

OTHER BOOKS IN ENGLISH BY THE AUTHOR:

*China in Crisis*

*The Shadow*

*Land and Power in South America*

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“EXTERMINATE

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*All the*

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BRUTES”

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Translated from the Swedish by Joan Tate



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All Jews and Negroes ought really to be exterminated. We shall be  
victorious. The other races will disappear and die out.

WHITE ARYAN RESISTANCE, SWEDEN, 1991

You may wipe us out, but the children of the stars can never be dogs.

SOMABULANO, RHODESIA, 1896

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## P R E F A C E

THIS IS a story, not a contribution to historical research. It is the story of a man traveling by bus through the Saharan desert and, at the same time, traveling by computer through the history of the concept of extermination. In small, sand-ridden desert hotels, his study closes in on one sentence in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "Exterminate all the brutes."

Why did Kurtz end his report on the civilizing task of the white man in Africa with these words? What did they mean to Conrad and his contemporaries? Why did Conrad make them stand out as a summary of all the high-flown rhetoric on Europe's responsibilities to the peoples of other continents?

I thought I had the answer to these questions when in 1949, at the age of seventeen, I first read *Heart of Darkness*. Behind the "black shadows of disease and starvation" in the Grove of Death I saw in my mind's eye the emaciated survivors of the German death camps, which had been liberated only a few years earlier. I read Conrad as a prophetic author who had foreseen all the horrors that were to come.

Hannah Arendt knew better. She saw that Conrad was writing about the genocides of his own time. In her first book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), she showed how imperialism necessitated racism as the only possible excuse for its deeds. "Lying under anybody's nose were many of the elements which gathered together could create a totalitarian government on the basis of racism."

Her thesis that Nazism and Communism were of the same stock has been well remembered. However, many forget that she also held the "terrible massacres" and "wild murdering" of European imperialists responsible for "the triumphant introduction of such means of pacification into ordinary, respectable foreign

policies," thereby fathering totalitarianism and its genocides.

In the first volume of *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (1994), Steven T. Katz has begun a demonstration of the "phenomenological uniqueness" of the Holocaust. On some of his seven hundred pages, he speaks with contempt for those who have instead emphasized the similarities. Sometimes, though, he is more tolerant and says, "Their approach might be called, nonpejoratively, a paradigm of similarity; mine, in contrast, is a paradigm of distinctiveness."

The two approaches seem to me equally valid and complementary. My desert traveler, employing a paradigm of similarity, finds that Europe's destruction of the "inferior races" of four continents prepared the ground for Hitler's destruction of six million Jews in Europe.

Each of these genocides had, of course, its own unique characteristics. However, two events need not be identical for one of them to facilitate the other. European world expansion, accompanied as it was by a shameless defense of extermination, created habits of thought and political precedents that made way for new outrages, finally culminating in the most horrendous of them all: the Holocaust.

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## PART I

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## THE BIRTH OF RACISM

*"Race is everything: literature, science, art,  
in a word, civilization, depend on it."*

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century, eighteenth-century criticism of imperialism still lived on, and for many it was self-evident to take a stand against genocide.

In his great history of colonialism, *European colonies in various parts of the world viewed in their social, moral and physical condition* (1834), John Howison writes:

The continent of America has already been nearly depopulated of its aborigines by the introduction of the blessings of civilisation. The West Indian archipelago, from the same cause, no longer contains a single family of its primitive inhabitants. South Africa will soon be in a similar condition, and the islanders of the Pacific Ocean are rapidly diminishing in numbers from the ravages of European diseases and the despotism of self-interested and fanatical missionaries. It is surely time that the work of destruction should cease; and since long and melancholy experience has proved us to be invariably unsuccessful in rendering happier, wiser, or better, the barbarians whom we have visited or conquered, we may now conscientiously let them alone and turn a correcting hand towards ourselves and seek to repress . . . our avarice, our selfishness, and our vices.

This was an attitude with roots in both Christian faith and Enlightenment ideas of equality. But during nineteenth-century European expansion, another attitude appeared. Genocide began

to be regarded as the inevitable byproduct of progress.

To the great anthropologist, J. C. Prichard, it was obvious that "the savage races" could not be saved. What had to be aimed at instead, he said in his lecture "On the Extinction of Human Races" (1838), was to collect in the interests of science as much information as possible on their physical and moral characteristics.<sup>57</sup>

The threat of extermination provided motivation for anthropological research, which in exchange gave the exterminators an alibi by declaring extermination inevitable.

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That same year, 1838, Herman Merivale gave a series of lectures at Oxford on "Colonization and Colonies." He noted Prichard's theory that "the white is destined to extirpate the savage" was becoming more and more usual. Extermination was not only due to war and epidemics, but had deeper and more secret causes: "the mere contact with Europeans is fatal to him in some unknown manner."

Merivale fiercely rejects this theory. There are no examples of inexplicable mortality. "The waste of human life" is enormous, we know that. But it has natural reasons. The main reason is that "civilization" out there in the wilderness is represented by "the trader, the backwoodsman, the pirate, the bushranger"; to put it briefly, by whites who can do anything they like with no risk of criticism or control.

"The history of European settlements in America, Africa and Australia, presents everywhere the same general features—a wide and sweeping destruction of native races by the uncontrolled violence of individuals, if not of colonial authorities, followed by tardy attempts on the part of governments to repair the acknowledged crime."

A British parliamentary commission set up in 1837 to investigate the causes of the misfortunes that had afflicted the Tasmanians and other native peoples came to the same conclusion. The

commission found that Europeans unlawfully took over native territories, reduced their numbers, and undermined their way of life. "Gross cruelty and injustice" were the main causes of the natives dying out.<sup>58</sup>

As a direct consequence of the commission's work, The Aborigenes Protection Society was formed in 1838 with the aim of putting a stop to the extermination of native peoples. For the rest of the century, this organization continued its increasingly uphill battle against genocide.

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Where am I? In a concentration camp? In the Third World? The naked bodies around me are emaciated and covered with sores. Christmas is approaching. Some well-fed men are putting up a net with coarse, strong meshing. On the other side of the net is the sculpture of a naked giantess painted in red and gold and decorated with an iron, a club and boots. The net stops us reaching this fat and happy woman.

The men putting up the net are working in a hail of crude jokes. They will soon set their dogs on us. They are already laughing themselves silly when they see us scrambling on the net. In vain we reach out for club and iron. We don't even reach the boots.

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Prejudice against alien peoples has always existed. But in the middle of the nineteenth century, these prejudices were given organized form and apparent scientific motivation. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the pioneer was Robert Knox. His book, *The Races of Man: A fragment* (1850) reveals racism at the actual moment of birth, just as it takes the leap from popular prejudice via Knox's conceded ignorance to "scientific" conviction.

Knox had studied comparative anatomy with Cuvier in Paris. Cuvier's great feat was to prove that innumerable animal species had ceased to exist. But how they died out and why, he did not explain, Knox says.

We know equally little about why the dark races go under. "Did we know the law of their origin we should know the law of their extinction; but this we do not know. All is conjecture, uncertainty."

All we know is that since the beginning of history, the dark races have been the slaves of those lighter skinned. What is that due to? "I feel disposed to think that there must be a physical and consequently, a psychological inferiority in the dark races generally."

This is perhaps not due to lack of size in the brain but rather a lack of quality in it. "The texture of the brain is, I think, generally darker, and the white part more strongly fibrous; but I speak from extremely limited experience."

How limited this experience was is clear in another part of the book, where Knox says that he had done an autopsy on only *one* colored person. He maintains he found in this corpse a third fewer nerves in arms and legs than in a white man of corresponding size. The soul, instinct, and reason of both races must therefore, it is obvious, he maintains, be different to a corresponding degree.

From total ignorance, via this autopsy, Knox takes a giant stride directly to statements such as: "To me, race, or hereditary descent, is everything; it stamps the man," and "Race is everything: literature, science, art, in a word, civilization, depend on it."

There is something almost touching about the childish openness with which Knox exposes the lack of empirical basis for his statements. The sixth chapter of *The Races of Man*, which deals with the dark races, goes on like this: "But now, having considered the physical constitution thus briefly of some of these dark races, and shown you that we really know but little of them; that we have no data whereon to base a physical history of mankind; let me now consider . . ."

Consider what?

Well, on the basis of this established lack of facts, Knox unhesitatingly delivers categorical statements on the inferiority and inevitable destruction of the dark races.

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Darwin spoke of "the savage races," without clearly stating which he meant. Wallace and several other authors wrote "the lower" or even "the lower and more depraved races," leaving the reader in profound uncertainty. Was it what we in our day call the Fourth World they were talking about? Or was it the entire Third World? Or even more?

Many people considered that *every* race was inferior and more depraved than the white race; and among the white "races," *all* were lower than the Anglo-Saxon race. Under such circumstances, how large a part of mankind was condemned to extinction?

Knox uses the expression "the dark races." Which are they exactly? That question is not easy to answer, says Knox. Are the Jews a dark race? The Gypsies? The Chinese? Dark they certainly are to some extent; and so are the Mongolians, American Indians, and Eskimos, the inhabitants of almost the whole of Africa, the Far East, and Australia. "What a field of extermination lies before the Saxon, Celtic, and Sarmatian races!"

He is indignant over one thing only: hypocrisy. The British in New Zealand have just (1850) carried out the most audacious annexation in the history of aggression. "The Aborigenes are to be protected!" the British say. Thank you very much! says Knox. They may not become British, when their land is taken from them; they are to be "protected"!

The Saxons do not protect the dark races, says Knox, do not mix with them, do not let them keep a single acre of the land in the occupied countries; at least that is the situation in Anglo-Saxon America, and the Saxon conquerors are moving south.

"The fate, then, of the Mexicans, Peruvians and Chileans, is in

no shape doubtful. Extinction of the race—sure extinction—it is not even denied."

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Can the dark races become civilized? "I should say not," says Knox. "Their future history, then, must resemble the past. The Saxon race will never tolerate them—never amalgamate—never be at peace . . . . The hottest actual war ever waged—the bloodiest of Napoleon's campaigns—is not equal to that now waging between our descendants in America and the dark races; it is a war of extermination—inscribed on each banner is a death's head and no surrender; one or other must fall."

"I blame them not," Knox goes on. "I pretend not even to censure: man acts from his impulses, his animal impulses, and he occasionally employs his pure reason to mystify and conceal his motives from others."

The Americans were presumably already on their way to extinction when the Europeans first arrived. "Now, the fate of all these nations must be the same; it results from the nature of their populations, and nothing can arrest it."

Look at South Africa. The Saxon spirit of progress there led to massacres of the natives. "Have we done with the Hottentots and Bosjeman race? I suppose so: they will soon form merely natural curiosities: already there is the skin of one stuffed in England; another in Paris if I mistake not. . . . In a word, they are fast disappearing from the face of the earth."

And Chinese, Mongolians, Tartars or whatever they are called, how will things go for them? Well, it is known what happened in Tasmania. The Anglo-Saxon swept the natives out of their own country. "No compunctious visitings about the 'fell swoop' which extinguished a race."

The Chinese can expect the same. China appears to be totally at a standstill with neither inventions nor discoveries. The famous

Chinese art must belong to another race from which the Chinese borrowed it without really understanding it.

No, the Chinese have probably seen their best days, have lived through their definitive track and period of time, now hastening toward the terminal where all that remains are remnants left by extinct creatures—like the mammals and birds in Cuvier's world of the past—that have long since ceased to exist.

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Who was this man who with such delight wallowed in the destruction of human beings? He was a Scot, had served as an army doctor in South Africa, and had founded a school of anatomy in Edinburgh. As a young student, Darwin heard his controversial lectures.<sup>59</sup>

All anatomists at that time bought specimens from grave robbers, but Knox was suspected of having turned to professional assassins to ensure suitable corpses. That was the end of his scientific career.

He saw himself as a voice crying in the wilderness. He and he alone had discovered a great truth, the truth of race, which only numskulls and hypocrites could deny.

*Origin of Species* meant a turning point for Knox's ideas. Darwin neither confirmed nor denied them, but his theory of evolution was clearly useful for the racists.

Knox was restored to favor and shortly before his death he became a member of the Ethnographical Society, in which a new group of "racially conscious" anthropologists were now setting the tone.

In 1863, Knox's followers broke away and formed the Anthropological Society, which was more markedly racist. The first lecture—"On the Negro's Place in Nature"—emphasized the negro's close relationship to the ape. When a rebellion of rural blacks was ruthlessly crushed in Jamaica, the society held a public



Robert Knox. Contemporary caricature from Knox, the Anatomist, by Isobel Rae, Edinburgh, 1964.