

Human Zoos, Conservation Refugees, and the Houston Zoo's The African Forest
By Shannon Joyce Prince

The Houston Zoo has proudly announced a new project, The African Forest, which will open December 2010. According to the Zoo's website, The African Forest is not just about exhibiting "magnificent wildlife and beautiful habitats. It's about people, and the wonderful, rich cultures that we all can share." Actually, The African Forest, as I will explain later, is about exhibiting and teaching African indigenous cultures or rather, as I also will demonstrate later, inaccurate Western conceptions of African cultures, in a place designed to exhibit and teach about animals. The African Forest is also about making and keeping African indigenous peoples conservation refugees.

Fairs, exhibitions, and zoos that showcase, market, or teach about Africans and other indigenous peoples as though they were animals are called "human zoos," and The African Forest is one of them. Human zoos have been condemned since 1906 by academics, anthropologists, religious leaders, civil rights activists, African leaders, scholars of genocide, and many others including lay people both non-white and white, and those condemnations had caused human zoos to die out almost entirely decades ago. For that reason, this essay is not about *arguing* that human zoos are immoral in general or that this human zoo in particular must be stopped. Despite the recent resurgence of human zoos and other forms of vintage racism, the immorality of human zoos is not in question. The verdict, so to speak, has been made: human zoos are both unethical and indefensible. So why write an essay in which I will ask you to protest The African Forest? Malcolm X once said, "Racism is like a Cadillac, they bring out a new model every year." A new human zoo demands a new denunciation. While a comprehensive exploration of why human zoos are racist and must be stopped would be a book without

end, I will limit myself to an essay length analysis. To avoid reinventing the wheel, a list of sources that provide further information is at the end of this paper. I should mention that some of this essay comes from a letter I sent to the Houston Zoo weeks ago which has not received a response. (As I will note later, zoos ignoring people who protest against human zoos is par for the course.)

I will describe The African Forest in detail later on, but to provide you with a frame for understanding those details, I must first briefly describe the history of human zoos. Human zoos are the most common name for projects that, when they claimed to be educational, referred to themselves as “ethnological expositions” and, when they took no pretenses to hide the base voyeurism they were appealing to, were called “Negro villages.” As I mentioned earlier, zoos would exhibit or teach about non-Western peoples, most often Africans, as though they were animals and frequently alongside them. Sometimes the people exhibited were caged or chained, and sometimes their dwellings and home communities were replicated. Due to being taken to environments that wreaked havoc on their immune systems, people frequently died from being exhibited in human zoos. The purpose of human zoos was threefold a) they profited from the public’s desire to see “exotic” peoples b) they showed Africans and other indigenous peoples as not being as “advanced,” “developed,” or “modern” as whites and as existing in a pseudo-scientific space between whites and animals and c) they justified and promoted colonization by exhibiting non-white peoples as trophies of conquest who were inferior to the whites who gazed upon them and thus merited white domination or guidance.

The cultures exhibited in human zoos are always either past, present, or planned future targets of racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, displacement, slavery,

Westernization, globalization, “development,” forced cultural change, or genocide. To give just a few examples, Ota Benga, a Mbuti pygmy widower who was bought by Samuel Verner (Mr. Benga had been enslaved by the Belgians) and exhibited at the Bronx Zoo alongside an orangutan (so visitors could compare how similar the two of them were) was the only member of his family to survive a slaughter carried out by the forces of Leopold II, the king of Belgium. Leopold’s forces would ultimately kill up to fifteen million Congolese black people. Ishi was a Native American man exhibited in the Museum of Anthropology at Parnassus. He was the last surviving member of the Yana people – the result of massacres after gold was discovered on his people’s land. Saartjie Baartman was a Khoi-San woman exhibited in a cage by an animal trainer because the buttocks and genitals of her people’s women were thought by Westerners to be freakish. After her death she was dissected. Her brain and genitals were pickled and kept in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, and the French did not return her remains to South Africa until 2002 despite Nelson Mandela having begun an international campaign for their repatriation in 1994. At the time when Ms. Baartman left South Africa, a British traveler noted that he hadn’t seen more than twenty of Ms. Baartman’s people “not in servitude of the Dutch.”ⁱ Filipinos were exhibited in the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. Between 1899 and 1902 nearly one and a half million Filipinos were killed by the U.S.ⁱⁱ

As these examples show, there are two rules human zoos follow. First, white people are not exhibited as or alongside animals – only non-whites are. While the Houston Zoo website may refer to “cultures we all can share,” only some cultures get put in the zoo. Second, human zoos purposefully, not randomly, pick cultures to exhibit. Whites who were/are racist know that they can’t displace, enslave, colonize, dominate, or

eradicate fellow humans. Human zoos allowed and still allow targeted non-whites to be redefined as animals in Western, European, or First World spaces in order to justify white past, current, or planned mistreatment of non-white peoples in the non-white peoples' homelands.

Human zoos were concomitant with disturbing museological practices that continue to this day. Africans and indigenous people were and are exhibited in natural history museums as though they are not human. Whites typically are not and have not been exhibited among nature and animals in natural history museums. Furthermore, non-white art, technology, tools, etc. are called "artifacts" while the corresponding objects of whites are deemed "art," "technology," or "tools," etc. African and indigenous art was and is placed in museums of natural history. White art is placed in art museums. Non-white peoples have long condemned racist museological practices that first posit a nature/human dichotomy and then relegate only non-white peoples to the non-human realm of nature while defining whites as the only humans and humans as only white.ⁱⁱⁱ

Now that you have some historical context, let's examine the human zoo in question. According to the Zoo's website, The African Forest includes an "African Marketplace Plaza" selling gifts from "from all over the world" and offering dining with a "view of giraffes;" a "Pygmy Village and Campground" showcasing "African art, history, and folklore" where visitors can stay overnight; "Pygmy Huts" where visitors will be educated about pygmies and "African culture," hear stories, and be able to stay overnight; a "Storytelling Fire Pit;" an "Outpost" where visitors, while getting refreshments, will view posters "promoting ecotourism, conservation messages, and African wildlife refuges;" a "Communications Hut and Conservation Kiosk" where

“visitors will use a replicated shortwave radio and listen in on simulated conversations taking place throughout Africa;” a “Rustic Outdoor Shower” representing the fact that the fictional “Pygmy Village” “recently got running water” where children can “cool off;” a section of the “Pygmy Village” where children can handle “African musical instruments and artifacts;” and “Tree House Specimen Cabinets” that showcase “objects, artifacts, and artwork.”^{iv}

Clearly The African Forest falls neatly into the contemptible tradition of its human zoo predecessors, replicating a non-white village, a place where non-white humans live, in a zoo among the habitats where animals live. In doing so, The African Forest is following a pattern Jan Pieterse describes saying, “Exhibits of non-western peoples were first organized by zoos, apparently on the grounds that with exotic animals went matching people, and probably making use of the same trade connections. In Germany such exhibits were organized by the Hamburg animal trader and zoo director Carl Hagenbeck. In his memoirs he refers to them as ‘anthropological-zoological exhibits.’ ... Thus during the heydays of imperialism many exhibits of peoples were organized: against payment the public were shown negroes, Indians, Asians, situated in their own dwellings. In colonial ethnography the colonized were turned into objects of knowledge, in the colonial exhibit they were turned into spectacles.”^v.

The Zoo also states that very few people will get to travel to Africa, but many more people will be able to visit The African Forest. As Kurt Jonassohn remarked in his paper “On A Neglected Aspect Of Western Racism” which was presented at a meeting of the Association of Genocide Scholars, “As mentioned above, these [non-white people] had been brought to Europe by the early explorers. While some of them were taught to

perform simple household tasks, they served primarily to demonstrate the wealth of their owners and to impress their peers. But they were not accessible to a wider public. By the late nineteenth century, the movements toward democratization, universal public education, and greater equality in the distribution of wealth, expanded the participation of people in all aspects of the life of the community. Visits to zoological gardens, regional exhibitions, and world fairs were a significant part of both entertainment and education.” In other words, human zoos have always claimed that they were simply pursuing the noble goal of democratizing access to other cultures. The African Forest functions exactly as Pieterse and Jonassohn describe, but it’s problematic for several more reasons.

First, Africa is not a monolith despite how The African Forest presents the continent. By exhibiting Africa as monolithic, the Zoo is miseducating visitors. There is no such thing as an “African forest,” “African marketplace,” or “African culture.” Africa is a continent of fifty-three nations and even more cultures. For example, there are over five hundred languages spoken in Nigeria alone. One may speak of a Ugandan forest, Yoruba marketplace, or Xhosa culture, but Africa is such a diverse continent that the idea of, for example, an “African marketplace” is meaningless. If the Zoo had any real interest in actually making The African Forest educational, it would make sure their information was accurate and wasn’t going to leave visitors more misinformed and ignorant about Africa than when they arrived. A promotional video on the Zoo’s website then goes on to say that “The African Forest” is really the central African forest, but geographical detail is missing both in the project’s name and in descriptions of its various facets, clearly indicating that the Zoo considers Africa and its various parts interchangeable.

Imagine if the Zoo were doing an exhibit on Europe and one clichéd section of the continent – the windmills and tulips of the Netherlands, the canals and gondolas of Venice, or the small rustic villages and mule drawn wagons of Serbia – were meant to represent the whole. Everyone would find such an exhibit problematic, ignorant, and inaccurate – not educational, and certainly the Zoo wouldn't be promoting the exhibit as a way to experience “the life of a continent” or “travel to Europe” the way the Zoo's website promotes The African Forest. The continent of Europe and each of its various nations are given respect, so no country is made to stand for all the others and no part is allowed to replace all the others and define itself as “Europe.” However, when it comes to Africa, erroneous synecdoche is the rule.

Furthermore, we don't go to the zoo to learn about how Europeans live. If someone wanted to learn about Europe or pretend they were traveling to Europe he or she would be told to visit a library or museum. Only someone wanting to learn more about or experience a non-white continent would be directed to the zoo.

Modern human zoos always, ignorantly, treat Africa as a monolith while laughably pretending to be educational. A human zoo in Germany put on in 2005 called itself an “African village.” An American human zoo that was put on in 2007 called itself the “Massai Journey” yet also boasted an “African Savanna” and “African Village.” At the Houston Zoo, Africa has no meaning beyond the imaginings of the West. Africa is a synecdoche for everything and everything is a synecdoche for Africa. The “African Marketplace” sells gifts from all over the world – so anything foreign is African and Africa is anything foreign, yet “pygmies” are the one culture singled out for attention on

the Zoo's website. Apparently, pygmies stand in for all Africans, and all Africans are more or less pygmies.

The ironic part of representing all Africa in the context of the central African forest is that certain aspects of both Africa in general and central Africa in particular are conspicuously absent from this “everything but the kitchen sink” approach. Why are the metropolises, skyscrapers, boutiques, and movie theaters of Africa missing while The African Forest shows off the village that just got running water? Why is only folklore being shared? Why not teach about the epic poems that rival the Odyssey and Iliad, about the brilliant historical and contemporary richness of Africa's technology, science, philosophy, or university systems to name just few arenas of knowledge where the continent shines? (And no, I'm not romanticizing Africa. Read some Basil Davis, nonfiction Chinua Achebe, or Herodotus.) I am emphatically against the idea that there is anything less modern about a “Pygmy hut” than a glass and steel tower, but the Zoo is only showing aspects of Africa that fit Western stereotypes of cultural anachronism and primitivism. (Some might argue that features of urban life wouldn't be appropriate to include as urban dwellers do not live in harmony with nature. That argument ignores the facts that a) environmental justice activists and non-white people define nature as being everywhere in contrast to the predominantly white belief that nature means rural or wild^{vi} and b) as I will explain later, The African Forest teaches the lie that rural indigenous Africans in fact don't live in harmony with nature.)

Beyond the fact that Africa is not a monolith, central Africa is also not a monolith. Just as central Europe contains several countries that are culturally distinct from each other such as Germany, Switzerland, and Slovenia, central Africa contains Burundi, the

Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda. These countries, in turn, host multiple ethnic groups. Therefore, it's problematic that in a website video the Zoo refers to "the culture of central Africa," as though there were only one, just as it would be problematic to refer to "the culture of central Europe."

I said earlier that Africans and indigenous peoples are the peoples deemed worthy of being placed in the zoo – but whites place one particular people in the zoo more frequently than any other – pygmies. If Africans in general are seen as being exotic, less than human, and physically different from whites, pygmies are Africans par excellence. The tradition of exhibiting pygmies began with the aforementioned Ota Benga. After he was bought by Samuel Verner, he was exhibited at a human zoo at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, dressed in a duck costume and showcased at the American Museum of Natural History, and exhibited in the Bronx Zoo's Monkey House.^{vii} Madison Grant, defending the dehumanization of Ota Benga against the protests of black preachers in his racist pseudo-scientific work *The Passing of the Great Race*, said that he and other whites should not take orders from black religious leaders. At age thirty-two Mr. Benga committed suicide.

To give two examples, the Brussels 1958 World's Fair contained a pygmy village.^{viii} Recently a zoo in Norfolk, Virginia put on a pygmy human zoo as well. Why is this so? Pygmies are treated by many whites as though they aren't human or as though their smaller physical stature represents a smaller share of humanity. For example, when Newt Gingrich wanted to criticize would be Republican presidential candidates he called them "pygmies."^{ix} Beyond the fact that all blacks are essentialized and mistreated for their physical appearance – for example, the color of their skin – pygmies are almost

defined entirely by their physical stature. Rarely are they called the names of their various ethnic groups such as Baka, Mbuti, or Twa – they are simply labeled pygmies. While it isn't disrespectful to speak collectively of multiple pygmy ethnic groups as pygmies, the Zoo doesn't bother to name the village it's creating a Baka, Mbuti, or Twa village. But as the Zoo is educating its visitors that all Africans are the same and all central Africans are the same, perhaps all pygmy groups are the same, too.

If the Zoo decides to respond to those who protest The African Forest, the Zoo may try to dishonestly claim that, for various reasons, The African Forest is not part of the human zoo tradition but is about celebrating multiculturalism and biodiversity and making life better for people and animals alike, but the legacy of older human zoos directly informs the Zoo's decisions about which people to exhibit.^x Despite the fact that Europe has incredible animals, the Zoo is not putting "European culture" on display. The Zoo chose to include African peoples because that's who older human zoos showed, and of all the peoples in Africa, the Zoo is choosing to focus on pygmies because, again, they're the preferred people for human zoos.

What's particularly chilling about this legacy is that pygmies, like Jewish people, are victims of genocide. Fifteen million people, including six million Jewish men, women, and children, were killed in the Holocaust, and fifteen million pygmy and other black Congolese men, women, and children were killed under King Leopold. Both Jews and pygmies, at the time of their holocausts, were being compared to animals to justify their treatment, and pygmy culture was being exhibited in zoos – pygmy culture is *still* being exhibited in zoos. Would anyone tolerate singling out Jewish people and placing a "Jewish village" in a zoo surrounded by animal habitats? Wouldn't people find it bizarre

at best, sinister at worst, and anti-Semitic at the least to have Jewish homes, musical instruments, and art next to beasts? Since pygmies, like Jewish people, are victims of genocide and dehumanization, they are one of the last peoples who should be placed in a zoo. I doubt that any zoo could move forward with a plan to put Jewish culture in the zoo. The fact that it's considered acceptable and desirable to put pygmy cultures in zoos has horrifying implications.

Human zoos past and present, including The African Forest, both exist in a context of and perpetuate racism. Africans have always been considered non-human animals in America. If you visit <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>, a website that offers an extensive collection of “primary resources for the study of southern history, literature, and culture” and simply enter “ape,” “monkey,” “gorilla,” or similar words in the website's search engine, you will bring forth text after text of antebellum and Reconstruction era whites comparing blacks to non-human primates. One particular text found here: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/oconnor/oconnor.html> tells a pertinent Reconstruction era story that, due to the fact that I've see in recounted in more than one text from that time, seems to have been a well circulated urban legend.

The text says, “There is a story told of a field hand going to a circus and saying to a very big, black ape, ‘Good mawnin', sah.’ The ape remained silent. ‘Why don't you talk to me, mistah?’ the darkey said; ‘you looks jes' like my poor brer John, who is done dead.’ The ape blinked sympathetically, but made no reply. Then the darkey's face broke into a smile, and he said, ‘You sho'ly is wise, sah; 'cause ef you said anything de white folks would cut off yo' tail, put a hoe in yo' hand, and set you to work plantin' cotton.’ ”

In the Reconstruction era many white people said black people were not human but animal, or at least close to animal, and they emphasized that claim by spreading the rumor that black people couldn't distinguish themselves from animals and that *black people wouldn't blink at seeing what they believed to be another black person on display in the manner that animals are displayed*. But that was just the Reconstruction era, correct? No one treats people of African descent in that manner anymore, right?

A recent paper "Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization and Contemporary Consequences" written by psychologists at Stanford, Pennsylvania State University, and University of California-Berkeley states that blacks are still subconsciously linked to apes by people born after the civil rights movement.^{xi} As the website Science Blog describes in its article on the paper, "in hundreds of news stories from 1979 to 1999 in the Philadelphia Inquirer, African Americans convicted of capital crimes were about four times more likely than whites convicted of capital crimes to be described with ape-relevant language, such as 'barbaric,' 'beast,' 'brute,' 'savage' and 'wild.'" The psychologists found that, "Those who are implicitly portrayed as more ape-like in these articles are more likely to be executed by the state than those who are not." Furthermore, Science Blog states, "the findings show that society is more likely to condone violence against black criminal suspects as a result of its broader inability to accept African Americans as fully human, according to the researchers." But one study doesn't necessarily prove anything, right?

A 2009 article from a parenting website begins as follows, "A girl in 9-year-old Malik Jones' class called him a monkey and said he was dirty. Other students started repeating the girl's words. When Malik touched something, classmates would wipe the

spot he had touched. Malik is one of three African American students in his elementary school class in Brooklyn.”^{xii} It sounds as though Malik’s classmate was just echoing the attitudes of adults. After all, recently a Republican activist said that a gorilla who had escaped from the zoo was an ancestor of Michelle Obama. Her husband, President Obama, was compared to a chimpanzee in a comic run by the New York Post. The Dresden Zoo did the New York Post one better by naming a real baby baboon after Obama.^{xiii} If you couldn’t make it to Dresden, there was no need to fear – David and Elizabeth Lawson started selling Obama monkey toys in 2008.^{xiv} In Europe, black soccer players are regularly taunted with bananas. Costco recently sold a black baby doll called “Lil’ Monkey” that held a banana.^{xv}

Black men have been repeatedly portrayed as King Kong in the past couple of years. LeBron James was photographed playing King Kong to Giselle Bündchen’s Fay Wray. Lest you think I’m seeing racism where it doesn’t exist, Giselle’s dress is even the same very specific shade of green as Fay Wray’s in an original King Kong poster.^{xvi} Kanye West and Lady Gaga have also been photographed as King Kong and Fay Wray, and a book on feminism entitled *It’s a Jungle Out There* by Amanda Marcotte was illustrated with pictures of white women assailed by simian black savages.^{xvii} This movie poster for *The Blindside* <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm3647637760/tt0878804> is part of the King Kong cannon as well.

The Southern Poverty Law Center states that racist websites “offer a window into some of the most important ideological and other discussions going on in the racist movement.”^{xviii} Members of Stormfront, a major neo-Nazi and white supremacist forum, discuss blacks the same way the antebellum and Reconstruction era whites whose words

are archived on <http://docsouth.unc.edu/> did. Blacks, or “negroes,” as we are referred to on Stormfront, are likened to all manner of non-human primates and other animals, and it is frequently said that we belong, of all places, in the zoo. Special opprobrium is directed at Africans, and, naturally, pygmies.

In one forum thread titled “Human zoo,” a Stormfront member reposts an excerpt from wikipedia’s article on human zoos (found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_zoo .)^{xix} A fellow white supremacist comments “Ha ha. They had it right!” A Stormfront member references Ota Benga in another thread entitled “Monkey exhibit at Bronx zoo” saying, “Oh, yes they did and how appropriate that they thought of the idea. I say bring back the exhibit! I want to learn more about Ota!”^{xx} Another member adds, “I was riding the train at the local zoo passing the monkey house. I told all the kids on our train to wave at the monkeys. Right on cue a pack of negroes came out of the monkey house and started waving back. I thought I was going to bust a gut...”

As I said earlier, it is impossible to recount the infinite reasons why human zoos are inappropriate, but this lengthy list of recent examples of black dehumanization from a far larger pool of racist events shows that blacks are still frequently thought of as beasts in both the mainstream and among white supremacists and neo-Nazis. The idea that blacks are animals is pervasive in America. How can anyone think that exhibiting African cultures in a zoo is a good idea in this context? Exhibiting African culture in a zoo only affirms the bigotry that relegates blacks to the sphere of animals. The reason Africans don’t belong in the zoo is that many whites believe Africans do belong in the zoo.

In his satirical article “How to Write About Africa,” Binyavanga Wainaina mocks the ignorant and stereotypical way Westerners write about his home continent. The Houston Zoo’s discourse on The African Forest makes several of the blunders Mr. Wainaina describes, two of them especially having the potential to terribly harm Africans. In his article, Mr. Wainaina suggests, “Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title.” The African Forest does that. He continues, “In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country.” Yep, The African Forest does that, too. Mr. Wainaina says, “Subtitles may include the words 'Zanzibar', 'Masai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun' or 'Bygone'.” And, lo and behold, the Zoo’s website promises that visitors to The African Forest will hear the sound of drums in one of the first sentences describing the project. Why drums? Why not ongo trumpets or ieta bow harps? Those instruments come from central Africa. Kids may get to play with replicas of various instruments in the “Pygmy Village and Campground,” but it’s the sound of drums visitors will hear.

That The African Forest does the things Mr. Wainaina criticizes shows that the Zoo is relying on the laziest stereotyping possible, but there are two clichés Mr. Wainaina denounces that are particularly problematic. The first is “Establish early on that your liberalism is impeccable, and mention near the beginning how much you love Africa... Africa is to be pitied, worshipped or dominated. Whichever angle you take, be sure to leave the strong impression that without your intervention and your important book, Africa is doomed” and “Animals, on the other hand, must be treated as well rounded, complex characters... Any short Africans who live in the jungle or desert may be

portrayed with good humour (unless they are in conflict with an elephant or chimpanzee or gorilla, in which case they are pure evil).”

Earlier in my essay I said, “The cultures exhibited in human zoos are always either past, present, or planned future targets of racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, displacement, slavery, Westernization, globalization, “development,” forced cultural change, or genocide.” This human zoo is no exception to the rule. Mr. Wainaina’s article provides us with a helpful frame for analyzing the harm The African Forest will do to African people in Africa. As his article says, when framing Africa ignorantly one often employs a) liberalism b) a claimed love of Africa c) a condescending or distorted view of Africa d) a belief that Africa is doomed without Western intervention e) a gaze that sees African animals as more human than African people and f) a gaze that views “short Africans who live in the jungle” (pygmies) as evil when in conflict with animals.

So what does the Zoo freely state about its views on Westerners, Africa’s future, African people, and African animals? The Zoo says on its website, “The African Forest will transform the way Houstonians view the world providing visitors with a glimpse into the remote forests of central Africa and the distinctive people that call it home. By understanding and appreciating the challenges these people face, we will be better equipped to work with them to preserve our fragile world and to make it a better place for future generations.”^{xxi} A spokesperson for the Zoo stated in the Houston Chronicle, “Traditional zoo exhibits concentrate on animals, what they eat, how big they are and so forth. This delves into habitat; conflict between man and the wild. And it tells these things in story fashion, from beginning to end.”^{xxii} The Zoo also said in its description of The African Forest that the project contains an “Outpost” where visitors, while getting

refreshments, will view posters “promoting ecotourism, conservation messages, and African wildlife refuges.”

Finally, the Zoo’s blog states, “What we frequently do not discuss is the human component of wildlife conservation. What are we doing to enact the ‘careful preservation and protection of something’ if that something is the people who have historically lived side-by-side with the wildlife we intend to protect? To that end, the Houston Zoo’s conservation efforts will focus on developing wildlife, habitat, and human community support programs in central Africa in 2010.

‘Right now, there are few places left on earth where humans do not co-exist with native wildlife. There are also few national parks and protected areas on earth where humans did not co-exist with wildlife before these park boundaries were put in place. And there are even fewer places where the decision to designate a protected area does not somehow intimately affect the human population living around its borders.

“If the ability for native people to coexist with their habitat is taken away from them without offering a sustainable solution, then wildlife and habitat conservation efforts are bound to fail. The most successful wildlife conservation efforts are those in which indigenous communities are empowered in the management of local natural resources and supported through capacity building programs.

“Model community initiatives lead to socioeconomic and conservation gains by establishing and strengthening alternative community initiatives for sustainable development which can be compatible with the long term conservation of local natural resources. Today, wildlife is much more valuable alive than dead.”

Clearly, the Zoo is doing the six things Mr. Wainaina criticizes. The Zoo has picked a liberal cause: being green by protecting the environment and wildlife. The Zoo is claiming a love for Africa – The African Forest is about “the wonderful, rich cultures that we all can share.” The Zoo has a condescending and distorted view of Africa – Africans are in conflict with wildlife, and it’s ok to violate the human rights of Africans by making them refugees to protect wildlife as long as you give them some alternative development. The Zoo believes Africa is doomed without Western help – we have to protect imperiled wildlife from Africans. The Zoo sees African animals as more human than African humans – it condones displacing African people to protect African animals. Last but not least, the Zoo sees pygmies as in conflict with wildlife and posits them as the antagonists in those conflicts. There’s so, so much egregiously wrong and wrongheaded in the Zoo’s discourse on Africans that it’s necessary to analyze the Zoo’s words piece by piece.

Let’s start with the Zoo’s first quote, “The African Forest will transform the way Houstonians view the world providing visitors with a glimpse into the remote forests of central Africa and the distinctive people that call it home. By understanding and appreciating the challenges these people face, we will be better equipped to work with them to preserve our fragile world and to make it a better place for future generations.” In other words, the Zoo will exhort its visitors to take up the White Man’s Burden.

Anyone who comes to the Zoo, no matter who they are, is in a position to help/teach Africans. Africans have challenges; we have answers. They need help; we come to the rescue. They live in central Africa and have millennia of knowledge on how to care for their environments, but we’re the ones in the position to tell them what to do.

The Zoo states that the reason we should learn about central Africans is so that we can understand Africans' challenges and help them. There is a power structure implicit in that idea. The only reason to learn about African cultures is to control them. As Munir Fasheh of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University says, "It always fascinated me how difficult it is for Europeans and Americans to learn *from* other cultures. What is referred to as 'area studies' in western universities do not, in general, refer to learning *from* but *about* other cultures – usually in order to control."^{xxiii}

Furthermore, as one of the nation's most acclaimed white anti-racists Tim Wise notes, multiculturalism leads to non-whites being demeaned "So long as diversity talk avoids issues of power and privilege, opting instead for cultural tourism."^{xxiv} I'll address the issues of power, privilege, and imperialism later.

The next problem with that quote is that it is gallingly hypocritical. Is it typically Western corporations or African corporations that raise animals on cruel factory farms or profit from the brutal fur industry? Is hunting recreationally generally part of an African or Western ethos? Is it primarily Africans or Westerners who own polluting industries, mining industries, the corporations that use the resources that are mined, and the corporations that create toxins – all of which threaten the well being of animals and people alike? My list of questions could go on. I'm sure you can probably think of many of your own. Why, beyond the racist need that many white people have to tell black people what to do, would the Zoo focus on changing the behavior of people who do far less to harm animals and the environment worldwide than Westerners do? If the Zoo truly wanted to help African animals – and African people to boot – in a way that supports the sovereignty of Africans, there are many things they could do. For example,

Westerners could challenge the transboundary waste trade in which Western nations and corporations dump their toxins in Africa, poisoning people and animals both. Or Westerners could take on any of the anti-nature and anti-wildlife sins Western people perpetrate that were listed above.

The hypocrisy of the Zoo's quote is tied to the fact that when Western entities – governments, organizations, institutions, corporations, etc. – decide they want to “help” the environment or animals, too frequently they do not change their own behavior but rather declare they are helping by dominating Africans' and/or indigenous peoples' lives and behavior. For example, white and Western people who have large carbon footprints often engage in “land grabs, killings, violent evictions and forced displacement” to create “carbon offsets” on indigenous land in Africa and worldwide.^{xxv} In “Reflections on Distance and Katrina,” Jim Igoe of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center tells how Tanzanians are being displaced by “networks of private enterprise, NGOs, and government officials.” He says, “Exxon Mobil is also sponsoring part of conservation interventions initiated by the African Wildlife Foundation” which meant that “local people targeted by this intervention are being encouraged by the African Wildlife Foundation and the Tanzanian government to enter into agreements and sign things that they don't fully understand.” This “transforms these landscapes from peopled landscapes to those dominated by wildlife, which has made them attractive to private investors at the expense of locals. It also provides Exxon Mobil, and many other corporations that sponsor conservation interventions, with tax breaks and a valuable green public image enhancement.” Mr. Igoe then references William Cronon's *Uncommon Ground* to explain that “Western obsession with protecting distant and exotic places undermines

effective conservation... Unfortunately, this transcendent experience draws people's attention away from more proximate and mundane landscapes and the impacts of their more mundane activities on the environment."

As Jan Pieterse notes in his article on human zoos and colonialism, while Westerners put non-Western culture in human zoos and accused them of being barbaric, whites were barbarically practicing colonization. In *The African Forest*, Western people put "African culture" in a human zoo and accuse Africans of not properly caring for the environment and wildlife, while playing a disproportionately larger role than any of the earth's other peoples in destroying the environment and wildlife. As Munir Fasheh says, "Talking about 'ensuring environmental sustainability' without talking about reversing the current pattern and level of consumption (and its role in global warming) is again a sign of lack of honesty and courage."^{xxvi}

Human zoos are about directly or indirectly justifying past, current, or future imperialism. Africans and indigenous people worldwide are always considered inferior by the West – whatever inferior means in a particular age. As Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire, say "The transgression of the values and norms that Europe considered to constitute civilisation was a driving force behind the West's 'animalisation' of exotic peoples. Denied an entirely human nature, they were thus colonisable and needed to be domesticated and tamed to turn them - if possible - into civilised men. This *mise en scène* helped to legitimise the West's colonial action. But is our gaze so very different from that of our grandparents? Probably not, as human zoos still exist. On the eve of the twenty-first century, an African village built in the middle of a Safari Park in Nantes offered visitors the same images as yesterday. Moreover, it

significantly boosted the park's number of visitors. Very few people pointed out its shocking nature. We accept this, and in the same movement our children cross paths with monkeys, giraffes and 'Blacks'." In past eras, indigenous people were said to transgress European values and norms by virtue of being "heathens," cannibals, or nudists. Currently, indigenous Africans are viewed as inferior because the West sees them as not properly caring for wildlife. In other words, The African Forest says that the West is civilized – knows how to properly protect wildlife – and indigenous Africans are not civilized – don't know how to properly protect wildlife. Because indigenous Africans are not civilized, a "Pygmy Village" may be placed in the Zoo. Placing such a village in the Zoo will help the West to civilize indigenous Africans – to change their behavior so that they properly protect wildlife. Placing indigenous Africans in the Zoo justifies the Zoo's civilizing mission.^{xxvii} As Vandana Shiva notes in *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, indigenous people were originally displaced from their land because they weren't seen as improving it, profiting from it, or doing enough with it. In other words, their land was stolen because they had too little impact on the environment. Now neo-colonialists steal land by claiming indigenous people have too much of an impact on the environment. Clearly, these people just make this stuff up as they go along.

However, the only way to respect indigenous Africans is also the only way to help wildlife – respecting the sovereignty of indigenous African peoples. If the Zoo truly wanted to help wildlife and truly respected African peoples, they would support the environmental principles of non-white people such as Principle number five of the Principles of Environmental Justice adopted by the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit which says, "Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to

political, economic, cultural, environmental self-determination for all peoples.”^{xxviii} They would honor international agreements such as Agenda 21 which states, “Indigenous people and their communities represent a significant percentage of the global population. They have developed over many generations a holistic traditional scientific knowledge of their lands, natural resources and environment. Indigenous people and their communities shall enjoy the full measure of human rights and fundamental freedoms without hindrance or discrimination...”^{xxix} Numerous other resolutions including the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, one part of which says, “Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation, and where possible, with the option to return” affirm that indigenous peoples have the right to remain on their land and manage their environments and wildlife as they see fit. Actions that violate those rights are human rights abuses. In other words, taking indigenous people off the lands they’ve cared for since time immemorial, lands dear to them and crucial to their ways of life, isn’t the same thing as taking someone off their land to make room for a highway – it’s a violation of indigenous peoples’ collective self determination and individual and communal human rights.

Human zoos go beyond justifying imperialism and denying Africans and indigenous people sovereignty. They often perpetuate the myth that indigenous people and Africans don’t mind being dominated. When Michael G. Vann of Santa Clara University’s History Department was asked of one particular human zoo, “What image of the empire did the Colonial Exhibition set out to project?” he responded, “As a state-

sponsored exhibition, the event sought to portray the empire as loyal and valuable. There was no mention of anti-colonial agitation or the serious rebellions that were going on in Vietnam at the time. Rather, the colonial subjects were presented as obedient and hard-working. Fascinating in their strange costumes and odd behaviour, these natives were nothing to fear, rather, they were a great asset to France.”^{xxx} In other words, a human zoo is still a human zoo even if, as *The African Forest* does, it seeks to portray non-whites in a positive manner and those who visit the zoo don’t have any particular animosity towards non-whites. A hallmark of the human zoo is that it leaves out the passionate resistance of non-whites to whatever help human zoos and their patrons and the societies of those patrons are claiming to give. The Houston Zoo’s website proudly describes the various ways in which the Zoo and Zoo patrons can “help” indigenous Africans to protect wildlife, but just as non-white peoples resisted imperialism in the past, they continue to resist the West’s imperialist environmental practices – including those promoted by the Zoo. I’ll delve into that further in a moment, but let’s examine the second quote.

“Traditional zoo exhibits concentrate on animals, what they eat, how big they are and so forth. This delves into habitat; conflict between man and the wild. And it tells these things in story fashion, from beginning to end.” Inaccurately framing the culture or cultures being exhibited in a human zoo is tradition. For example, Ota Benga had teeth sharpened into points in accordance with his people’s custom, but it was reported that his teeth were sharpened because he was a cannibal – even though his people were not cannibals. *The African Forest* dares to teach Zoo patrons that indigenous Africans are in conflict with wildlife, but the claim that indigenous Africans harm animals is a well known tactic to violate their human rights and drive them from their traditional lands –

often in cahoots with organizations such as the World Bank, NGOs, and corporations. To give a couple examples, the government of Botswana lied that Bushmen had been killing wildlife in order to steal their land – land under which DeBeers was interested in mining for diamonds.^{xxx1} Or let's look at the culture The African Forest is exhibiting – pygmies. The Batwa pygmy people, according to tribal rights group Survival International, “had lived for generations before and after 1930 without destroying the forest or its wildlife, and even had historical claims to land rights, only received compensation if they had acted like farmers, and destroyed part of the forest to make fields. Despite legal provision for Batwa to use and even live within the national parks (Ugandan Wildlife Statute, No. 14, 1996, sections 23-6) they remain excluded from them. Access to the parks is controlled by the Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Trust, the NGO CARE and the Uganda Wildlife Trust; it is negotiated through 'multiple use committees' which include almost no Batwa representation. This exclusion is encouraged by the stereotype which represents the Batwa as destroyers of the gorillas. In fact, however, Batwa do not eat gorillas, and they have coexisted with them for centuries. Any gorilla-hunting they may engage in is done at the instigation of others. Nevertheless, the Batwa are stigmatised as gorilla-slayers and poachers, and get the blame for any poaching that occurs.^{xxxii}

Survival International also notes “the Aka, like all of the 'Pygmy' peoples in Central Africa, are under threat. More and more of the forest is being depleted by logging companies, while huge areas of good forest have been turned into parks or wildlife reserves that are *guarded by armed thugs who beat up the Pygmies and drive them out of their ancestral hunting grounds*. And yet the Pygmies are the real guardians of the forest.

As their proverb explains: 'We Aka love the forest as we love our own bodies' ” (italics mine.)^{xxxiii} To learn more about pygmy and other African and indigenous peoples’ views on conservation see http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/conservation/uganda_review_cbd_pa_jan08_eng.pdf, http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/conservation/bases/p_to_p_project_base.shtml#english, http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/wb_ips_uganda_may00_eng.shtml, and other resources on <http://www.forestpeoples.org/index.shtml> .

Again, if The African Forest were truly about respecting Africans, it wouldn’t frame a people whose land is being stolen because they are being dishonestly accused of harming wildlife as enemies of animals in order to continue to steal that same peoples’ land.

The Zoo’s website says The African Forest contains an “Outpost” where visitors, while getting refreshments, will view posters “promoting ecotourism, conservation messages, and African wildlife refuges.” Let’s examine ecotourism first.

When communities freely choose to enter into the ecotourism industry on their own terms, when they are the primary beneficiaries, financial and otherwise, of ecotourism, and when they have management and other high jobs in the industry – not just menial jobs as performers or nature guides, ecotourism can be a good thing. Ecotourism is an immoral industry when people have little choice but to enter it after having been displaced from their land – and it’s a sick industry when it’s presented as a way to facilitate displacing people from their lands.

According to Lee Pera and Deborah McLaren,^{xxxiv} tourism “has been promoted as a panacea for ‘sustainable’ development. However, tourism's supposed benefits (generation of employment, development of infrastructure, etc.) have not ‘trickled down’ or benefited Indigenous Peoples. The destructiveness of the tourism industry (*environmental pollution* and enormous waste management problems, *displacement from lands*, human rights abuses, unfair labor and wages, commodification of cultures, etc.) has brought great harm to many Indigenous Peoples and communities around the world... Indigenous Peoples have not been invited to participate adequately in these policies which will have negative consequences for the rest of time” (italics mine.)

They say, “Tourism has often had negative impacts on Indigenous Peoples and other local communities and ecosystems of which they are a part,” adding, “The tendency of large-scale tourism to dominate a whole regional economic base can be observed in many areas throughout the world. Tourism threatens and often destroys locals' traditional means of livelihood, or local self-reliance, and can ruin local industries with its build-up of transportation, communications, and economic infrastructure. Liberalization in economic sectors such as agriculture, or expansion of other industries such as logging or mining, also create conditions ripe for tourism development since they help to erode a community's self-sufficiency and create dependency upon a market over which locals have no control... *It is no coincidence that those who have lost their lands* or have no market for their crops *are forced into service-sector employment in the tourism industry* and are increasingly dependent on the whims of the global market and the corporations which run it” (italics mine.) Furthermore, The International Land Coalition says tourism “negatively affects” landless people.

McLaren adds, "Global tourism threatens indigenous knowledge and intellectual property rights, our technologies, religions, sacred sites, social structures and relationships, *wildlife*, ecosystems, economies and basic rights to informed understanding; reducing indigenous peoples to simply another consumer product that is quickly becoming exhaustible" (italics mine.)

Georgianne Nienaber writing for central African (Rwandan) newspaper *The New Times* states, "Finally, the detritus of 'civilization,' in the form of excrement, garbage and detergents, is discharged into the once pristine environment. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) estimates that the average tourist produces one kilo (approximately 2.2 pounds) of litter and solid waste EACH DAY! The story of tourism in Africa causes one to weep. In Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe the story of tourism is a tragedy in which western businesses sent most of the money back home to the colonialist developers. The higher purchasing power of tourists inflated local economies to the extent that artificial inflation raised property and food prices for the locals, pricing them out of land ownership. Foreign workers held the most lucrative management positions (Pera and McLaren, *Globalization, Tourism and Indigenous Peoples: What You Should Know About the World's Largest Industry*, www.planeta.com), reducing the local 'service providers' to little more than slave labour... Echoing the experience of the Native American Indian, religious artifacts have been cheapened into souvenirs and, with the loss of the bedrocks of religious and cultural beliefs, alcoholism and other social ills have devastated portions of the population."^{xxxv}

A paper published by the Forest Peoples Programme in conjunction with the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda – the Batwa pygmy people's own

organization – quotes a Mutwa pygmy as saying, “Don’t mix us with other people, leave us separate and help us.”^{xxxvi} It’s odd that The African Forest plans to promote ecotourism as a way to help Africans and African wildlife despite how deeply devastating some Africans, specifically central Africans and pygmies, and allies of indigenous people find the industry for Africans and African wildlife.

Now let’s examine the last two things the “Outpost” in The African Forest promotes “conservation messages and African wildlife refuges.” Conservation in Africa and the creation of wildlife refuges on the continent are notorious for the frequent creation of “wildlife refugees.” That means that African governments, with the help of Western businesses and NGOs, violate the human rights of Africans, decide they have no right to their traditional lands, and literally make them refugees alongside, for example, refugees of war. In other words, in Africa it’s common for conservationists to create refuges to conserve wildlife by simply kicking Africans out. Indigenous people and their allies including Cultural Survival, First Peoples Worldwide, Earthrights International, the aforementioned Survival International, and Forest Peoples Programme have vociferously denounced the practice. According to Mark Dowie, the International Forum on Indigenous Mapping created a resolution that said that conservation was the newest and biggest enemy of indigenous people which 200 delegates signed

Five of the world’s most important wildlife conservation organizations are guilty of stealing land from indigenous people and making them refugees: World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Conservation Union.^{xxxvii} The aforementioned African Wildlife Foundation is yet another conservation organization that steals land from indigenous people. As I noted

earlier, the African Wildlife Foundation partnered with Exxon Mobil to displace Tanzanians. An employee representing Exxon Mobil Corporation is on the Houston Zoos' Board of Directors. In other words, you have a company that worked with a conservation/refuge creation foundation in Africa to steal land from Africans on the Board of a Zoo that promotes conservation and wildlife refuges in Africa.

Exxon is known for the Valdez Oil Spill, the Brooklyn Oil Spill, and the Greenpoint Oil Spill, and despite its eagerness to support the Houston Zoo and create a wildlife refuge in Tanzania, the company is currently harming endangered gray whales. In other words, Exxon doesn't sincerely care about protecting animals – only about its superficial pro-environment image. Organizations that allow corporations like Exxon to mask their anti-wildlife actions become accessories to crimes against nature – they're ultimately harming animals and the environment. If its crimes against nature aren't enough, the company is currently being accused of sharing responsibility for " Indonesian Military Killings, Torture and other Severe Abuse in Aceh, Indonesia" such as rape and murder according to the International Labor Rights Forum.

An employee representing Shell Downstream, Inc. is another of the Zoo's Board members. Royal Dutch Shell is a multinational petroleum company notorious for committing crimes against humanity, abusing African indigenous people, torturing people, and poisoning the environment. This is the company that is widely believed yet never has admitted to helping facilitate the execution of legendary environmental and indigenous rights leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other indigenous Ogoni Africans who protested the theft of Ogoni land for oil extraction. The company was condemned by the Nigerian High Court and activists as recently as 2005 and 2008 for "violating the

constitutional ‘rights to life and dignity.’” Shell, in addition to its other crimes against human rights, also creates conservation refugees.^{xxxviii} If the Zoo wanted to help Africans and animals in one fell swoop they could try to change the behavior of Shell. Instead, the Zoo is working with Shell, a company that commits human rights abuses and first displaced indigenous Africans to extract oil and harm the environment and is now displacing Africans ostensibly to help the environment and Africans.^{xxxix}

And lest I forget, one of the Zoo’s donors is Chevron.^{xl} As you might expect, Chevron also makes indigenous people conservation refugees.^{xli} Seeing a pattern? Furthermore, Chevron is currently being sued for 27 billion dollars by an indigenous Amazonian community whose rainforest was polluted by the corporation’s oil-drilling.^{xlii}

Basically, among the corporations that fund the Houston Zoo are some of the most human and wildlife rights abusing businesses in existence. These same businesses try to clean up their images by creating wildlife refuges – but they create those refuges by forcing indigenous people off their land. Then the Zoo, which receives funding from those corporations, claims that the indigenous people who are getting kicked off their land are the ones who harm wildlife and promotes conservation and conservation refuges.

Of course, the Zoo is fine with corporations forcibly displacing Africans to protect wildlife, but no one forces whites to change their behavior to protect animals. We *ask* white people to make good decisions; we *coerce* Africans. Many white people don’t want to give up using plastic bags in grocery stores, yet they expect Africans to lose their entire ways of life.

The Zoo is not focusing on poor or elite white people who labor in chicken processing plants, pork factory farms, or own petroleum companies and kicking them out

of their houses, making them refugees, taking away their jobs, and telling them to be grateful working as maids in eco-tourism lodges or guiding foreigners around the places they used to call home. White people are human. White peoples' human rights don't get violated to protect animals. It's okay to violate the human rights of non-white peoples, Africans, and indigenous peoples. They aren't human. That's why they're in the zoo.

The conservation refugee problem is so bad that, according to Mark Dowie, hundreds of thousands of people have been made refugees due to conservation and conservation refuges. We've all seen images of fly covered, dull eyed African refugees on our television screens. How can any ethical organization accept money from or unhesitatingly promote the corporations or practices that create such images, that literally ruin peoples' lives?

Beyond the fact that making people refugees in the name of conservation is evil – it doesn't even help conservation. As Mark Dowie says in *Paradigm Wars*, “More and more conservationists seem to be wondering how, after setting aside a ‘protected’ land mass the size of Africa, global biodiversity continues to decline... 90 percent of biodiversity lies outside of protected areas. If we want to preserve biodiversity in the far reaches of the globe, places that are in many cases still occupied by indigenous people living in ways that are ecologically sustainable, history is showing us that *the most counterproductive thing we can do is evict them.*” Again, in the interest of keeping this long essay from being any longer than necessary, I encourage those wanting more information on conservation refugees to read Mark Dowie's work in *Orion Magazine* and his book *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict Between Global Conservation and Native Peoples*.

The African Forest and the practices it promotes are neither about respecting Africans nor protecting animals. They're about claiming authority over African land, wildlife, and human lives. The African Forest's version of multiculturalism teaches that respecting other peoples means that you can force those peoples off their lands as long as you play in a replica of their villages first. However, I'm sure if the Zoo asked Africans what they would find more respectful – people playing with replicas of their musical instruments in The African Forest or the Zoo's major donor and Board member, Shell, ceasing to abuse their human rights, I'm pretty sure they would choose the latter.

Let's look at the most damning statement the Zoo has made. “If the ability for native people to coexist with their habitat is *taken* away from them without offering a sustainable solution, then wildlife and habitat conservation efforts are bound to fail.”

The Zoo has openly admitted that they're making people refugees. It freely states that indigenous people's right to coexist with their habitat is being “taken” from them. And, as can be expected, they promise to throw a few scraps indigenous peoples' way as a consolation for violating their human rights. But what do “sustainable solutions” for indigenous people really mean? As Jim Igoe says, after being made refugees in the name of conservation by one of the Zoo's donors, Exxon Mobil, indigenous Africans were then told “their only way out of poverty is to become junior partners in conservation-oriented business ventures on grossly unfavorable terms.” This treatment is the rule, not the exception, when it comes to conservation refugees according to Mark Dowie.

One would be hard pressed to find a single indigenous group worldwide, if there is one, that didn't face issues such as substance abuse, domestic abuse and family dysfunction, physical and psychological health problems, poverty, suicide and other

forms of social trauma as a result of displacement. To give just one example, after the Bushmen were kicked off the land they have inhabited since time immemorial after they were falsely accused of harming wildlife^{xliii} their leader, Right Livelihood (alternative Nobel) prizewinner Roy Sesana, described the condition of his people after having been made conservation refugees as follows, “I say what kind of development is it when the people live shorter lives than before? They catch HIV/AIDS. Our children are beaten in school and won't go there. Some become prostitutes. They are not allowed to hunt. They fight because they are bored and get drunk. They are starting to commit suicide. We never saw that before. It hurts to say this. Is this development?”^{xliv}

We can also look at an older example of conservation refugees. Mark Dowie describes how after the Miwok Indians were kicked off their ancestral land so that Yosemite National Park could be created, the Miwok were given what The Houston Zoo calls “capacity building programs... Model community initiatives” that “lead to socioeconomic and conservation gains by establishing and strengthening alternative community initiatives for sustainable development which can be compatible with the long term conservation of local natural resources” – they were encouraged by the park to weave baskets and grind corn for tourists in a generically named “Indian Village.” They were made exhibits in a human zoo. Today the many Miwok suffer from high rates of poverty and low levels of education.

Mark Dowie quotes Bernhard Grzimek, who was the director of Hitler’s Frankfurt Zoo, as saying of conservation in Africa, “We Europeans must teach our black brothers to value their own possessions (speaking of wildlife.)” The Houston Zoo agrees. And when it comes to violating the human rights of blacks, the Zoo also agrees with Chief Justice

Roger B. Taney who stated, during the infamous Dred Scott case, that blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” The Houston Zoo, through The African Forest, is espousing the belief that its perfectly fine to displace Africans and make them refugees. After all, in the eyes of the Zoo, Africans don’t have land rights. They don’t have human rights. They’re simply another group of creatures in the zoo. The Houston Zoo has made it explicitly clear that it doesn’t consider indigenous African to be worthy of human respect or human rights. As people of conscious we cannot let assaults on the humanity of African indigenous peoples or any other groups go unchallenged. Stephen Corry, the Director of Survival International, says of the situation of conservation refugees “What is happening to these people is not some kind of inevitable doom; it is a crime, and must be resisted.”^{xlv}

When I was a student at Dartmouth, artist Fred Wilson put together an installation in our campus museum called “So Much Trouble in the World - Believe it or Not!” that addressed the issue of human zoos. The treatment of Ota Benga, pygmies, and other indigenous peoples by human zoos was highlighted and condemned. The tone of the installation was one of disbelief, inviting museum patrons to wonder at the scale of the absurdity and cruelty of the distant past. One of the main sentiments of museum visitors seemed to be, “Wow, people did things that were beyond the pale back then!”

In discussing the legacy of human zoos, Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire say, “Many aspects of colonial history remain inaudible today. They are impossible to accept in a country that is only just beginning to face this traumatic past.

“The example of the human zoos allows us to trace the entire process through which popular (and colonial) racism penetrated Western society.

“Human zoos, the incredible symbols of the colonial period and the transition from the nineteenth to twentieth century, have been completely suppressed in our collective history and memory.

“Are we capable of accepting what these human zoos say about our culture, our mentalities, our subconscious, and our collective psyche? For countries that insist on human equality, and not least Republican France with its values handed down from the French revolution, these human zoos, ethnological fairs, or ‘native villages’ remain difficult subjects to deal with.”

Kurt Jonassohn adds, “...people who must have visited these human zoos in their childhood deny any memory of these experiences.” For those who study human zoos, they are a shameful part of the past, an episode of history almost too terrible to remember. The Houston Zoo thinks human zoos are a tradition to continue.

Africans and indigenous people being made refugees by the West is imperialism and a violation of human rights. Human zoos are one of imperialism’s favorite tools. A one sentence summary of this paper would be this: The Houston Zoo, which is funded by corporations notorious for destroying the environment, harming wildlife, violating human rights, and creating conservation/wildlife parks by making Africans and other indigenous peoples conservation refugees, is creating a human zoo called The African Forest that supports and promotes the creation/continuation of conservation parks *and* the attendant perpetuation of the conservation refugee crisis. This paper was not meant to be a journey through historical or present day manifestations of prejudice, but a call to action.

Please consider opposing The African Forest, human zoos, and the creation/perpetuation of the conservation refugee crisis in one or more of the following ways:

1. Tell the Houston Zoo you are against The African Forest human zoo and the creation of conservation refugees as well as the continuation of the conservation refugee crisis by contacting the Houston Zoo here: <http://houstonzoo.com/contact/>. Tell the Houston Zoo that you will boycott zoos that host human zoos and/or make/keep Africans conservation refugees. If you have an affiliation, credential, or detail about yourself you feel is relevant, feel free to mention it i.e. a university you work for, a social justice group you work with, being indigenous (black or not), African, or of African descent, being a parent or educator, etc. **Be sure to send a copy of your message to nohumanzoo@yahoo.com so that we have a record of your letter in case the Zoo doesn't respond and to prevent the Zoo from deciding to claim that no one is protesting.**
2. Send your name and, if you want, affiliation to nohumanzoo@yahoo.com if you want to be put on a petition stating, "We, the undersigned, do not support The African Forest human zoo, the creation of conservation refugees, or the continuation of the conservation refugee crisis."
3. Raise awareness about The African Forest through your website, blog, email list, livejournal, etc. and encourage others to write the Zoo and sign the petition.
 - Please be aware that, naturally, the letter you send or your signature on the petition may be made public.
 - The original version of this paper is twice as long and has much more information. If you would like the full version of this paper email nohumanzoo@yahoo.com.

Thank you so much for your help!

For more information (in no particular order) see: "African Culture and the Human Zoo" by Prof. Dr. Nina Glick Schiller, Dr. Data Dea, and Markus Hoene (PhD candidate at the time the paper was written) at

<http://www.eth.mpg.de/events/current/pdf/1120750934-01.pdf>; "Up roar trails plans to exhibit Africans in a German zoo" by Uduma Kalu of the Nigerian newspaper *The*

Guardian at <http://www.antropologi.info/blog/Arkiv/En->

[2005/AfricanVillageGuardianNigeria](http://www.antropologi.info/blog/Arkiv/En-2005/AfricanVillageGuardianNigeria); The Parade of the Vanquished by Jan Nederveen

Pieterse at <http://www.africansocieties.org/n4/eng/pieterse.htm>; *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* by Vandana Shiva; *Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization* edited by Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz; and "On A Neglected Aspect Of Western Racism" by Kurt Jonassohn at <http://migs.concordia.ca/occpapers/zoo.htm>.

- ⁱ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_n4_v31/ai_20425715/pg_2/?tag=content;coll
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/article/articleview/2274/1/134/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations edited by Amy Lonetree and Amanda Cobb
- ^{iv} <http://www.houstonzoo.org/naming-opportunities/>,
<http://www.houstonzoo.org/attachments/wysiwyg/3/NamingOppsFeb3.pdf>
- ^v <http://www.africansocieties.org/n4/eng/pieterse.htm>
- ^{vi} *The Quest for Environmental Justice : Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* edited by Robert Bullard
- ^{vii} http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/06/nyregion/thecity/06zoo.html?_r=1&ex=1155009600&en=c2cc9b84edc068cd&ei=5087%0A
- ^{viii} http://archives.lesoir.be/peut-on-exposer-des-pygmees%0A-une-initiative-prise-a_t-20020727-Z0M3QG.html?query=%22Peut-on+exposer+des+Pygm%E9es%3F%22&firstHit=0&by=10&sort=datedesc&when=-1&queryor=%22Peut-on+exposer+des+Pygm%E9es%3F%22&pos=0&all=1&nav=1
- ^{ix} <http://www.bostonherald.com/news/national/politics/view.bg?articleid=1013180>
- ^x The Zoo might also try to claim it has the support of African peoples. As Dr. Sylvester Ogbechie, a Nigerian man, notes at <http://www.antropologi.info/blog/Arkiv/En-2005/AfricanVillageGuardianNigeria> "The ultimate irony is, of course, as someone pointed out, that the Zoo will not find any shortage of Africans to act as objects in these exhibits, since all they need to do is go to some impoverished Francophone African country and cart in the usual number of "tribal" entities who always seem to be too willing to trade in their dignity for the right to be exhibited as animals. I don't say the above lightly but my research on Western exhibitions of Africans shows that the largest number of African peoples included in such exhibits mostly seem to come from Francophone Africa (and also from Cameroon which was a former German colony). "The colonial mentality and complete subjugation of these people to the myth of white supremacy is absolutely abhorrent, which is why I am not too fond of research in my own field that focuses on these areas. They are too easily spoken for, and too often the wrong thing is said in that process."
- ^{xi} <http://www.scienceblog.com/cms/americans-still-linking-blacks-apes-15428.html>
- ^{xii} <http://preview.niot.org/blog/brooklyn-parent-what-do-you-do-when-your-child-being-bullied> (The article notes Malik Jones is a pseudonym.)
- ^{xiii} <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/5799568/Dresden-zoo-forced-to-rename-primate-called-Obama.html>
- ^{xiv} http://www.denverpost.com/breakingnews/ci_9587847
- ^{xv} <http://contexts.org/socimages/2009/09/03/concerns-about-racism-are-weird/>
- ^{xvi} <http://www.racialicious.com/2009/12/22/die-already-king-kong-racism-lady-gaga-edition/>
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} http://www.splcenter.org/search/apachesolr_search/forums
- ^{xix} <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=480150>
- ^{xx} <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=317405>
- ^{xxi} <http://www.houstonzoo.org/en/photos/albums/v/63>
- ^{xxii} <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/breaking/6551657.html>
- ^{xxiii} http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/openlettertopope_english.htm
- ^{xxiv} <http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2010/02/26/majoring-in-minstrelsy-white-students-blackface-and-the-failure-of-mainstream-multiculturalism/>
- ^{xxv} <http://www.ienearth.org/carbontrading1.html>
- ^{xxvi} <http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/rethinkMDGs.pdf>
- ^{xxvii} http://www.africultures.com/anglais/articles_anglais/43blanchard.htm
- ^{xxviii} *The Quest for Environmental Justice : Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* edited by Robert Bullard
- ^{xxix} <http://www.planeta.com/planeta/99/1199globalizationrt.html>
- ^{xxx} <http://www.port.ac.uk/special/france1815to2003/chapter6/interviews/filetodownload,18533,en.pdf>
- ^{xxxi} <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/699>
- ^{xxxii} <http://www.survivalinternational.org/material/20>
- ^{xxxiii} <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/93>
- ^{xxxiv} <http://www.planeta.com/planeta/99/1199globalizationrt.html>
- ^{xxxv} <http://www.nextbillion.net/news/ecotourism-greedy-lover-or-savior>
- ^{xxxvi} http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/wb_ips_uganda_may00_eng.shtml
- ^{xxxvii} Conservation Refugee by Mark Dowie
- ^{xxxviii} <http://commonsblog.org/archives/000578.php>
- ^{xxxix} <http://www.treehugger.com/files/2008/10/green-inc-book.php>
- ^{xl} <http://www.houstonzoo.org/donors/>
- ^{xli} <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/161/>

^{xlii} <http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9EPOS7O0.htm>

^{xliii} <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/699>

^{xliv} <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/1230>

^{xlv} <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/93>