



Exterminate All the Brutes: telling the whole story as it is

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Three words summarise the history of humanity: civilisation, colonisation, and extermination. The three words in concrete terms have shaped and moulded our current world. Each word holds a special significance for us, especially for those of us growing up in what can be perceived as the post-colonial world.

Raoul Peck, the famed Haitian director, brings to life a four-hour documentary on the history of the current world as seen from the Western lens dissecting the origin of white supremacy from the time of the Inquisition to the racist polity that has shaped the Americas to the racialisation of sciences. Peck concerns himself with the film because he considers himself as an immigrant from “a shithole country” – an epithet used by the Trump administration to describe a select group of countries.

Its famed namesake book was written by Sven Lindqvist, alongside the works written by famed Haitian anthropologist, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, and Native American historian, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, inspires “Exterminate All the Brutes” as Raoul Peck takes on an all-encompassing journey from Europe to Haiti to Congo to Japan to America to Sweden.

Tackling the roots of any major ideology is never easy and Peck pushes the boundaries of documentary film making combatting the major contestations of bigotry in literature, language, statecraft, business, religion, race, science, and art.

To Raoul Peck, the personal is intimately political, as is seen from his iconic film on James Baldwin, “I am not your Negro” and biopic of the late Patrice Lumumba, “Lumumba”.

Peck who has on occasion said that he is “not in the business to make films” stitches together archival footage, historical footage, photographs, superb animation, a calm and searing voice over done by himself, and fictional vignettes

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featuring Josh Harnett as a white colonist.

The first episode takes us to medieval Spain where an Inquisition took place to root out not only Jews and Muslims from Europe, but also their Christian descendants are known as conversos as the Catholic Church and monarch cemented the idea of purity of race.

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Peck charts the historical allegory consigned to “natives” as savages and enslaved Africans as “animals”

highlighting struggles of both communities, including brilliantly choreographed artwork with acute storytelling. The barbarism meted out to Native Americans was so brutal in reality that in the famed Valladolid debate, the first of its kind on human rights, the friars supported freedom for the natives and enslavement for Africans, who they saw devoid of human conscience.

It is in the third and fourth episodes that Raoul Peck shows how ingrained racism and white supremacy have become in our polity with Europeans inventing the concept of “race” in scientific terms. A fictional scene is shown where a European scholar ranks communities in states of civilisation with Asians being semi-civilised and Africans never having any inkling of civilisation. This civilising mission was used as an excuse to colonise chunks of what is today known as the “Global South.”

The culmination of the Holocaust and the rise of Nazi Germany have their deep roots in the genocide of the Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans. It is at this point that Raoul Peck echoes poetically quoting passages from Andrew Jackson, the late (in) famous President, Joseph Conrad, Polish writer, and Adolf Hitler himself, all of whom rejoiced at the extermination of the native to create a new order. The creation of North and South America was fertilised by the erasure of black, brown, and red bodies. In the modern world just like during Hitler’s Germany, industrialists and media personnel alike accommodated right-wing populism.

In many ways what seems like a deeply educational and searing historical lesson, Peck sounds off the alarm bell asking us to question the roots of our current outrage and how we arrived here in the first place.