

America's Internal Colonialism

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Colonialism is a word associated with the 19th and 20th centuries, with an outside force (usually European) coming into a country, destroying and uprooting the culture and people, with the main goal being the extraction of resources for the gain of the 'mother' country. It is defined as "the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically." [1] Yet this definition of colonialism can be expanded from examining the external to examining the internal. For what may be the first time in US history, internal colonialism is occurring as the very facades of democracy and the economic system begin to fall apart and the elites begin to colonize internally.

The internal colonization of America by elites can be seen most starkly in the financial sector, specifically in the 2007-2009 economic crisis, the effects of which are still being felt. There was mass panic about the near global economic collapse which allowed financial corporations to convince the government to bail them out to the tune of \$12.8 trillion [2], yet, once the dust cleared, the very banks that caused the crisis in the first place only grew larger. *Bloomberg* noted in April of this year that Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs, and Citigroup had combined assets that "amounted to 43 percent of US output" in 2007 but after the crisis those same banks now "held \$8.5 trillion in assets at the end of 2011, equal to 56 percent of the U.S. economy," [3] meaning that their combined percentage of the economy had *increased* by thirteen percent.

While the near collapse of the economy led to large amounts of growth for the banks and therefore the bankers getting massive bonuses, it had a devastating impact on average Americans. While one can go and generalize about the number of jobs and houses lost, it is much more telling to go and look at the actual numbers. After the crisis ended, it was stated that the entire fiasco "cost the U.S. an estimated \$648 billion due to slower economic growth" which translated into "an average of approximately \$5,800 in lost income for each U.S. household." [4] It was also found that 5.5 million more jobs were lost than were predicted in the Congressional Budget Office forecast of 2008.

The effects of this recession has not only resulted in droves of Americans being left destitute and unemployed to the point where just last year one million of them applied to McDonalds [5], but has also left towns and cities on almost utterly destroyed.. A 2011 IHS reported revealed that there were "37 metropolitan areas which are not expected to return to peak employment until after 2021" and that

Many of these metropolitan areas are part of the "Rust Belt," an area covering portions of the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest that was once an international center for heavy manufacturing. Cities such as Canton and Youngstown, Ohio were once hubs of the steel industry. Detroit and Flint, of course, were at the heart of the US automobile industry. [6]

This is a prime example of internal colonialism where the banks and automobile companies have sucked the economic life out of towns and cities, exploiting them to the fullest extent possible, and then when they are done and no more can be used, the banks and companies leave these areas and move elsewhere in the world to exploit other people, leaving in their wake only destruction and devastation. This combination of greedy bankers and companies that offshore jobs has created not only a global economic crisis, but also a situation where half of the US population is now either impoverished or low-income. [7]

Yet, this internal colonization happens on an even more horrendous scale environmentally. Mining companies such as Massey Energy, now owned by Alpha Natural, engage in a horrid practice called mountaintop mining which is defined as “a surface mining practice involving the removal of mountaintops to expose coal seams, and disposing of the associated mining overburden in adjacent valleys — ‘valley fills.’” [8] Mining practices such as these allow corporations to get at the resource faster and thus extract more easily and cheaply as well as it allows miners more safety since they do not have to actually go down into the mines. While this may be good for the corporations, it is nothing but horrible for the environment. A 2007 *Wired* article stated that

In just two decades, hundreds of mountaintops, more than a thousand miles of stream, and hundreds of square miles of forests have been obliterated.

[...]

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, MTR destroyed more than 1,200 miles of Appalachia’s streams and 7 percent of its forests between 1985 and 2001. Approximately 800 square miles of mountains were leveled.

[...]

According to a rough estimate by West Virginia University bio-geochemist William Peterjohn, the deforestation could add as much as 138 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere — and that’s not even counting the even-larger CO2 emissions from burning the coal. [9]

There is also a human factor involved as well as removal of the mountaintops in such a manner causes water resources to become contaminated which can lead to “Balkan endemic nephropathy (BEN), an irreversible kidney disease has been related to the leaching of toxic organic compounds in groundwater.” Contaminated drinking water can affect children quite negatively as “An Eastern Kentucky University study found that children in Letcher County, Kentucky, suffer from an alarmingly high rate of nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, and shortness of breath, symptoms related to blue babe syndrome,” [10] which was found to be caused by contaminated minerals find their way into nearby streams.

This is yet another prime example of internal colonialism. As the corporations abuse the planet and push the environment to its breaking point, their careless exploitation and sole concern for profits results in a decimated, uninhabitable environment and people who become sickly and weak. As with the bankers, once there is no one and nothing left to exploit, they flock to the next location and start the process anew.

This internal colonialism is not only destroying people, but also the very environment that everyone- including the bankers and industrialists- live on. While we may be suffering

currently, the colonizers may be in for a surprise as they destroy the environment and with it, themselves.

Notes

- 1: Oxford Dictionaries, *Colonialism*, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/colonialism>
- 2: PBS, *The true cost of the bank bailout*, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/economy/the-true-cost-of-the-bank-bailout/3309/> (September 3, 2010)
- 3: David J. Lynch, "Banks Seen Dangerous Defying Obama's Too-Big-To-Fail Move," *Bloomberg*, April, 16, 2012 (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-16/obama-bid-to-end-too-big-to-fail-undercut-as-banks-grow.html>)
- 4: Pew Charitable Trusts, *The Impact of the 2008 Economic Collapse*, http://www.pewtrusts.org/our_work_report_detail.aspx?id=58695 (April 28, 2010)
- 5: Andy Kroll, "How the McEconomy Bombed the American Worker," *Truthout*, May 9, 2011 (http://truth-out.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=998:how-the-mceconomy-bombed-the-american-worker)
- 6: 24/7 Wall St, *Ten Cities That Will Take A Decade To Recover From The Recession*, <http://247wallst.com/2011/06/22/ten-cities-that-will-take-a-decade-to-recover-from-the-recession/> (June 22, 2011)
- 7: ABC News, *Census date: Half of US poor or low income*, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-201_162-57343397/census-data-half-of-u.s-poor-or-low-income/ (December 15, 2011)
- 8: U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Mid-Atlantic Mountaintop Mining*, <http://www.epa.gov/region3/mtntop/>
- 9: Brandon Keim, "Blowing The Top Off Mountaintop Mining," *Wired*, September 10, 2007 (http://www.wired.com/science/planetearth/news/2007/09/mountaintop_mining?currentPage=all)
- 10: University of South Carolina, *Mountaintop Removal: Effects on Human Health and the Environment*, <http://law.sc.edu/environmental/papers/200841/eas/chhotray.pdf>

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