

Tribunal

Ethnic Cleansing of the Black Community

By Amadi Ajamu

On Saturday March 3, the December 12th Movement International Secretariat held an historic citywide Tribunal / Hearing on “We Ain’t Going Nowhere!” The Ethnic Cleansing of the Black Community. The Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corp community room was filled to capacity with organizers, activists, and residents eager to give expert analysis and testimonies in order to work on a plan of action in resistance to the ethnic cleansing - forced displacement of Black people in New York City and cities throughout the country.

International human rights attorney Roger S. Wareham chaired the proceedings and the presiding panel of three distinguished jurists included Victor Goode, Esq., Professor at City University of New York School of Law and former Executive Director of the National Conference of Black Lawyers; Joan Gibbs, Esq., former General Counsel for the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, and Alfred Toussaint, Esq., Program Manager of CAMBA Legal Services, Housing Unit.

Wareham gave an overview of the human rights work the International Secretariat has done since 1989 in the United Nations Human Rights Council, World Conference against Racism 2001, the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, and the International Criminal Court. “These tribunals are the backbone of the documentation that allows us to take our issues to the international arena for Africans in the U.S., on the continent and throughout the Diaspora. Gentrification is ethnic cleansing, and ethnic cleansing is a component of genocide, a crime against humanity. “The UN defines ethnic cleansing as ‘rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group,’” he explained. He stressed the importance of understanding the “all-sided attack which Black people in the U.S. are under in the context of a U.S. economy which no longer has the need for our surplus labor and can only profit from the slave labor of incarcerated Black folks.”

Lead jurist Victor Goode’s opening focused on the language of ethnic cleansing and the necessity of its inclusion in the the dialogue. “Many of you have heard the term ethnic cleansing before but you probably heard it most often in relation to situations of war or warlike conditions that displace people. But part of the importance of today’s presentation is the recognition that ethnic cleansing is not relegated to situations of warfare, nor is it relegated to outright violence. In the US we look primarily to our state laws and federal laws.

However those of us in the African American community must recognize there are other laws that govern both our own lives and the conduct of governments and agents of governments. Those are international laws,” he stated.



Joan Gibbs, Esq.

Victor Goode, Esq.

Alfred Toussaint, Esq.

During the afternoon compelling testimonies were offered. Charles Fleming spoke on the U.S. history of white race riots and attacks that forced Black people to move. “In cities including Atlanta GA, Tulsa OK, Chicago IL, Rosewood FL, Washington DC, Knoxville TN, New York NY, East St. Louis IL and others white citizens have attacked black citizens, their homes and their businesses in an effort to denigrate, punish and marginalize their elevation and dignity. Note should be taken that often city employees, police organizations, and officials were complicit in the offenses thus influencing the duration and intensity of the harm done to blacks,” he explained. Fleming gave documentation on his findings include statistics on the thousands of Black people who were maimed or murdered during these ethnic cleansing actions.

Nellie Hester Bailey of the Harlem Tenants Council discussed the policy of “spatial deconcentration” implemented by the U.S. government to disperse Black people from cities. “Ethnic cleansing specifically addresses race as a motivating factor, whereas gentrification coined by British sociologist Ruth Blass in 1964; was based on her study of white working class displacement in inner-city London. However, over half a century later; gentrification has steadily morphed into a global displacement strategy advanced by finance capital in an ethnic cleansing process that negates social reproduction to the hegemony of investment capital. The intersection of neoliberal urban planning such as what we see today with our current Mayor Bill DeBlasio, patterns of investments, evictions, and homelessness can only produce uneven development, a natural outcome of capitalism,” she stated. In the wake of urban rebellions against oppression in the 1960’s, Bailey documents the ruling class and government pushed for President Lydon Johnson to suspend the U.S. constitution and declare martial



Nellie Hester Bailey

law. “Johnson came up with the Kerner Commission, an eleven member commission to look at the situation,” she said. “The commission then hired police and military officials as contractors and consultants. It was a military tribunal because the outcome was that of social control hence ‘spatial deconcentration’ to determine how and where can we disperse this unruly population that is isolated from major cities,” Bailey concluded.

“We must advocate and organize to occupy, defend and renovate the vacant and abandoned housing all over the city.”

Father Frank Morales

Father Frank Morales of the All Souls Episcopal Church in Harlem NY spoke directly, “Gentrification should be understood as a pre-emptive counterinsurgency, as state repression of the poor and working classes; a violent repression that attacks at the base, that attacks the home. And the attack on the home is an attack on the very life blood of the people and its community. Therefore, it is not hyperbolic to suggest that the ultimate logic of ‘gentrification,’ and the re-concentration of the previously displaced into so-called ‘shelters’ and prisons is a form of genocide. Therefore, gentrification, and the concurrent violence of forced removal must be viewed as a form of institutionalized genocide.”

Fr. Morales continued, “Through organized and massive civil disobedience and our human right to resist, we can come together and form communities of self-defense in order to defend our own from eviction and from being forced into jails and shelters. Secondly, we must must advocate and organize to occupy, defend and renovate the vacant and abandoned housing all over the city.”

Chaplin James Payne, a former realtor exposed their financial practices. “Real estate foreclosure in the 5 Borough NYC area consistently average over 5,000 properties at any given time; with Brooklyn averaging over 2000. Market prices have risen within the last 5yrs. Many properties have doubled and even tripled in values. Brooklyn has moved into the high end markets of sales and rentals. Families are finding it difficult to maintain their homes or even have access to an apartment. Landlords are requiring a minimum of 40 times the rent of an individual’s income. If your rent is \$1,234 per month, you need to earn more than \$4,924 per month or at 40 hours per week at \$30.77 per hour, about \$60,000 annually,” he explained.

“Many people are being push out of their NYC neighborhoods. Millennials are having to rent rooms and have roommates instead of having a private apartment. A few of the enforcers that help to create this problem are, Landlords/Owners, Attorneys and Brokers. Brokers and Attorneys are the contract writers for the Landlord/Owners; and Realtors are only the foot soldiers that carry out the orders in the field. Brokers & Realtors are members of one of the largest trade associations in the world; the National Association of Realtors.”

“This association has over one million members with representatives in all 50 states. The National Association of Realtors is one of the largest financial contributors of both Democrat and Republican parties and provides major lobbying strategies, with money and other influences to create many policies and procedures. This association are known to function as a self-regulatory organization since being founded in 1908 with headquarters in Chicago, Illinois. Since 1999 they spent over \$100million in lobbying and in 2011 they spent over \$22million in that year alone,” Payne continued.

“It has been known and believed that Brokers and Mortgage companies were the main catalyst for the inflated use of subprime loans and mortgages when property values were inflated and created unrealistic real estate values which cause the market to rapidly increase and crash. All these companies were complicit in the rapid ethnic cleansing of a distinct cultural community; Brokers, Mortgages, Insurances, Attorneys, Appraisers, Inspectors, and Landlord Owners, etc. The economic down turn along with the gentrification movement became part of a strategic systematic agenda across the U.S. The process has created ethnic cleansing in the black community which continues today”

Natacha Robert spoke of the Detroit Bankruptcy as a method of ethnic cleansing. “Between the 1920’s and the 1950’s Detroit’s African population continued to grow, and by the 1970’s Detroit became America’s largest majority black city.

Detroit was very important for the development of a Black middle class and the union movement due to the thriving automotive industry. Many Africans worked within the automotive industry and were able to make enough money to buy homes and maintain a living. After World War II, many Africans lost their factories jobs to returning veterans of the war, most of whom were white. The city also experienced a period of deindustrialization beginning in the 1940's with divestment from the auto industry. As whites fled to the suburbs, Detroit became a majority black city with a dwindling tax base," said Ms. Robert.



The Ethnic Cleansing of Black Educators

Yaa Asantewaa Nzingha, an educator, focused on ethnic cleansing of Black educators from American school systems. She began by quoting Dr. Amos Wilson, "The paradox I have to deal with daily in my classroom is the amount of lying that must take place in the name of education; the amount of outright deception that goes by the name of education; how truth must be nailed to the cross in classroom after classroom; how people tremble, quake and suffer from anxiety when truth and reality is brought up by their teachers; how people are pushed out of the universities and punished because they dare talk about truth; how people think they should go to school only to be made comfortable."

"It is only appropriate I start with myself," said Nzingha. During my thirty years as a public school educator; have experienced hostility, harassment, demotions, suspensions and termination because of the role I played in 'successfully' educating children of African descent. My most devastating blow came January, 2001 when I was terminated from my teaching position at Junior High School 113, in Brooklyn, New York for teaching Black youth they were Africans. While covering my theatre class, a teacher, Mr. Levine, became troubled when he asked a thirteen year old Black male to do a skit where he would role-play a thief and go to the corner store, steal candy, potato chips, etc. to bring back for the girls in order to impress them," she said.

"The young man responded by saying, 'My drama teacher, Ms. Nzingha, teaches us as Africans we shouldn't fall into the low standards America has set for us, but have high standards as African people, therefore, I do not feel I should have to act out the part of a thief.' Levine wrote a letter to the principal stating that teaching children to call themselves Africans was not only lowering their self-esteem, but teaching them hopelessness," she explained. "The Principal, Katherine Corbett, sided with Mr. Levine and after years of praising my curriculum and teaching techniques ordered me to discontinue my current methods of instruction and no longer include "anything" in my curriculum that dealt with issues of rejection, racism, peer conflict, personal conflict, or the atrocities of slavery. I was eventually banned from the school and terminated by, at that time, district superintendent, Dr. Lester Young, Jr. My incident triggered a host of attacks on other teachers in the same school who taught youth their culture, history, ancestry, origin, etc. The ethnic cleansing of Black educators is not unique to New York," she concluded. Ms. Nzingha reported documentation of many Black educators similarly situated around the country and the long history of not educating or mis-educating Black children in the US.

On the Issue of the manipulation of "natural disasters," Cleatress Brown discussed New Orleans, Flint Michigan, and Puerto Rico. "As stated by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), a Disaster can be defined as 'a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society.' In New Orleans we have to ask just what are 'natural' disasters?" The well known and documented instability of the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain levees contributed significantly to the forced displacement of the Black community and ethnic cleansing of the city; now thoroughly 'gentrified'. Even Black residential communities unaffected by the levee breach were permanently evacuated." Louisiana Congressman Richard H. Baker stated, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans, we couldn't do it, but God did."

The Flint Michigan water crisis is another example of an unnatural disaster effecting the Black community. "As residents complained to authorities about the foul smelling undrinkable water flowing through their pipes, their complaints fell on deaf ears." The chemically tainted water began have an affect on their children and unborn resulting in miscarriages and premature births. Tap water was contaminated with high lead levels after the city turned to the Flint River to supply its water in April 2014. When they switched, officials didn't use a corrosion-control treatment to maintain the stability of rust layers (containing lead) inside service lines.

“In Puerto Rico the U.S. is their real disaster.” After Hurricane Marie struck Puerto Rico the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) foot dragging and mismanagement exasperated the situation on the ground. “Now six months later, the island population of ‘U.S. citizens’ are still waiting for full recovery aid and the U.S. may send back those persons who evacuated to the ‘main land’ for refuge.”

Tribunal Jurist Closing Remarks

Attorney Joan Gibbs focused on the issue of NYC Housing Authority crisis. “There were a couple of issues that weren’t addressed which I would like the organizers to give some thought. Among them was the depopulation of public housing which is the residence of many of our people. Warehousing apartments under the guise of repair, policies of selling off the parking lot land space, and the blatant destruction of housing like Cabrini Green in Chicago, the largest public housing in the U.S.

Attorney Alfred Toussaint stated, “In the international arena, as Malcolm X said, we have to take our fight and make it a human rights issue. This is one of the reasons we want to change the discourse and language that we use, instead of gentrification we should talk about ethnic cleansing. With that we can see how a number of states have taken their plight to the international arena and have gotten redress.”

Lead Jurist, Hon. Victor Goode’s summation reflects an overview and action. “These kinds of public forums are critically important to spread knowledge, to allow community to form, and to allow the kind of organizing to take place to ultimately lead to solutions. Today we had an opportunity to hear testimony, observations, and analysis, data and history; all addressing the issue of ethnic cleansing and gentrification; how it has happened and what we might do to address it. We have heard evidence on how racism and capitalism are intricately connected and they operate in the field of housing. We have heard the testimony about everything it has to do with the occupation of space. From renting a home, to buying a home, to locating in a community and to participating in a community. We have heard how gentrification is a tool of the current political economy. We have heard how the neoliberalism policies of our current economic system plays a role in that gentrification process,” he said.

“We listened to testimony concerning how federal agencies that are supposed to serve the interest of our communities have instead become the tools of capital enterprises that seek to exploit our communities.”

“But we also heard that there were opportunities to work both within and without those agencies to turn some of its programs around to stem the tide that our communities are facing. We heard a great deal of testimony concerning the foreclosure crisis. We’ve heard testimony about how America has failed repeatedly to recognize housing as a human rights issue. We must look beyond the limitations of the language of our current legal system and adopt the language of international human rights... I would add only one more point to our deliberations today and that is much of what we talked about today are situations that we have been responding to, and as they occur we must respond to them. But we must also reignite our civic imagination. Our capacity not only to respond to the struggles that face us, but to imagine a future that we want. This is our opportunity to think about and to articulate the kind of community that we want. We must also cultivate a vision and a dream so that our children will live in a different kind of world. As you all know, the struggle continues.”

**For more info and FULL VIDEO coverage
SEE OUR LINKS**

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We Ain't Going Nowhere!

TRIBUNAL

ON ETHNIC CLEANSING OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2018 at 1PM

Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration

1368 Harriet Tubman Blvd. (Fulton St.) Brooklyn / A train to Nostrand Ave.

Presentations by Experts • Community Testimony • Road Forward...

The Attacks on Black Peoples' Human Right to:

- Housing
- Employment
- Businesses
- Health Care
- Justice
- Education
- Houses of Worship and Culture...

**This is Ethnic Cleansing...
A Crime Against Humanity**

**To Endorse or Submit Testimony
Call (718) 398-1766**

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