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Gil Villagrán, MSW, May 2015

Biology scientist **Charles Darwin**, author of "**The Origin of Species**," concluded that "the survival of the fittest" is an axiom descriptive of observed nature in his native England and on his two-year voyage on the *MSS Beagle* to South America. From Darwin's ideas social philosopher **Herbert Spencer** posited the theory that for society/civilization to succeed, only the fittest humans, societies, nations will/should survive. Therefore, helping the infirm, the sick, and the "lower" members of any community/society/nation is contrary to *the law of nature*, and will lead to the "imperfection of mankind." This idea came to be called **Social Darwinism**.

In spite of the highly educated Founding Fathers of our nation, educated by reading the enlightened writings of European philosophers, (their movement named "The Enlightenment"); the writings of Hobbs, Locke, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, as they wrote our **Declaration of Independence**, our **Constitution** and our **Bill of Rights**, they curiously left out whole swaths of the humanity living among them from their new republic's social contract. Those who they deemed as unqualified for their new nation, as free and equal citizens began with the native people they conquered, removed or killed, slaves kidnapped with the whip and chain and sold at auction, and to a slightly lesser extent, all women—including their wives, mothers and daughters.

Adam Smith, economist author of **The Wealth of Nations**, theorized that if every man seeks his ultimate well-being by making or growing a product to sell to others for the best price he can obtain, and then it will increase his wealth (equals his well-being), and ultimately, the wealth of his nation. His book is to a great extent the foundation or "bible" of capitalism.

A theoretical "**Invisible Hand**" guides all humankind, all commerce, all nations to create abundance for those favored by **Providence** (God's Will) to succeed by seeking individual fortune. Those who fail are judged to be less worthy, imperfect, lazy, deserving of God and society's disdain. They will live shorter, dissatisfied lives, and society is better off without them.

Later **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism** by Max Weber, published in Germany in 1905, critiqued this philosophy which led most of

western civilization to commercialism and conspicuous consumption (to show everyone that God favors the "already saved" by bestowing success (proved by wealth) upon them. The Great Awakening, later called the Evangelical Movement, most importantly--the Progressive Movement, are compassionate reactions to the "save yourself and to hell with all others" philosophy/ideology. These movements reaffirmed the former Christian value of serving the poor, the sick, and victims of social inequity in **Settlement Houses**, orphanages, hospitals, indoor and outdoor relief. This movement merged into the early welfare services movement, and it is now the present Welfare State.

In the U.S. during the **Gilded Age**, as in every age, every nation, every society, vast wealth was acquired by the few from the labor of the many through low wages, unsafe mines and oil fields and refineries (search: Ludlow Massacre & Triangle Shirtwaist Factory), over-crowded factories, company housing, price gouging at company stores, and monopoly trusts that control all commerce, including government services, permits, regulation or non-regulation (aka "regulatory capture"), of elections, as well as all levels of so-called democratic government.

Financiers' gambling on the **Wall Street Stock Market** created a domino effect reaching across the nation and the world. It can be speculated that when the financial crisis hit Europe, an under-employed, dissatisfied art student named Adolph leveraged the malaise into a beer cellar movement eventually named the NAZI party.

The crisis of **The Great Depression** was but the culmination of unregulated Wall Street "gambling" of the nation's corporate and banking industries by the wealthy few and the wannabe upper wealthy professional and working class.

The Depression was initiated by the **Oct. 1929 Crash of Wall Street** when most investors realized much of their wealth was based on inflated value of commodities that were often fictitious, overstated or sold and resold over and over as when an auction drives buyers into a competitive frenzy where a "tulip bulb" (in 1700s Belgium, Holland) seems to be worth a fortune only a king can afford.

The Depression was compounded by a massive drought from Virginia to Arkansas. The years of overgrazing and same crop farming depleted the soil, which led to the **Dust Bowl**, where winds blew the topsoil away. Banks foreclosed on small farmers (such as Cesar Chavez's family's farm in Yuma,

Arizona), so planting and harvesting did not occur as before. Thousands of farms were abandoned, and millions of farmers and farm workers wandered in search of jobs, joining millions of factory workers already without work. The price of food rose and many suffered serious hunger. The nation was in its most severe crisis ever!

The wide range of New Deal programs created by President FDR provided the 3 Rs (Relief, Recovery and Reconstruction) to save the nation from likely Fascism, but it was not until WWII 's massive public spending that effectively ended the Great Depression, and subsequent **Marshall Plan** at the end of the war that rebuilt Europe to prevent yet a return of Fascism.

The two decades after WWII (1945 to 1965) was a golden era for many Americans as the nation rebuilt its infrastructure and entered high tech and mass manufacturing, selling "made in the U.S.A." products to the whole world. Jobs were plentiful, the **GI Bill** paid for education for veterans and subsidized home loans as America began to suburbanize into new communities around decaying urban cities.

But the golden era did not reach all Americans. Left out of the upwardly mobile was what sociologist Michael Harrington in 1962 named "**The Other America**," where 25% of Americans lived in severe poverty of missed meals, dilapidated homes, lack of the most basic health care. It is reported that JFK was startled to learn this harsh reality when a White House reporter asked him if he had read the book, and that LBJ was moved to action on the War on Poverty by the book.

So today in our new century, our nation of 350 million is governed "officially" by the democratic ideals eloquently prescribed in our Constitution, but in reality we are governed by the same ideology of "survival of the fittest," who are the wealthiest, the 1% billionaire owned politicians who are served by the most clever at propaganda, mass marketing advertising, public manipulation which determines elections so that "the people" in "we the people..." vote against their own best interests, such as for allowing pollution of their own environment to ensure jobs.

Evidence of this reality is such that in almost every election, the best financed candidates win, incumbents are re-elected, Congressional gridlock gets progressively more entrenched, and national problems continue to fester without remedy.

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