Your Name

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Module 8: The White Man’s Burden

# **Cultural Assumptions Conveyed by Kipling’s Poem**

Europeans, during the colonial era, generally held the view that they (as Europeans) were culturally superior to the darker-skinned natives of the lands they discovered. Europeans had a clear advantage in transportation and military technology, obviously, and believed that their forms of politics and religion were also more sophisticated than those they ran across elsewhere. However, many of the European colonists were fortune seekers looking to produce bulk commercial exports, be that in agricultural production, mining operations, or produced goods like china or textiles. Many of these bulk operations employed native labor at minimal wages - if not actually save labor, as was practiced in South Africa and the US South. Besides, in most cases, the entire government of colonized regions was restructured to support and enforce these kinds of low-wage labor (Curry). As the Colonial era moved on, though, and the Liberal Enlightenment dawned in Europe, this economic system became a philosophical problem. Many people start to argue that it was hypocritical of anyone who styled themselves as a Liberal (as most of the colonists everywhere did) to ignore the human rights of other people – mostly black. The *White Man's Burden* argument was a rebuttal to this Liberal ideation. It argued that these foreign (dark-skinned) people were so backward that they could not effectively understand European forms of government, and thus could not effectively rule themselves.

# **“On the Origin of Species” vs. European Imperialism**

The theory of Darwinism is that animals evolve in order to survive. This was later termed survival of the fittest although this terminology was not created by Darwin himself, it was coined by Herbert Spencer following his reading of Darwin’s work. Herbert Spencer was a huge supporter of eugenics, and it was he who helped develop the idea of social Darwinism. He did this by applying Darwin's ideas to social settings and the human race. When Darwin’s theory of 'survival of the fittest' was used to assess the human race, many in Europe saw themselves as being superior due to their advances in technology and the ways in which they were able to rule other nations. This, in turn, made them believe that it was their' right to survive'; they had evolved; therefore they, (the whites) were the strongest race and the most likely to survive (Dennis). These ideas, in theory, were used to justify European imperialism in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other pseudo-sciences were developed that apparently supported these theories and showed the evolution of the White man as being ahead of that of the other races; however, we now know these to be false.

# **Negative Consequences of the Application of Darwin’s theory in Social Setting**

Darwin's theories published in 1859 was occasionally misinterpreted to mean "survival of the fittest" and used as a justification for their success by some of the wealthy who were under attack by socialists and others. The Marxists claimed that the capitalist were thieves, while some capitalists countered that they got what they got by being "the fittest." People who used these arguments were lambasted in the press as being "social Darwinists." Social Darwinism is an excuse dreamed up by people who were financially or politically successful in glorifying themselves and justifying special privileges granted to them by governments. The people who dreamed it up evidently knew little about Darwin's theories but seized his name to tart-up the ancient idea of divine rights and the Calvinist idea that earthly success indicates God's favoritism. It is a non-religious version of the preening of the Pharisees. This stupid idea affects political power, which, in turn, affects the economy as people with financial power use the idea to justify bribing government officials for special privileges. These privileges distort and hinder economic activity. In a nutshell, Social Darwinism is just survival of the fittest as Darwin ascribed to the evolution of a species through its adaptability and ability to compete. Arms races and competition in all fields of production for goods and the supply of services have pushed economies to great heights but also to great uncontrolled debts with an ever-expanding gulf between the haves and have nots. These disparities in a society, if allowed to fester to malignancy, will eventually cause the economy to collapse.

**Works Cited**

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