

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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**Survival of the Kindest**

**Nafsi ya Jamii**

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**BC Columnist**

Western culture has infected us with **many false** models of nature's workings and the nature of reality such as the "survival of the fittest" model. The outbreak of this mental disease occurred with the 18th century cultural movement of intellectuals that is called the Enlightenment Period or the Age of Reason. Race and racism based on skin color took root, for example, during this same time period and was based on **and** intertwined with other incorrect understandings. Much of more **ancient human wisdom** both from European sources and non-European sources was discarded during this period. Some was discarded because it was already buried deep and hidden from public knowledge in the controlling institutions of the time: imperialist regimes and oppressive Christian religious hierarchies. Wisdom was also lost because this indigenous-European-sourced knowledge was restricted to the eyes of a few esoteric cult members. It was misinterpreted because of faulty language translations. Because of cross cultural ineptitude, it was frequently misunderstood. Yet, knowing this today, we continue to function as if these false understandings, paradigms, and misinterpretations have unassailable validity.

The "survival of the fittest" model is now starting to collapse. With its collapse it is subtly undermining many of the most powerful political, economic, and social systems in the West, including capitalism. Cultural thinkers in the US are in crisis attempting to hold their own in a rising tide of alternative perspectives from a multicultural world. A huge irony is that science, the main product of the Enlightenment

Period, is also calling into question the understandings that are at its root. However, take note that it **is not** the alternative European vision that is Marxian socialism – **also** founded with some of the same materialist deductive reasoning of the 18th century – that is presenting this significant challenge to these Western corporate imperialist structures. The rhetorical socialist “boogey man” posited by Mitt Romney, Rush Limbaugh, and that gang is an obviously false distraction.

Those few, lonely naysayers that assailed Enlightenment beliefs and those cultures and peoples who held on to and refined their ancient wisdom teachings are now being affirmed more and more **by science**. Jacques Barzun is one historian who termed science “a faith as fanatical as any in history.” Such thinkers as Carolyn Merchant, Theodor Adorno, and E. F. Schumacher posited that the so-called scientific revolution shifted ‘natural’ science from a focus on trying to understand nature or wisdom to a focus on manipulating nature – using it to grab power – which led to the inevitable manipulation of people as well. “Science’s focus on quantitative measures has led to critiques that it is unable to recognize important qualitative aspects of the world.” (Fritjof Capra, [\*Uncommon Wisdom\*](#), p. 213)

Among a number of other investigations in the US and around the world, researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, are challenging the long-held capitalist belief that human beings are **naturally wired** to be selfish. In a wide range of studies, social scientists are amassing a growing body of evidence to show that we are evolved to be compassionate and collaborative in our quest to survive and thrive. It is **not** about “the survival of the fittest.” Dacher Keltner, a UC Berkeley psychologist and author of ***Born to be Good: the Science of a Meaningful Life***, is building the case that humans are successful as a species precisely because of our nurturing, altruistic and compassionate traits. He calls it “**survival of the kindest**.” “Because of our very vulnerable offspring, the fundamental task for human survival and gene replication is to take care of others... Human beings have survived as a species because we have evolved the capacities to care for those in need and to cooperate.”

At the core of most Native American culture – and most indigenous cultures around the world – harmonizing with nature and other

peoples is a highly appreciated cultural value. In the largely European rush in the US to manipulate and control nature, motivated by the materialist values of the Enlightenment, whites visited genocide on Native peoples, stole their land, and captured Africans and enslaved them based on the false, unnatural, **counter-evolutionary** doctrine of "survival of the fittest."

Marx's focus on materialist resource exchange in the traditional market place missed the importance of the market place as a place for building community solidarity that had less to do with resource exchange and that overrides quantitative exchange calculations when folks are in need of assistance. "**From each according to his ability, to each according to his need**" already was the way for many long before Marx. In many traditional African villages, Chiefs were chosen – **by the women** – on the basis of what they could generously provide to the whole village, not on the basis of fighting ability or how many people they could manipulate and control. Native American leadership was similarly constituted. Whole communities came together regularly to help one another without the expectation of exchange but with a longstanding practice of mutual caring. Traditional communities exhibited the evolutionary human being (community) at its highest potential. Europeans were the savages **not** the indigenous peoples.

At the time of the writing of The Constitution, in the upstairs rooms of Constitution Hall, Benjamin Franklin hosted some of the leadership of the Haudenosaune people, "people of the long house." Franklin was appreciative of the governance structure that the Haudenosaune had put together to end the warring of five Native American nations: the Mohawk, the Seneca, the Oneida, the Onondaga, and the Cayuga. Rather than subdue each other in continuous wars – which solves nothing. The **women** called for an end to fighting and supported the Great Peace Maker, *Skennenrahawi* in Mohawk, who went from tribe to tribe fashioning the greatest achievement for peace in human history. The governance structure he brought together was based on a high level of respect, deep listening, patience, and consensus decision making that was sorely needed during Franklin's time and that is needed today.

Dulled by the conceptualizations that arose from the Enlightenment, our **Founding Fathers** were not able to summon the best of human

evolutionary capability. They fashioned a governing document that was a step forward – for Europeans – but that fell far short of capturing the best that we can do as evolved human beings. At its core it is still about the doctrine of “survival of the fittest.” For **only propertied men** was the power of the majority ameliorated. Decisions were based on manipulated power and not caring. Without an underlying caring value system, mechanisms to protect the minority and to address the needs of communities and peoples were inadequate and quickly over come.

After hundreds of years the people in this country have returned to a junction where we can move toward an evolutionary future with great harmonizing with nature and widely practiced mutual caring. **Or** we can continue to wallow in the self destructive detritus of the 18th century. **We can choose.**

*[Note: Nafsi ya Jamii is the Swahili phrase that translates in English to “The Soul Community”]*

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