

Louisiana resolution brands Charles Darwin a racist

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In a bizarre melding of political correctness and Christian fundamentalism, a resolution branding Charles Darwin a racist and claiming that his theory of evolution through natural selection was responsible for the racist ideologies of the nineteenth century, as well as the Nazi Holocaust, will be presented before the Louisiana State Legislature.

The proponent of the resolution, Sharon Broome, a black Democrat from the state's 29th legislative district in the Baton Rouge area, asserted in a recent interview with the *Baton Rouge Advocate* that Darwin “teaches that some humans have evolved further than others,” and that “people of color are savages.” Broome commented further that the resolution will “shine a light on the history of racism.”

The resolution reads, “Be it resolved that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby deplore all instances and ideologies of racism, and does hereby reject the core concepts of Darwinist ideology that certain races and classes of humans are inherently superior to others.”

The state's House Education Committee has already approved the resolution by a 9-5 vote. While Broome's resolution, if passed, neither rises to the level of law, nor will affect curriculum in the schools, it will certainly have a chilling effect on the teaching of biological evolution in Louisiana schools. Not only will science teachers have to contend with being branded as secular humanists, they will now be labeled racists to boot.

Some of the positions Broome attributes to Darwin reveal not only ignorance of the great naturalist's seminal contribution to biology, they represent as well a dishonest attempt to create an amalgam between Darwin's theory regarding the descent through modification of all living organisms, and the perversion

of his work by social theorist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and others, who attempted to use Darwinism to justify class and racial exploitation.

This “social Darwinism,” as it came to be known, was embraced by sections of the ruling classes, who declared the innate superiority of the wealthy over the poor, based on a superficial rendering of Darwin's work. It should be pointed out that Charles Darwin was quite liberal for his time, was a staunch opponent of slavery and rejected social Darwinism as a misguided attempt to use a theory of the natural world to explain social phenomena.

Darwin was, in fact, quite uncomfortable with the phrase “survival of the fittest” as a descriptor for the blind process of evolution, in that adaptations that make a species successful under a given set of environmental circumstances could, and often did, turn into their opposite when objective conditions changed.

It is not difficult for someone like Broome, who is most likely driven by a deep hostility to the teaching of evolution, to find statements or positions held by the naturalist which reveal that he was also a product of a particular period of history and an imperfect human being. Thus Darwin may have employed the word “savagery” to describe the cultural level of non-Europeans. It should be noted, however, that Darwin looked with unease at the widely held notion that “civilization” had to be brought to the “backward” races, and once remarked in a letter that native populations were being “improved right off the face of the earth.”

The terms “savagery,” “barbarism” and “civilization” had a wide usage during the nineteenth century and corresponded with the attempts by scholars and social theorists such as American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan—and then, building on his work,

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels—to subject the process of human history to a materialist analysis. Any honest historical appraisal will reveal that racism, and the outrages stemming from it, are the products of the exploitative nature of capitalism and not the theories of science.

Science, like all other human activity, is not practiced in a vacuum but exists within class society and must reflect, in varying degrees, the dominant class viewpoint. Thus, “Darwinist ideology,” as Broome calls it, was appropriated by sections of the monarchy and capitalist class to fuel a growing racialism. But why stop with Darwin? Shouldn't the theories of the Austrian monk Gregor Mendel, who discovered the laws of heredity, also be banned? Genetics has certainly been used by racists everywhere to give their reactionary notions a pseudoscientific gloss.

While critics of Broome correctly point out that her resolution is another attempt by creationists to ban the teaching of evolution from public schools, it is the first time that this thoroughly retrograde attack on science has been given the cover of so-called political correctness.



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