

# Social Darwinism Ap World History

## Social Darwinism



- “Survival of the fittest” – but in society
- Natural weeding out of “weaker” peoples of the world would allow the “stronger” to flourish
- Belief = European dominance involved the displacement or destruction of backward peoples or “unfit” races

## Social Darwinism AP World History: Understanding Its Impact on Global Events

Social Darwinism. The term itself evokes images of ruthless competition and the "survival of the fittest." But understanding its role in shaping global events, particularly within the context of AP World History, requires moving beyond simplistic interpretations. This comprehensive guide delves into the intricacies of Social Darwinism, exploring its origins, its application throughout history, and its lasting impact on international relations and societal structures. We'll examine how this controversial theory influenced everything from colonialism and imperialism to eugenics and racial ideologies, providing you with the knowledge needed to ace your AP World History exam and gain a deeper understanding of this complex historical phenomenon.

## What is Social Darwinism?

Social Darwinism, at its core, is the misapplication of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection to human societies. While Darwin focused on biological evolution within species, Social Darwinists inappropriately extrapolated his ideas to justify social inequalities and hierarchies. They argued that certain races, nations, or social classes were inherently superior and destined to dominate, mirroring the "survival of the fittest" principle observed in the natural world. This interpretation

often disregarded the crucial difference between biological and cultural evolution, leading to profoundly damaging consequences.

## **The Misinterpretation of Darwin's Theories**

It's crucial to understand that Darwin himself never advocated for Social Darwinism. His work on natural selection concerned the biological adaptation of organisms to their environment, not the moral justification of social structures. Social Darwinists selectively chose elements from Darwin's work to support pre-existing prejudices and biases, twisting his scientific findings to serve their political and ideological agendas.

## **Social Darwinism and Imperialism**

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the zenith of European imperialism, and Social Darwinism provided a convenient ideological framework for justifying colonial expansion. European powers often portrayed themselves as superior races, destined to rule over "lesser" populations in Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

## **The "White Man's Burden"**

This concept, popularized by Rudyard Kipling's poem, encapsulated the Social Darwinist belief that Europeans had a moral obligation to civilize and govern supposedly inferior races. This "burden," however, often masked brutal exploitation, oppression, and the destruction of indigenous cultures and societies.

## **Justification for Colonial Violence**

Social Darwinism provided a pseudo-scientific justification for the violence and injustices inherent in colonial rule. The subjugation of colonized peoples was presented not as an act of aggression, but as a natural consequence of the supposed inherent superiority of the colonizers.

## **Social Darwinism and Eugenics**

The application of Social Darwinist principles extended beyond international relations to influence

domestic policies, notably in the eugenics movement. Eugenicists believed that selective breeding could improve the human race by eliminating "undesirable" traits.

## **Forced Sterilization and Discrimination**

This led to forced sterilizations, discriminatory immigration laws, and other discriminatory practices targeting individuals deemed "unfit" based on race, ethnicity, or perceived intellectual inferiority. The horrific consequences of eugenics programs, especially during the Nazi regime, serve as a stark warning against the dangers of misapplying scientific theories to justify social control.

## **The Legacy of Social Darwinism in AP World History**

Social Darwinism's legacy continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of inequality, racism, and nationalism. Understanding its role in shaping historical events is crucial for analyzing the complexities of global power dynamics and the enduring impact of ideologies on human societies.

## **Challenging the Narrative**

It's essential to critically examine the historical narratives that employed Social Darwinism to justify oppression and inequality. By understanding the flawed logic and devastating consequences of this ideology, we can better comprehend the historical forces that shaped the modern world and work towards a more just and equitable future.

## **Conclusion**

Social Darwinism, despite its misappropriation of scientific principles, played a significant role in shaping global events throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its influence on imperialism, colonialism, and eugenics resulted in widespread suffering and injustice. By understanding its historical context and critically analyzing its impact, we can gain a deeper appreciation of the complexities of world history and the enduring struggle for social justice.

## **FAQs**

1. How did Social Darwinism differ from Darwin's actual theory of evolution? Darwin's theory focused on biological evolution through natural selection within species. Social Darwinism incorrectly applied this principle to human societies, justifying social inequalities and hierarchies.
2. What were some specific examples of Social Darwinism in practice? The "White Man's Burden," used to justify colonialism, and eugenics programs aimed at improving the human race through selective breeding, are key examples.
3. Did Darwin support Social Darwinism? No. Darwin himself never advocated for Social Darwinism and explicitly distanced himself from its misinterpretations of his theories.
4. What are some of the lasting impacts of Social Darwinism? Social Darwinism's legacy continues to influence discussions of race, class, and inequality, highlighting the enduring dangers of misapplying scientific concepts to justify social injustices.
5. How can studying Social Darwinism help me in my AP World History course? Understanding Social Darwinism provides crucial context for analyzing imperialism, colonialism, and the rise of various nationalist and racist ideologies throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, improving your understanding of key historical events and their underlying motivations.

**social darwinism ap world history:** *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, Or, The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* Charles Darwin, 1896

**social darwinism ap world history:** *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* Charles Darwin, 2008-09-02 In the current resurgence of interest in the biological basis of animal behavior and social organization, the ideas and questions pursued by Charles Darwin remain fresh and insightful. This is especially true of *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Darwin's second most important work. This edition is a facsimile reprint of the first printing of the first edition (1871), not previously available in paperback. The work is divided into two parts. Part One marshals behavioral and morphological evidence to argue that humans evolved from other animals. Darwin shows that human mental and emotional capacities, far from making human beings unique, are evidence of an animal origin and evolutionary development. Part Two is an extended discussion of the differences between the sexes of many species and how they arose as a result of selection. Here Darwin lays the foundation for much contemporary research by arguing that many characteristics of animals have evolved not in response to the selective pressures exerted by their physical and biological environment, but rather to confer an advantage in sexual competition. These two themes are drawn together in two final chapters on the role of sexual selection in humans. In their Introduction, Professors Bonner and May discuss the place of *The Descent* in its own time and relation to current work in biology and other disciplines.

**social darwinism ap world history: A Century of Eugenics in America** Paul A. Lombardo, 2011-01-06 This volume assesses the history of eugenics in the United States and its status in the age of the Human Genome Project. The essays explore the early support of compulsory sterilization by doctors and legislators.

**social darwinism ap world history: Why Men Rebel** Ted Robert Gurr, 2015-11-17 *Why Men Rebel* was first published in 1970 after a decade of political violence across the world. Forty years later, serious conflicts continue in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Ted Robert Gurr reintroduces us to his landmark work, putting it in context with the research it influenced as well as world events. *Why Men Rebel* remains highly relevant to today's violent and unstable world with its holistic, people-based understanding of the causes of political protest and rebellion. With its close eye on the politics of group identity, this book provides new insight into contemporary security challenges.

**social darwinism ap world history:** *AP World History: Modern Premium* John McCannon,

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**social darwinism ap world history: The Gilded Age** Mark Twain, Charles Dudley Warner, 1904

**social darwinism ap world history: AP World History: Modern** John McCannon, 2020-02-04 Looking for an additional way to prep for the AP exam? Check out Barron's AP World History Podcast wherever you get your favorite podcasts. Be prepared for exam day with Barron's. Trusted content from AP experts! Barron's AP World History: Modern: 2020-2021 includes in-depth content review and practice. It's the only book you'll need to be prepared for exam day. Written by Experienced Educators Learn from Barron's--all content is written and reviewed by AP experts Build your understanding with comprehensive review tailored to the most recent exam Get a leg up with tips, strategies, and study advice for exam day--it's like having a trusted tutor by your side Be Confident on Exam Day Sharpen your test-taking skills with 2 full-length practice tests Strengthen your knowledge with in-depth review covering all Units on the AP World History: Modern Exam

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2016-04-14 Before the 99% occupied Wall Street... Before the concept of social justice had impinged on the social conscience... Before the social safety net had even been conceived... By the turn of the 20th Century, the era of the robber barons, Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) had already accumulated a staggeringly large fortune; he was one of the wealthiest people on the globe. He guaranteed his position as one of the wealthiest men ever when he sold his steel business to create the United States Steel Corporation. Following that sale, he spent his last 18 years, he gave away nearly 90% of his fortune to charities, foundations, and universities. His charitable efforts actually started far earlier. At the age of 33, he wrote a memo to himself, noting ...The amassing of wealth is one of the worse species of idolatry. No idol more debasing than the worship of money. In 1881, he gave a library to his hometown of Dunfermline, Scotland. In 1889, he spelled out his belief that the rich should use their wealth to help enrich society, in an article called The Gospel of Wealth this book. Carnegie writes that the best way of dealing with wealth inequality is for the wealthy to redistribute their surplus means in a responsible and thoughtful manner, arguing that surplus wealth produces the greatest net benefit to society when it is administered carefully by the wealthy. He also argues against extravagance, irresponsible spending, or self-indulgence, instead promoting the administration of capital during one's lifetime toward the cause of reducing the stratification between the rich and poor. Though written more than a century ago, Carnegie's words still ring true today, urging a better, more equitable world through greater social consciousness.

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