there. Now if, if governments like our own, do not believe there's a reasonable claim for reparations, then I also say, why do they refuse to make an apology? One of the arguments is that we only apologize to our equals and that's clear. We're not seen as equals.

Speaker: But the other is key because they've expressed deep regret. And I think about what deep regret [00:34:00] is. I deeply regret that the skirt I was gonna wear today didn't zip up at the back. I deeply regret all the times I used to steal. Pick a mix from Woolworths in Brixton. Surely the only sentiment for one of the worst crimes in history is an unequivocal apology.

Speaker: Sorry. So they've expressed these deep regret, they've called it a stain on nation's history. They've feigned every other form of apologetic apologizing without actually apologizing. A lack of respect, absolutely. But could it be that they recognize their culpability and like your average corporate body who's trying to avoid paying out something that is so blatantly their fault, they're going to great lengths to ensure that they do not use the recognized legal language for liability.

Speaker: They wanna make sure that they do not admit fault, not because they don't believe they're not at fault. They do not admit fault because they know that they are at fault and they simply do not want to pay the price. We make so many arguments against paying reparations when there are so many different things that we could [00:35:00] do to start today, but we, we know, we refuse to look at them.

Speaker: And you know, some of the things which are free, like giving some artifacts back. Now, another argument that I come up against constantly, particularly in this place, is that I should be grateful. People of African descent should be grateful because the UK abolished the slave trade. You know, that the UK met what was a moral obligation and actually done it mainly because you know, those who were enslaved were beginning to revolt and it was becoming economically invi.

Speaker: We should be praised in Britain for doing that. I was say whoever praised an arsonist for putting out their own fire, and, and anybody who suggests the abolition of, of slavery was a purely moral consideration. Has to come up with a very good answer as to why we compensated those who were enslaved and, and, and, and not we, sorry, we compensated the slaves and not those who were enslaved.

Speaker: 'cause that's what happened. We all remember that Britain took out the largest loan the equivalent of 300 billion today, and that we [00:36:00] only finished off paying, paying off that loan in 2015. And they used that to pay the slave owners. Not the enslaved. That means that me and many of you, if you paid taxes, which I hope you did in the past however many years, paid wards the to, to literally enriching those that enslaved our ancestors.

Speaker: And it's the type of injustice sh that should really shock the conscience. And it underscores why reparations are not more just morally necessary, but economically justified. Not only have the government established that it was possible to pay reparations, even though they paid it to the wrong people, they've established that the funds actually exist in our present.

Speaker: And we have to remember that our society overall is one that's been organized around inheritance. We inherit Ralph. We inherit income. We inherit culture. We inherit identity. Our nation's inherited assets, but for some reason on this particular issue, we refuse to inherit liability. Another one that I've heard, and this may be the last one in terms of arguments against, is that [00:37:00] Africans sold their own into slavery.

Speaker: So really it's all our own fault. Now, no one is saying that slavery did not exist. In fact, it existed all around the world. But to conflate that type of slavery with chattel slavery is, is absolutely wrong. And now, professor Sir Hillary Breck actually changes quite. Quite well. And he really goes into why we should debunk that particular myth.

Speaker: He says, if I walk into your house and I murder your children and I burn your house down, and then 50 years later I say, well, you let me in. That doesn't exonerate me from my, from my crime. That's how ridiculous the argument sounds when people tried to push blame onto peoples of African descent for atrocities that were committed by European colonizers.

The Growing Reparations Movement

Speaker: Now as I get drawn to a close, I want to talk about why actually reparations are in the UK's best interest because people think, how could they possibly be? You're talking about taking loads of money away from us. But if we care about justice, if we care about democracy, if we care about truth [00:38:00] then we really have to take reparations seriously isn't about right?

Speaker: Just about historical wrongs. It's about healing the soul of this country. It's about building a society that confronts its past so it can honestly shape it. Its future reparations are not. Just about peoples of African descent. There are about communities here in, in the UK as well about persistent racial inequalities that we face in housing, employment policing, health and education.

Speaker: These are not accidental. They are structural. They are the legacy of Empire and until we address the root causes of them, we are. We're just gonna keep treating the symptoms. Now in, in investing in reparative justice is an investment in social cohesion, truth telling, and democratic renewal. It's about dismantling a colonial mindset that sees people of African descent as forever marginal and forever exploited and forever silence.

Speaker: And for those who do not succumb to the moral arguments for doing what is right, I have to make some economic ones for them. As governments right across Europe are pandering to nationalism, we [00:39:00] would do well to remember that nationalism is not a uniquely western concept. Many commonwealth countries will only remember a path of exploitation and a present in which they are subjected to punitive IMF conditions crippling their social infrastructure in certain interests of the more powerful countries like the uk.

Speaker: Countries in the global south have their own nationalists, and every single one of them will tell you that their achievements are in spite of Britain's atrocities, not because of aid or the privilege of being colonized. And as we increasingly grow into a nation where, you know, very soon a large amount of people are gonna be over 65, the majority of the African continent will be young people.

Speaker: And I will say that I do not want to be on the wrong side of them as someone in this country. And, and I think we have to, we have to recognize that the world is changing, the world is changing, and whether we do this or not. Africa and the Caribbean will continue to rise and they will do it in spite of us.[00:40:00]

Speaker: So if, if reparations are about justice and, and justice demands truth, then it's so important that we record our resistance. It isn't just cultural, it's political. It's, it's a, it's a necessity. And because the fight for reparations is also a fight over memory. And about whose history gets told, whose voices get heard, whose pain gets recognized.

Speaker: We need to record that resistance. And for far too long, a black resistance in Britain and and resistance to formerly colonized peoples around the world has been distorted, silenced, or erased. And that's why we must not only make history, we. We, we have to keep it. We have to protect those stories, the struggles, the strategies of those who refuse to accept the status quo, like Bernie Grant.

Speaker: We have to be clear that the British state has never been neutral when it comes to history. It built myths of, of civilization, of reluctant empire of slavery as something that Britain nobly ended not as the monstrous system it led. Profited from, but our communities have always told another story.

Speaker: We've [00:41:00] kept the memory alive through word of mouth, protests, banners, poetry, music, pamphlets, building our own archives when no one else would, and now we have to expand them because recording resistance particularly matters in our increasingly digitized world. I'm sure everybody is thinking about AI at the moment, and if we don't hurry up and correct the mistruths that are out out there about us on the internet.

Speaker: All that artificial intelligence is gonna pick up is all of the lies that have been told about us in the past. We have to safeguard the memory of our struggles because we live in a world that often likes to forget on purpose, and it legitimizes the movement to show our struggle is part of a loud, proud tradition

from abolition to wind rusts, from from Claudia Jones to to Bernie Grani educates.

Speaker: It helps build a decolonized curriculum and it connects us across generations, across borders and across struggles. Recording resistance in itself is reparative. It's part of Heal Healing, and it's about replacing amnesia with accountability, and that is why this digitalized archive is so important [00:42:00] now.

Speaker: I'm really pleased that we've now got to a place, and it has, has, it has been difficult because even now I talk about how Bernie was ridiculed when he first started to talk about reparations. You wanna see some of the stuff I get in my inbox. But the reparations movement is, is, is growing.

Speaker: Its gaining strength. Young people, educators, community organizers, faith leaders, artists, international allies. It's a deeply intersectional movement. It's linking racial, economic, environmental, and social justice. And the call for reparations, I believe, is actually rooted in love of our people, our history, and our right to dignity.

Speaker: It's not about guilt, it's about responsibility and creating a world where peoples of African descent can actually live with dignity, security, and memory. Where we are no longer forced to carry the trauma of the past in silence, and where we can actually build institutions that reflect our own truths, cultures and powers.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

Speaker: Now, Bernie might have not lived to see reparations achieved, but he definitely lit. I. The fire to this path. And as I look [00:43:00] across this room and some of you're recognized activists scholar students, community leaders I know that his spirit lives on and I, I want us to be the generation that refuses to be silent.

Speaker: I want this to be the parliament that actually listens. And I want this country to be a nation actually brave enough to make things right. And people often say to me. How can I be so hopeful? I mean, not, not only am I descendant of peoples who are enslaved and colonized, I'm actually a black woman back bench MP on the left.

Speaker: So we live by hope. But we also, but I also live in the truth that this place once said that I could be owned that I could be treated like property. And I

get to stand in its halls under these photos of some people that may have once owned my ancestors and call for reparations. And you know that that has to be progress in itself.

Speaker: So I end with Bernie's words tonight, which were a call to action. We have a right to remember, a right to speak out, and a duty to act. So let us do that and let us repair. Thank [00:44:00] you.