

## In Recognition...

### The UK Honour System Explained and Criticised

Before you read the complete article, look at this vocabulary and find it in the text:

**hand out:** distribute, give out  
**patronage:** support given by a patron  
**fostered:** encourage and support  
**gongs:** common term for medal or award  
**deed** an act, usually brave  
**gaudy:** bright, extravagant, usually tasteless  
**vowed:** to make a solemn promise  
**been had:** to be tricked

The UK has an honours system in which the monarch Queen Elisabeth II **hands out** various awards on the recommendation of the government of the day. There are various levels of awards ranging from Knights and Dames to Orders of the British Empire (OBE). See [here](#) for full description of the UK Honours system.

Traditionally the system was a form of **patronage** which **fostered** loyalty to the Crown and the establishment. In recent decades the monarchy has tried to modernise and **gongs** have been handed out to 'ordinary' people for good **deeds** and even former rebellious rock stars. Arise Sir Elton John, Sir Paul McCartney and Sir Mick Jagger!

"In recognition of a hundred million album sales  
 In recognition of your popularity  
 You take your **gaudy** prize  
 From people you said you despise  
 You wear your self-respect upon your bended knee."

**In Recognition - The Proclaimers** ([watch video](#))



The Honours system has its critics. Me for one! Every year when a hero of mine 'bends the knee' to the Queen I usually post a furious rant on Facebook. I have **vowed** never to listen to 'Sir' Van Morrison ever again for 'selling out' and this year I am particularly upset that ex-Liverpool player and manager Kenny Dalglish has decided to accept a knighthood, given that he supported Liverpool fans 100% when the establishment attacked them after the Hillsborough disaster in 1989. Today, in one sense Kenny has decided to join that same establishment. Sad day.

There have been well known people who have refused honours. Stephen Hawking, David Bowie and film director Ken Loach all turned down titles. John Lennon actually returned a medal which all the Beatles had received when they were very young with a note: "Your Majesty, I am returning my MBE as a protest against Britain's involvement in the Nigeria-Biafra thing, against our support of America in Vietnam and against 'Cold Turkey' slipping down the charts."



Above: John Lennon (left)  
 Below: Benjamin Zephaniah (left)

One vocal critic of the Honours system is the poet Benjamin Zephaniah, who when he received a letter asking if he would accept an award replied: "OBE - no way Mr Blair, no way Mrs Queen. I am profoundly anti-empire." Zephaniah explained he could not accept anything which had the word 'empire' in it. An empire which enslaved his people and for which the monarchy has never apologised. Full article [here](#).

Zephaniah feels that accepting an establishment medal compromises the work of writers and artists and restricts their artistic freedom: "It gives OBEs to cool rock stars, successful businesswomen and blacks who would be militant in order to give the impression that it is inclusive. Then these rock stars, successful women, and ex-militants write to me with the OBE after their name as if I should be impressed. I'm not. Quite the opposite - you've **been had**."



UK Honours are still given in the name of a long lost empire. I leave you with the fine words of Zephaniah on what that word 'empire' means to him: "I get angry when I hear that word 'empire'; it reminds me of slavery, it reminds of thousands of years of brutality, it reminds me of how my foremothers were raped and my forefathers brutalised. It is because of this concept of empire that my British education led me to believe that the history of black people started with slavery and that we were born slaves, and should therefore be grateful that we were given freedom by our caring white masters. It is because of this idea of empire that black people like myself don't even know our true names or our true historical culture." **By John Hird**

"Let's chat about that!"

Send your answers to your ECP coach!

- Would you accept an award from the Spanish King?
- Can royal awards be made more equalitarian?
- Would you bow to a 'Sir' or 'Dame' or monarch?
- What are John's views on the UK Honour system?
- Do you deserve an award? what title would you give yourself?



Member of the British Empire (MBE) medal

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This month's **CINEMA NIGHT** will show one of the all time great British horror movies **'DON'T LOOK NOW'** starring Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland.



## BOUGHT + SOLD BY BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH

Smart big awards and prize money  
Is killing off black poetry  
It's not censors or dictators that  
are cutting up our art.  
The lure of meeting royalty  
And touching high society  
Is damping creativity and eating at  
our heart.

The ancestors would turn in graves  
Those poor black folk that once  
were slaves would wonder  
How our souls were sold  
And check our strategies,  
The empire strikes back and waves  
Tamed warriors bow on parades  
When they have done what they've  
been told  
They get their OBE's.

Don't take my word, go check the  
verse  
Cause every laureate gets worse  
A family that you cannot fault as  
muse will mess your mind,  
And yeah, you may fatten your  
purse  
And surely they will check you first  
when subjects need to be amused  
With paid for prose and rhymes.

Take your prize, now write more,  
Faster,  
Fuck the truth  
Now you're an actor do not fault  
your benefactor  
Write, publish and review,  
You look like a dreadlocks Rasta,  
You look like a ghetto blaster,  
But you can't diss your paymaster  
And bite the hand that feeds you.  
What happened to the verse of fire  
Cursing cool the empire  
What happened to the soul rebel  
that Marley had in mind,  
This bloodstained, stolen empire  
rewards you and you conspire,  
(Yes Marley said that time will tell)  
Now look they've gone and joined.  
We keep getting this beating  
It's bad history repeating  
It reminds me of those capitalists  
that say  
'Look you have a choice,'  
It's sick and self-defeating if our  
dispossessed keep weeping  
And we give these awards meaning  
But we end up with no voice.



**When?** The last **Friday** of every month - 19:30 to 21:30 - It's **FREE!**

**Next film: 29th June**

**Where?** The ECP Hub  
C/ San Ignacio de Loyola, 15

