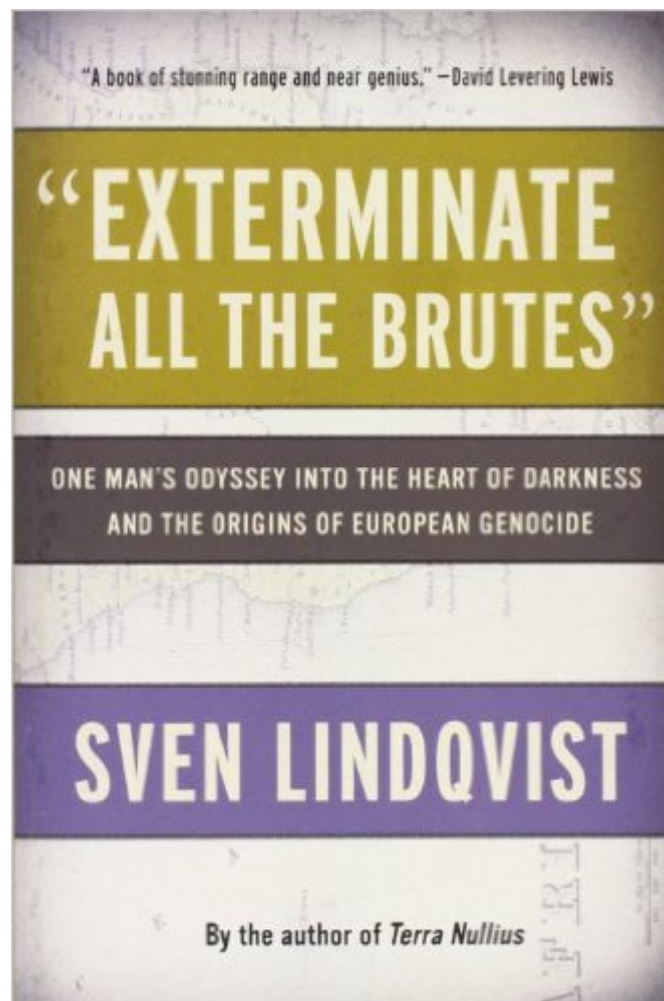


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"Exterminate All The Brutes": One Man's Odyssey Into The Heart Of Darkness And The Origins Of European Genocide



Synopsis

"Exterminate All the Brutes" is a searching examination of Europe's dark history in Africa and the origins of genocide. Using Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as his point of departure, Sven Lindqvist takes us on a haunting tour through the colonial past, interwoven with a modern-day travelogue. Retracing the steps of European explorers, missionaries, politicians, and historians in Africa from the late eighteenth century onward, the author exposes the roots of genocide in Africa via his own journey through the Saharan desert. As Lindqvist shows, fantasies not merely of white superiority but of actual extermination and "cleansing" the earth of the so-called lesser races; deeply informed European colonialism and racist ideology that ultimately culminated in Europe's own Holocaust. Chosen as one of the Best Books of 1998 by the New Internationalist, which called it "a beautifully written integration of criticism, cultural history, and travel writing, underpinned by a passion for social justice," "Exterminate All the Brutes" is a powerful reckoning with the past and an indispensable contribution to the literature of colonial Africa and European genocide.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Exterminate All the Brutes is brief and disturbing; Sven Lindqvist unveils the realities and moral convictions we have almost completely repressed. Just as the author suggests, the book shatters the image we have of ourselves, but even more importantly, it is distressing how relevant his ideas and Conrad's *'Heart of Darkness'* are in the world today - again. The title of the book is taken from

Joseph Conrad's 1902 classic novel - Heart of Darkness. In it, the main character, Kurtz, goes to Africa to bring progress and culture to the uncivilized continent. He is dispatched to Africa as an ivory procurement agent, and as the story develops the reader is confronted with the unreal brutality of the colonial rule. Conrad's work intertwines the themes of 'light of civilization' and 'darkness of barbarism' and makes reader realize the hollowness of these phrases as Kurtz surrounds himself with chaos and mayhem. Sven Lindqvist develops this theme as he traces the imperial history of European colonialism and condenses it to a single sentence: "Exterminate all the brutes." European world expansion, he claims, and the employed tactics of extermination are the truths we like to forget. Preferring to externalize we look at the Holocaust as a historical aberration, a smear on the path of progress and enlightenment brought to the world by the Western societies. However, as the author points out, just as all of Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz, it would also be the European habits and political precedents that would lay the foundation for the atrocities of the Second World War. What was done in Africa, would be repeated in Europe - we know this, what we lack is the courage to face what we know and draw some conclusions.

I purchased Sven Lindqvist's book when it first came out in 1997. The writing is pared to the bone so you can clearly see the stark reality of his discoveries in perception. A late twentieth century European, Lindqvist travels back through colonial 19th century routes of Charles Darwin and Joseph Conrad into Africa, as a scenic observer of anthropological curiosities, almost. So, to all intents and purposes he starts off like a tourist. Dusky-faced north Africans remain outside of him, as he bumps along in buses and jostling towns and villages, carrying his laptop computer in a backpack. The natives are just the "others" he is interrogating and observing with a Western distancing mind and sensibility and going to write on and report about in his travelogue. But having to be close to Moroccans and others, over time, slowly travelling, in old vehicles in heat and dust, closely, over long distances, he gradually becomes drawn into their world, and as he does so, winds his way down into the psychological depths of the collective western colonising consciousness. Eventually Lindqvist ends up coming to face the dark pit in the hub of the Western psyche and unveils himself as interloper, transgressor and destroyer. In a Jungian sense, he approaches the nexus of the collective shadow of the western civilizational consciousness and finds he is not free of the spectre of the shadow of the Western "white" mind, clearly seeing the mind that went everywhere, travelling to all parts of the globe, with purpose, carrying guns, gin and bibles. Seeing into the mind of the white aggressor he recognises that he too carries the baggage of mental superiority and arrogance.

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