

What is Social Darwinism?

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Social Darwinism is a theory proposed by Herbert Spencer that applies the natural selection principles in society. Herbert Spencer was inspired by Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection among animals and survival of the fittest. The theory of social Darwinism applies the concept of natural selection among human societies and that only the most powerful humans earn the right to rule the earth because they are in power and suppressing the weak humans is justified.

This superiority can be inherent in the form of rule, political power or stable business. Spencer believed that human societies are built this way and that only the fittest will survive and he held the right to suppress others if he is more socially or economically stable. He believed that if by natural cause humans are suppressed then it's totally fine if humans also follow the natural behavior. This theory can be applied to answer the cruelty that Belgian King Leopold II imposed on the people of Congo.

Adam Hochschild's book "King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of greed, terror, and Heroism in colonial Africa" describes the devastating impact King Leopold's rule had on the people of Congo from 1885 to 1908. Hochschild's description of these inhumane acts is aimed to remind the world of the savage behaviour human beings can deliver when they are given the charge to rule over weak populations and how they are exploited and suppressed because of their economic weakness, race, and poverty. The author focuses on the brutality King Leopold had on Congo's people when the demand for rubber in Europe was high. Congo which was rich in rubber-producing trees faced a dark history under the rule of Leopold who hired many of the natives as unpaid labourers and his brutal army tortured and murdered the natives to reduce Congo's population to half, named by the term "Rubber Terror" in African history (Hocshildd, pp 163).

Several aspects of Social Darwinism can be seen in Hochschild's writing about Leopold's rule in his book. One of the concepts of this savage theory is that the people who are born stable economically hold the right to be inherently superior to those who are financially weak. This aspect of social Darwinism theory can be seen in Leopold's rule who took advantage of Congo's weak economy, treated them with brutality, and forced them into heavy work of the savage behaviour of the Belgian army. Leopold further advanced this economic instability by adding his share in the native companies this strategy empowered Leopold to maintain his sovereignty and provided him land for more cultivation and the right to have a workforce to impose savage laws on them. Following this savage rule, many of the natives were brutally killed, their women and children held hostage, and the men were beaten for forced labour (Hocshildd, p 278).

Another concept of Social Darwinism that is significant in Hochschild's writing is the provision of relief to the poor, which is thought to be weakening humanity. Leopold in his rule took advantage of Congo's poverty. As a ruler, it was his due responsibility to provide relief to the people if he was

taking so much advantage of them. It can be easily observed by critical analysis of Hochschild's description of King Leopold's rule that the king never really cared about the miserable life with poor health conditions and living standards of Congo's people. Rather he was interested in getting more and more financial advantages of the workforce. King Leopold had extreme greed for wealth. When he colonized Congo he had an immense load of ammunition, medicines, and boats that he used to manipulate the natives (Hocshilld, p 128).

Racial discrimination and anti-amalgamation concepts became the basis of many racial theories in the early 19th century. It is also a part of Spencer's Social Darwinism theory that can be observed in the Belgian rule of Congo. According to social Darwinism, nonwhites or coloured people are considered "bad genes" and justify the use of selective marriages and other methods like murder to ensure purity among so-called pure nations. Based on these concepts colored humans were brutally killed in various parts of the world and evidence of savage slavery can be found in history of just two centuries ago. Hochschild describes that during Leopold's reign, more than ten million people were brutally killed, and cannibalized in Congo between 1885 and 1905 (Hocshilled, pp. 280). The genocide was at its peak when a large number of wild rubber plantation was found in the jungles of Congo. Leopold's army under the strict obligation of the king's rule used their power to annihilate any opposition that ever stood against the empire. As the need for rubber plantations increased many men were forced to harvest rubber from the plants and when they refused their children and women were held, hostage. The rebellions that stood against the cruel rule of the empire were silenced by the huge Belgian army who used to cut hands off the corpses to maintain a count of their kills (Hochschild, pp. 165, 126).

In short, the shameless rule of King Leopold and the genocide of Congo's people perfectly describes the concept of Social Darwinism and how potentially stable powers take advantage of economically weak and backward nations. Influenced by the concept of Social Darwinism many of the Congo's people suffered horrible fate and their populations were reduced to half because of the savage killing of the Belgian army. Thankfully the world is now free of ignorant racial discrimination and everyone is treated equally irrespective of his race, ethnicity or wealth.

Works Cited

Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's Ghost: A story of greed, terror, and heroism in colonial Africa*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999.