
In the late 19th century, Charles Darwin and others began to describe the world in terms of “survival of the fittest.” In Darwin’s case he was referring to the development of animals and humans, but others applied the same idea to nations and business. Social Darwinists, as they came to be called, argued that the strongest or fittest should survive and thrive, while the weak and unfit should be allowed to die or be taken over by the strong.



Based on Social Darwinism, it seemed natural that rich and powerful nations should control those they saw as “less developed” people. Natives, especially those with dark skin, were viewed as “weak,” so powerful Europeans felt justified in seizing their land and resources and, “in their best interest,” converting them to their religions. Militarily, Social Darwinism also meant the strongest army would and should win, and any people killed or otherwise harmed in the process could be explained away as “unfit.”

In economics Social Darwinism was used to justify paying “weak” factory workers pennies a day for long hours of labor so the rich could thrive and develop their businesses. It also allowed the wealthy who chose to do so to ignore the needs of the poor, who were seen as less fit anyway and so deserving of no more than they had.

Put a √ by the title you like most (or write your own in the blank for the passage and explain why you chose the one you did in the space below.

- Social Darwinism
- Only Strong Survive
- What We Deserve

- It’s Only Natural
- Might Makes Right
- Evil Empires

In what way(s) does the cartoon support the passage information?

What do you think of Social Darwinism? Explain your ideas.