

FOREWORD TO THE TENTH-ANNIVERSARY EDITION

When I started researching for my four-part documentary *Exterminate All the Brutes*, I knew I had to go to the story of the so-called New World origins. I knew I first had to immerse myself totally, and Roxanne's enlightening book *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* not only got me exactly there but changed everything. And in the process, not only did I find a friend but also a political soul mate with many decades of militancy behind her, a serious political operative, and a solid scholar.

What we shared was not just an exchange of knowledge and profound mutual respect. At the root it was a common view of the world, a common sense of the fight for justice and social equality. A deeper connection ensued, for we are both personally affected by the subject of our research. Both our lives are built on experiences of injustice and observations of the silenced cracks of the history we originated from. We both looked for ways to have a voice that carries, pushes forward, and breaks walls, for our stories to be heard. It is precious to encounter someone both perceptive and sensitive on this strenuous path to the deconstruction of history.

It was instantly clear to me that *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* would become one of the pillars on which I was going to build my documentary. The purpose of this arduous project was to deconstruct the theological, political, and civilizational discourse the USA has been built on. The very foundation, the soul, the fabric, of this society needed to be questioned. I started by disentangling the legends weaved around a "pure and innocent" Old Europe "discovering" a so-called new world, to reestablish this invented tale on its right footing. It was a bloody conquest. Rox-

anne's work provided the meticulous blow-by-blow testimony of this bloodiness, of this thoroughly planned, systematic elimination of the "natives," this country's from-the-start open-book agenda for a conquest "from sea to shining sea."

An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States is the national history of America from the point of view of a silenced yet fundamental and decisive episode: the genocide of the Indigenous people at the founding moment of the United States. It's the tale of an entire population's excruciating destruction, the wiping out of many tribes across an entire continent. The untold story of the stealing and appropriating of their harvest fields, their roads, their raw material, their infrastructures, their lives.

Yet, what is more difficult is to grasp the meaning of this untold history and the ramifications of this historical tale with other historical dilemmas: slavery, the founding of the United States, the birth of capitalism, all tangled into historical knots. And all this, we need to know.

Roxanne looks at history with no filters, and amongst the facts and numbers, she reveals the hidden sides of humanity, in all its complexity. Far into the past, she looks at America before the United States and tells us history made of multiple tales. We were told one side of the story; we finally have the whole tale. We know now how the United States was founded on a genocide.

It is the account of a masquerade: the malicious construction of the virgin island's narrative, inhabited by a few worthless and inferior creatures, anomalies to be neutralized. The conquerors have told a story of victory, glory, self-worthiness, power. This story has been brought to us all the way from those dark ages, without being questioned; it has set the basic values, the foundations of this society today.

It is also, and most importantly, a tale of the Indigenous peoples' resistance, a tale of their constant fight against a barbaric ethnic-cleansing enterprise, from its beginning until today. This story, unfortunately, could never really be told openly to a wide and non-academic audience. The legend was permanently printed one way. And after many reprintings, it became "History." After generations of biased narration, this legend has metastasized within the Ameri-

can imagination, its literature, its cinema. The story then spread throughout the world and became the dominant and ubiquitous narrative.

Like many children in the world, I learned this “innocent” story of the origin, from Western movies, of course, and from the Eurocentric visions of an adventurous romanticism, which ultimately reduced all non-Americans to victims at best and to nonhumans at worst.

The words used by Roxanne to describe the historical tragedy of the Indigenous peoples of the United States—*genocide*, *ethnic cleansing*—have never been addressed so clearly and rigorously before to tell history from this angle. This is not only the Indigenous peoples’ history but the world’s history, which is entirely entangled with that historical tale. By telling an Indigenous peoples’ story of the United States, Roxanne also tells the story of the founding of capitalism, the fundamental role played by slavery in the founding of the United States, and the untold side of European history. She turns history on its head and reveals the underside, invisible to us, as it is the side on which today’s society is standing on.

The underside is revealed and now we can move forward.

Eventually.

As I conclude in *Exterminate All the Brutes*, “It is not knowledge that we lack.” In light of this fact, how do we proceed? How do we rewrite, preserve, and teach history? How do we find common ground?

—Raoul Peck

2022