

Cultural genocide: In Tibet or New Orleans?

By Larry Hales, Denver, CO chapter of FIST

The Dalai Lama claims that China is committing “cultural genocide” against the Tibetan people, and his claims and news of the events unfolding in the regional capital of Lhasa have captured a great deal of attention in the major media outlets in the U.S.

The “cause” of Tibet and the accusation of “cultural genocide” are not new. “Free Tibet” bumper stickers can often be seen at peace rallies, and it would seem that the case of Tibet is a real national liberation struggle of an oppressed people struggling for independence from an imperialist or colonial master.

However, the issue of Tibet has been foisted upon some sectors of the movement in the U.S. in order to weaken China. The relationship between the U.S., with its aim to undermine the gains of the Chinese revolution, and the Dalai Lama and his clique is an old one and goes all the way back to the CIA manufactured “uprising” of 1959.

It is greatly ironic that the corporate media in the U.S., which operate as mouthpieces for the owners and rulers of U.S. society, can use the Dalai Lama’s claim of “cultural genocide,” especially considering that the U.S. has committed genocide against Indigenous people and cut the ethnic/tribal ties to Africa of 40 million Black people.

At a 2002 talk sponsored by the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, Barry Sautman pointed out, “The problems of Tibetans are typical of minorities in the era of large modern states.” Sautman is an associate professor of Social Science at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. (www.international.ucla.edu)

Sautman argues that, though Chinese culture has naturally influenced Tibetan culture, “By not defining cultural genocide the Tibetan exiles can label any changes from 1959 as cultural genocide, although many of these changes could be expected to have occurred without the issue of cultural genocide arising.”

Sautman refutes the claim that Tibet has been flooded by Chinese migration by showing data that are not denied even by the U.S., which show that most Chinese that go to Tibet usually stay for only a few years and that many who claim to live in Tibet only claim to do so in order to

receive higher pensions.

Western culture has infiltrated Tibet as well, as it has many other societies around the world, but this is rarely looked upon as “cultural genocide,” or even as cultural imperialism.

The Dalai Lama is a separatist, connected to the old feudal relations that existed in Tibet before 1959, and his claims that Tibetan society was a free and open society where people lived harmoniously is a misrepresentation of history.

Historian Michael Parenti, in a piece titled “Friendly Feudalism: The Tibet Myth,” states: “Until 1959, when the Dalai Lama last presided over Tibet, most of the arable land was still

organized into manorial estates worked by serfs.

These estates were owned by two social groups: the rich secular landlords and the rich theocratic lamas. ...

“Old Tibet has been misrepresented by some Western admirers as ‘a nation that required no police force because its people voluntarily observed the laws of karma.’ In fact, it had a professional army, albeit a small one, that served mainly as a gendarmerie for the landlords to keep order, protect their property, and hunt down runaway serfs.” (www.michaelparenti.org)

It is the destruction of the old mode of production and property relations that angers the separatist movement that surrounds the Dalai Lama. The U.S. cares nothing about Buddhism, Tibetan monks or Tibetan culture, so it never mentions how the culture has been preserved, or that Tibet has been a part of China for centuries.

Jin Zhigou, chief editor of the magazine China’s Tibet, says that the Dalai Lama and those that surround him use the fact that people are increasingly interested in Tibetan culture to influence attitudes by crying “cultural genocide.” But what culture would there be to spark anyone’s interest if it were being wiped out and the process of “cultural genocide” was nearing its fifth decade?

Jin says, “With the continuous social

progress and the advancement of productive forces, it’s a natural thing for some cultural phenomena that are attached to relatively backward means of production to fade out of history. ... But the cultural activities closely connected with the salt-transporting, such as singing and dancing, rituals and taboos, have been preserved.”

“We needn’t have to keep black slavery in the United States just in order to enjoy the Blues,” he said. “The disappearance of salt-transporting by yaks won’t lead to the vanishing of the cultural elements it gave birth to.” He points out the millions of yuan, Chinese currency, that have been

and are being spent to maintain both the intangible and structural parts of Tibetan culture.

This attempt at cultural preservation is greatly different than what happens in the U.S. The Hurricane Katrina tragedy and aftermath provide a clear illumination.

“The roots run deep in New Orleans” is a popular saying amongst Black New Orleanians. New Orleans is sacred ground, but this has not stopped local, state and federal officials from denying the right to return for evacuees, destroying public housing and entire neighborhoods, denying the right to jobs and re-imagining and attempting to rebuild the entire city for wealthy whites. Is this not cultural genocide?

The capitalist system cares nothing about culture. Capitalism sees culture as a commodity or subterfuge, something to use for profit or to undermine a people. Is this not what has happened to Black culture?

Take hip-hop culture, the musical aspect alone, and look at its history and its current state. Where hip-hop music is now from where it was is the difference between self-determination and a people determining their culture, and a system that is perpetuated by exploitation.

Anyone with a scant knowledge of the history of the U.S. can see its hypocrisy when it comes to supporting the Dalai Lama’s claim of “cultural genocide,” and can see the real motive is to undermine the People’s Republic of China. ■



Angry marchers react to verdict: ‘NYPD go to hell! We are all Sean Bell!’

By Tyneisha Bowens
Queens, N.Y.

On April 25 in a Jamaica, Queens, courtroom, a judge acquitted three New York Police Department officers responsible for the November 2006 fatal shooting of 23-year-old Sean Bell. The horrific attack, which took place the night before Bell was to get married, also wounded Joseph Guzman and Trent Benefield. All three shooting victims are African-American.

District Attorney Richard Brown announced the judge’s ruling in front of the families and friends of the NYPD’s victims as well as the media. Brown then defended the verdict and stated that “reforms” in the NYPD were likely to come from the case. Outside the court the family, friends and supporters of Bell, Guzman and Benefield mourned and protested the decision with a march around the courthouse. This was

Financial Crisis Hits Students (continued)

the loss of much of the state and private student loan industry, the Secretary merely replied that she would be ready.

But despite the rosy and calm picture presented by the Department of Education, the student loan industry continues to crumble, and students are bound to be affected by either enormous interest rates or no loans at all. Students from the states affected so far have already reported deciding to leave their four-year university for a community college, or having to drop out of school altogether. Many of these students have already completed some of their education and are already in debt. Leaving school early will leave them high debt burdens and few prospects for well paying jobs.

Although there have been many struggles over the rising cost of education over the years, the readily accessible access to funds through loans and the promise of a relatively high-paying job upon graduation have kept some of the broader layers of students out of the movement. Now, neither of those factors is a guarantee. With students over the summer facing the prospect of being locked out of access to higher education altogether, this economic crisis may quickly become a political one amongst youth. ■

by a visit to Bell’s grave site.

In preparation for the possible acquittal, the Peoples Justice for Community Control and Police Accountability Coalition called for a rally and community speak-out during the evening of April 25. Speakers included families of victims killed and brutalized by the NYPD, cultural performers and representatives of various endorsing organizations.

Community members and organizations including the Audre Lorde Project, CAAAV: Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, Make the Road by Walking, Parents Against Police Brutality, May 1st Coalition for Immigrant and Workers Rights, Million Worker March Movement and the International Action Center marched without a permit from District Attorney Brown’s office to the site of the killing, which is now a memorial to Sean Bell, where a second rally was held.

The marchers chanted: “NYPD go to hell! We are all Sean Bell!” and “No Justice, No Peace, No racist police!” Marchers were welcomed into homes, businesses and buses. At one point a white truck driver honked and chanted with protesters as the youth led him through the march.

Following the official end of the People’s Justice march and rally, a spontaneous march led by community members including the Bloods (Black Liberation Organization Of Defense), a street organization originally formed in the 1970s, proceeded to the 40 Projects in Southside Jamaica, Queens.

The unpermitted march took the streets of Queens, holding a rally in the South Jamaica Housing Development and marching to the local NYPD precinct. Youth of the community joined the march and supporters lined the streets as the protesters yelled, “Fuck the police!” The marchers faced off with more than 50 NYPD officers at the precinct, where they held a speakout and continued their chants. The march ended after midnight. One protester and one legal observer were arrested and released on bail.



Banner at front of April 25th March. Photo: John Catalinotto

The acquittal has sparked a series of actions across the country protesting the verdict, including a demonstration led by the Rev. Al Sharpton on April 26 in Harlem. The Peoples Justice march, numbering about 1,500 altogether and consisting mostly of youth, included a diverse spectrum of nationality, sex, gender and sexuality.

The state killing of Sean Bell, like that of Amadou Diallo in 1999, is another in the series of attacks on the self-determination of the Black community. The responses to the verdict were actions of self-defense and resistance by people of color, women, LGBT/Queer folks and youth, who blocked the streets chanting: “Whose Streets, Our Streets!” and “Justice for Sean Bell!”

The writer is an organizer of the youth group Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST), which participated in the April 25th marches.



April 25th, Jamaica Queens, NY