

**HBO** ORIGINAL

**Exterminate  
All the**

**BRUTES**

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**



# SYNOPSIS

Release Date: April 7, 2021

Genre: Documentary (TV mini-series)

Written and Directed by: Raoul Peck

Featured: Raoul Peck, Josh Hartnett, Caisa Ankarsparre

Length: 3 hours, 52 minutes

Rating: TV-MA

## Director's Statement

*Exterminate All the Brutes* is based on three texts that critically understand the history of European expansion from the perspectives of those most impacted by it: Africans, African Americans, Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, the people of Haiti, and Jewish survivors of the German Holocaust. Infusing the film segments with a combination of personal narrative, historical scholarship, and drama, Peck recasts the history of the last five centuries without the usual whitewashing of conventional history-telling by calling out colonialism as the genocidal project it was. The most compelling aspect of Peck's telling of post-Columbus history is the way he links genocide (both Indigenous and Jewish) with African slavery based on white supremacy and the artificial social constructions of race. From there, the eugenics movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their modern expressions in white nationalist fascism are laid bare.

The film's director Raoul Peck has stated that his vision for the film is to "reflect on society...to break the limits of art," and the resistance to truth and the ignorance it generates by "deconstructing the making and masking of history, digging deep into the exploitative and genocidal aspects of European colonialism — from America to Africa and its impact on society today." The salience of the documentary series is its exposure of the largely disguised history of European imperialism and its impact on Indigenous and Black populations in the United States, its linkage or connection to the Jewish Holocaust, and the untold history of the Haitian Revolution and its role in United States settler colonialism.



# INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

Though historical in its analysis, Peck's *Exterminate All the Brutes* could not be more timely. The rise of white supremacy, anti-immigration, xenophobia, the assault on the natural world, neofascism, and the ignoring of facts in recent years has led to a world where objective truth has been rendered imperceptible to large swaths of society both in and beyond the United States. Peck's film urgently challenges us to confront the truths of history to create a more just future for all, especially those whose lives have been most negatively shaped by the past.

The discussion guide for this film series is designed to further educate a wide range of learners from high school teachers to college educators to general audiences on the complexities of the last five centuries of European colonialism explored in the series and encourage critical reflection.

It is divided into five broad topics:

1. **White supremacy**
2. **Colonialism** (global impact and its resulting structure of white supremacy in the United States)
3. **Genocide** (Indigenous and the Jewish Holocaust)
4. **Slavery** (Transatlantic slave trade and resulting racism, plus modern day impact) and the Haitian Revolution, which led to abolition of slavery in the U.S. and elsewhere.
5. **Fascism** (white nationalism, Native representation, institutionalized racism)

Peck has expressed his hope that the film will survive the test of time. As he told [The Guardian](#), "...to be frank with you, I don't really care if the film is well received or not right now. It's about, will it be possible for young people, in thirty years, forty years to find this film? They can find some materials to use for their own fight."

Now more than ever this film reminds us that, as Peck says, "it's not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions." Drawing the correct conclusions is necessary for creating the kind of systemic social justice that can lead to reconciliation and healing in populations negatively shaped by colonialism. But without long-term, multigenerational, and brutally honest education, we cannot get there. This guide is a step in that direction.



# WHITE SUPREMACY

## Define and Describe

White supremacy is the idea that “bloodline” is more important than wealth or social status; the mistaken and self-serving belief that light-skinned or white people are superior to those with darker skin. Christianity came to be identified with being European and light-skinned (Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples History of the United States for Young People*). White supremacy is thus bound up with Christianity and the church’s quest for power and control of land and resources.

Episode 1 gives a background of the birth of the concept of white supremacy, dating all the way back to the 10th century Crusades when Muslims controlled trade routes to the far east. The Crusades were never about winning souls, Peck tells us, but about gaining power and annihilation. Later, during the Spanish Inquisition in 1478, when the Catholic church and state were inseparable, distinctions were made between Moorish and Jewish converts in order to preserve Christian European power. This gave rise to the idea of “cleanliness of blood,” where those not of Christian European heritage were said to be “savage” and of “unclean blood,” while those of Christian European heritage were those of “clean blood.” For the first time in the world the concept of race based on blood was used as law.

## Discuss and Reflect

- How did white supremacy become embedded in our social systems (social, cultural, political, and religious), and thus become systemic?
- Why do people of color support leaders who display white supremacist language and behavior? Think about people of color who supported Donald Trump’s presidency, even though he said derogatory things about Mexicans, disabled people, Muslims, and others.
- How does white supremacy adapt to changing times even when laws are passed to curtail it, like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and many other laws since?
- How can the ideology of white supremacy be dismantled?
- Does whiteness determine power? If so, how do we explain the rise of people of color to positions of power, like Barack Obama?

## Related Clips

1. “The Origin of the Idea of White Supremacy”. Episode 1. 26:02 – 26:20
2. “Whiteness as Property”. Episode 4. 1:00 – 41:29

## Resources

- [White Supremacy, With a Tan](#)
- [How the Irish Became White](#)

“We know now when the story started, when race, color and blood begin to become institutionalized for the first time.”

— Raoul Peck

# COLONIZATION

## Define and Describe

Colonization is the process of taking political and economic control of a region, and colonizers are the people or institutions that are part of the process; the military, business interests, people who go there to live, and sometimes representatives of religious institutions.

There are two types of colonialism: franchise colonialism and settler colonialism. In franchise colonialism, Europeans arrive to a region to exploit the resources to benefit European markets. They wrest control of the land from Indigenous populations and establish their own governing structures, but the Indigenous populations remain in the majority. This form of imperialism was made possible through the advancement of weapons technology, which in turn advanced white supremacy. Settler colonialism, on the other hand, not only seeks the exploitation of resources, but the elimination of the Native populations and their replacement by settlers. European franchise colonialism happened predominantly in Africa and Asia (especially India and Southeast Asia), whereas settler colonialism characterizes the Americas, Australia, the South Pacific islands, South Africa, and some regions of Europe (Ireland, Scotland, Scandinavia, and Russia). Settler colonialism is particularly deceptive because it denies the harm it causes through genocide and displacement of people and calls it progress. Manifest destiny is a perfect example. The doctrine of discovery became a legal principle embedded in settler states to legitimize, justify, and maintain systems of oppression against Indigenous Peoples in places like the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

## Discuss and Reflect

- Is violence committed equally between the colonized and the colonizers? Is the violence of self-defense the same as the violence of aggressive invasion?
- Historical narratives often presuppose the inevitability of the violence and eventual disappearance of American Indian people as casualties of European and later U.S. expansion. These are referred to as terminal narratives. Yet we know that American Indian people still exist, despite the profound and protracted violence over four centuries. Were there alternatives to the violence of European colonizers? Was genocide inevitable? Could European migration to North America and the establishment of the United States have taken place more cooperatively and less violently?
- Discuss how African slavery was part of the commodification of the lands that were stolen from Indigenous Peoples (stolen people to work on stolen land).
- How do we talk about slavery reparations for Black people and land restitution and justice for Indigenous Peoples? What kinds of tensions might exist between the two? (Hint: See the article below about Bruce's Beach, in which land was returned to previous Black owners without questioning the land as already being stolen from Native people.)
- How has military superiority contributed to white supremacy?

"It is about how African bodies became properties and a source of labor and how poor white settlers embraced white supremacy as a substitute for land and slaves."

— Raoul Peck



## Related Clips

1. "European Colonizers". Episode 1. 34:38 – 36:00
2. "Settler Colonialism". Episode 1. 36:00 – 37:50
3. "Colonized Versus the Colonizer". Episode 1. 39:22 – 40:05
4. "Land as Commodity". Episode 1. 40:11 – 40:36
5. "Weapons Technology and Racism". Episode 3. 22:13 – 23:28

## Resources

- [Returning Bruce's Beach in California to the Family Who Originally Owned It](#)
- [The Doctrine of Discovery](#)

"The land, don't you feel it? Doesn't it make you want to go out and lift dead Indians tenderly from their graves? To steal from them some authenticity as it must be clinging even to their corpses."

– William Carlos Williams

# GENOCIDE

## Define and Describe

Article II of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide defines genocide as:

“Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such, a) killing members of the group; b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

The U.N. genocide convention was a response to the German Holocaust of Jewish people and was written by Raphael Lemkin. When Lemkin wrote his definition of genocide he studied the history of European colonization in the Americas. The same was true for Hitler. Hitler's idea of Lebensraum (living space) for racially pure Germans drove his genocidal pursuit against Jews, using colonial tactics he learned from the example of the United States' treatment of American Indians. As Peck tells us, “Hitler's campaign to the east became his very own colonial war.” Auschwitz was a modern industrial application of an earlier genocidal tradition, wherein 1,000 years of antisemitism rose to the level of extermination, influenced by Europe's expansion in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia. The idea of an Aryan master race rationalized genocide in the same way that the U.S. justified the elimination of American Indians.

## Discuss and Reflect

- In Episode 1 we see video images of Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017. They are chanting “You will not replace us.” Who do you think they mean by “you?”
- White supremacists fear losing power due to demographic shift and the browning of populations globally, and often think of themselves as victims of “white genocide.” Is this fear valid based on the legal definition of genocide laid out above? Discuss.
- What is the relationship between religion and genocide?
- If you look at the U.N.'s definition of genocide, do you think that the United States' treatment of American Indians meets the criteria?
- How can genocide be reconciled in a country where it happened? What might that look like in the United States?

“All Jews and Negroes ought really to be exterminated, we shall be victorious. Other races will disappear and die out.”

— White Aryan Resistance, Sweden, 1991.



## Related Clips

1. "Hitler's Example of Perfect Colonization". Episode 4. 38:00 – 38:52
2. "Genocide for Land Possession". Episode 2. 47:30 – 47:56

## Resources

- [The Legal Definition of Genocide, Prevent Genocide International](#)
- [The Ten Stages of Genocide](#)

Ten Stages of Genocide: Classification, Symbolization,  
Discrimination, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization,  
Preparation, Persecution, Extermination, Denial

– Greg Stanton, Genocide Education Project



# SLAVERY'S RELATIONSHIP TO COLONIALISM

## Define and Describe

According to Britannica.com, the definition of slavery is “the condition in which one human being was owned by another. A slave was considered by law as property, or chattel, and was deprived of most of the rights ordinarily held by free persons.”

As we have seen, slavery is one of the pillars of colonization. As Peck tells us, by the middle of the eighteenth century, “black” was considered universally bad and justified the enslavement of black-skinned people based on the artificial categorizing of “race.” Eurocentrism morphed into scientific racism, an ideology that cemented the dehumanization of racialized Black people to maintain the economic system that enriched the landowners who exploited them. By the end of the 18th century, sometimes called the “age of revolutions,” enslaved Haitians revolted against French colonists in 1790 to create the first true free republic in the Americas. The Haitians were the first to overthrow slavery in the Americas, influencing the abolition of slavery in the rest of the hemisphere, yet the Haitian Revolution has been silenced in conventional historical narratives.

Even after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in the U.S. in 1865, de facto slavery persisted in Africa with the rise of the rubber industry after the so-called Congo Conference among European powers in 1884. Africans’ refusal to extract rubber involuntarily resulted in the burning of villages, the killing of children, and the cutting off of hands. In the twentieth century, Raphael Lemkin, who defined genocide, wrote that “slavery may be called cultural genocide par excellence; it is the most effective and thorough method of destroying a culture and of de-socializing human beings.”

## Discuss and Reflect

- How did the Haitian Revolution impact the United States’ colonization of American Indians?  
How do you think the Louisiana Purchase affected American Indians?  
Do you think they were asked what they wanted?
- What do you think the impact of slavery is on today’s Haitian people?
- Do the Spanish and French owe a debt to Haiti’s citizens today for their history of slavery there? Discuss.
- How has the late 19th century’s European exploitation of African people and resources in places like the Congo shaped the world as we know it today?
- How might Lemkin’s theory of cultural genocide be evident in today’s Black communities?

“By the middle of the 18th century, black was almost universally bad. What had happened was the expansion of African American slavery, that was the most potent impetus for the transformation of European ethnocentrism into scientific racism.”

— Raoul Peck



## Related Clips

1. "Black Dehumanization and Justification of Slavery" . Episode 2. 34:00 – 35:00
2. "Haitian Revolution and Liberty" . Episode 1. 35:22 – 35:49
3. "Haitian Revolution and Louisiana Purchase". Episode 1. 38:00 – 38:32
4. "Congo Conference and Slavery" . Episode 1. 45:00 – 46:27

## Resources

- [1619 Project](#)
- [Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, UNESCO Day for Remembering the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Abolition \(video\)](#)

**"The king instituted a monopoly on rubber and ivory and  
ordered all Natives to supply labor and products  
without payment."**

**– Raoul Peck**



# FASCISM

## Define and Describe

In Episode 4, white supremacy, genocide, colonialism, and slavery converge into contemporary ideologies evident in white nationalism and fascism. Fascism is the result of crumbling European imperial power wielded against those deemed inferior as societies evolve and reject ideologies that “other” those racially and ethnically different. In the U.S., we cannot understand white nationalism without connecting it to the history of the Second Amendment and its mandate to empower and authorize white males to kill American Indians and control slaves. But fascism that emerges out of racism and colonialism is not confined to U.S. history; it is a global phenomenon. In the logic of white nationalism, history is silenced to advance ultrapatriotic narratives imbued with blame against the poor, coded as the ethnically racialized, inferior others.

In 1924 President Coolidge signed the Restriction Act, (aka Johnson-Reed Act) prohibiting immigration for forty years and closing the door to Jewish immigration during the era of Nazi-controlled Germany. This was a direct result of, and victory for, the American eugenics movement. Like Hitler and the Nazi approach to the Jews, the American eugenics movement believed that some people were more desirable than others and that the less desirables should be walled out of society, literally and figuratively.

White nationalist-driven fascism depends on the control of public narratives, resulting in misinformation, disinformation, and outright rejection of facts and objective truth. Scholars have been abandoned for pundits and entertainers where all that matters is opinion and whoever can yell the loudest and be the most vitriolic gets the attention. The difference in today’s fascism compared to the fascism of Nazi Germany is its ability to disguise itself; no longer are fascists easily identified as those dressed in uniforms. They are regular everyday people and are thus difficult to recognize. Fearmongering in the media gives birth to despotic leaders disguised as saviors with “easy sounding solutions that others will pay for.”

## Discuss and Reflect

- How is fascism (or neofascism) recognizable in the U.S. and beyond today?
- What are the consequences of slavery, Native American genocide, and the Jewish Holocaust?
- What is the legacy of the American eugenics movement on immigration today? What might be an example?
- How can self-determination, restitution, and reparations address the legacy of Native American genocide, slavery, and the Holocaust?
- How did the entire film make you feel? Peck repeatedly says throughout the film, “it is not knowledge we lack; we already know enough. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know.”  
Where do we go from here?

“The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and  
a killer. It has never yet melted.”

– D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 1923



## Related Clips

1. "Opinions Against Opinions". Episode 4. 35:40 – 36:27
2. "Fascism Difficult to Recognize". Episode 4. 30:58 – 31:24
3. "Trump and White Nationalism". Episode 4. 29:10 – 29:37

## Resources

- [Mad as Hell: What is Fueling America's Political Rage?](#)
- [Eugenics, History.com](#)

"The term Fascism was first used of the totalitarian right-wing nationalist regime of Mussolini in Italy (1922–43), and the regimes of the Nazis in Germany and Franco in Spain were also Fascist. Fascism tends to include a belief in the supremacy of one national or ethnic group, a contempt for democracy, an insistence on obedience to a powerful leader, and a strong demagogic approach. The name comes from Italian *fascismo*, from *fascio* 'bundle, political group', from Latin *fascis* 'rod.'"