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African Americans and the African world.

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"America's Best Idea" - Global Destruction of the Earth and the Displacement of Indigenous Peoples Represent Our Resistance

By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Before the wig and the dress coat
there were rivers, arterial rivers:
there were cordilleras, jagged waves where
the condor and the snow seemed immutable:
there was dampness and dense growth, the thunder
as yet unnamed, the planetary pampas...

-Paulo Neruda, "Amor America"

The Maasai are among the world's new homeless. That's right! The Maasai - who, for centuries, have been at home on the eastern coast of Africa in Tanzania and Kenya! Change the history textbooks! The Earth's first cattle herders are "conservation refugees"!

Thanks to the governments of Tanzania and Kenya, thanks to a wealthy businessman from the United Arab Emirates, the Maasai villages have been burned down by the military leaving the indigenous population destitute, according to Rebecca Adamson, (interview by Tiokasin Ghosthorse), *First Voices, Indigenous Radio*. "In the name of conservation, more and more indigenous people are turned out of their territory so that

parks and large game hunting reserves can be created for very wealthy people."

I talked with Adamson last week, and she continued this conversation with me by phone.

The Maasai are not the only indigenous people who now find themselves homeless.

In the late 1990s, with funding from USAID, the Democratic Republic of the Congo employed the military to load up cattle trucks filled with Pygmies, Adamson said. Some 45,000 Pygmies were forcibly removed from their lands in the forests. As a result, communities in these neighboring areas where the Pygmies were dumped are experiencing an economic and cultural crisis: some "250,000" people from these neighboring communities are now destitute. When violence erupts between the Pygmies and the occupants of these neighboring lands, the Pygmies lose: they become game for hunters to kill at will, according to Adamson.

The clock has rolled back to the 16th century, indeed!

The conservation movement is the newest face of neoliberalism, targeting land and material resources in Asia, South America, and Africa. The movement has discovered "gold" - in a sense. As Adamson explains, the wealthy and corporate world have discovered that the "good stewards of the land," the indigenous peoples, occupy the "best areas on these continents"!

Why should these indigenous people even exist!

In a world where the economic system demands profits, where all that is good, must reside with less than 15 percent of the world's population (white Euro-Americans), the indigenous populations must get the boot! (See "Conservation Evictions" *First Peoples Worldwide Background Paper*, March 2007).

A new phase of the campaign to oppress the indigenous peoples is under foot. The ghost of Columbus is still walking the Earth. (See Mac Chaplin's "The Meaning of Columbus Day," *World Watch*, Nov-Dec 2008).

"It all started here," says Rebecca Adamson, Cherokee, who, in 1997, founded First Peoples Worldwide (firstpeoplesworldwide.org).

We know now that the promise of *urban renewal* policies for depressed areas in the cities across the U.S. offered profits for the wealthy ownership class and housing for the middle class and toxic dump sites for the displaced and homelessness for the destitute. SROs, HUD housing sites, even middle class homes have been cleared away to bring on the gentrification project in urban areas throughout the U.S. In Benton Harbor, Michigan, the Black city council, state representatives, and judicial authorities worked in concert to turn over lakefront property from a predominantly Black population to Whirlpool Corporation. A Jack Nicklaus Signature golf club and beachfront condos will provide the life of luxury for the few. But, according to Teresa Kelly, writing for the *Michigan Citizen*, in exchange for "22 acres of pristine beach front" land, the city received a park area littered with toxins ("Whirlpool Hid Facts of Toxins in Park Land," bhbanco.blogspot.com). That park land is for the indigenous Black population of Benton Harbor!

Greg Palast reports that New Orleans community organizer Malik Rahim and survivors of Katrina, who "rebuilt a shattered hulk of a building with their own sweat and donated materials," have been evicted! Three hundred and fifty people have been displaced - again! Speculators have bought the building, Palast writes in "Expert Fired Who Warned Levees Would Burst, Hurricane George, Four Years Later." "Just before Christmas, elderly residents were carried out and dumped in the street, literally, by marshals. The speculators paid the families who build their new edifice not one dime."

Now the *conservation movement* promises to clean up existing national parks and create more park areas on land occupied by indigenous people. But just like Columbus, as the story goes, the conservatives never mention the indigenous populations in their do-good-save-the-land narratives!

The Yosemite National Parks effectively removed the Ahwahneechee (people of Ahwahnee," the Southern Sierra Miwok (people), and the Northern Paiute (Numa, people) indigenous people, said Adamson. Conservationists appealed to the U.S. government and won the rights to "save the land!" What the conservationists and their advocates will not tell you is that for centuries the land was saved!

Different name - same idea - clear land for profits and displace the indigenous population!

Any discussion of natural alliances between conservationists and indigenous peoples and "the need to work closely with local communities, common just a few years ago, has largely disappeared," writes Mac Chaplin. (See "The Meaning of Columbus").

It has been displaced, in the biggest conservationist NGOs, by talk of changed priorities, with a new focus on large-scale conservation strategies and the importance of science, rather than social realities, in determining their agendas. At the same time, there has been an undercurrent of talk about how 'difficult' indigenous peoples can be, how hard they are to work with, and, in places such as Ecuador, Bolivia, and the Chiapas region of Mexico, how some have moved in the direction of civil disruption and even violence.

It is called *conservation* now, and PBS's go-to-mythmaker is scheduled to inform the public about *America's Best Idea*!

Indeed, it is America's best idea because Ken Burn's *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* (PBS film, September 27, 2009) will not tell the viewers that the national parks, as Adamson explains, were "already being taken care of by these tribes. That's why the parks are "beautiful!" But Burns and his entourage of "experts," indigenous and Black park rangers, backed by corporate funding, promise the viewers that they will meet "the people who fought to preserve" the parks - and they are not referring to the indigenous people! Preview footage displays pictures of bearded white men.

The conservationists, said Adamson, "did it here in the U.S. and they lied to the US population by saying [these park lands] were unpopulated." Behind the do-good-save-the-land narrative, "conservationists "are just taking more and more land away from the people and creating more homeless people" - and starving people.

In 1992, Adamson explained, the chum salmon, a primary food for indigenous people

in Alaska, was parceled off to the commercial fishery. The Athabascan people can serve themselves - only after 96% of the chum salmon is caught by commercial fisheries and independent fishers.

What is left for the Athabascan to eat?

At Port Graham in Alaska, Adamson met with a chief elder who told her that the Athabascan are left to eat "the dog fish," in other words, the bottom dwellers. It does end with the chum salmon. The Athabascan family survives the winter on the kill of 1 or 2 bears or mountain goats. Respect is paid through ceremony to the bear or goat. Now, the corpse of bear and mountain goat are left to rot, unceremoniously. While the people are facing starvation, the surrounding white communities are killing bear and mountain goat for "hunting trophies"! A goat head over the mantelpiece next to the bear head looks good!

The land needs to be *saved from* the vulturism of the neoliberal conservationists!

According to Adamson, it only cost the indigenous people "\$3.50 a hectare to take care of our land...24 percent of the Earth's land." (See Rebecca Adamson, "Indigenous Stewardship Preserves Biodiversity at Less Cost," *EGA Journal*, Spring, 2007). It will cost the conservationist "\$3,500 a hectare." Eighty percent of the funding will support the livelihood of "ad men, management, non-profit organizations and their lobbyists," explains Adamson. Over "\$6.5 billion is needed to pay for this conservationist movement" and some 13 billion is needed in funding just to pay ad men and management...Eleven percent of the land is caught up in national parks." Once the land is turned over to the conservationists, it "goes down hill."

Yes, America's best idea - exploitation - is global! Homelessness is global! Displacement is global! Land desecration is global! And the culprits are Empire's footmen (and women) - multinational corporations - and dependable governmental servants.

But, as Adamson points out, the indigenous people of this Earth live by the paradigm: "protection and production." Be good stewards of the land and animals and "the land will produce" for you and the community. Awareness of the protection and production paradigm "shifts everything you do," said Adamson.

"Isn't that the paradigm that might work" for all the Earth's people?

Additional links on Conservation, the indigenous peoples, and the health gap:

"Indigenous Health Part 1: Determinants and Disease Patterns,"
www.thelancet.com, Vol. 374, July 4, 2009.

"Indigenous Health Part 2: The Underlying Causes of the Health Gap,"
www.thelancet.com, Vol. 374, July 4, 2009.

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