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**Surviving and Thriving: Exploring The Impact of
Herbert Spencer's Philosophy of "Survival of The
Fittest" on American Cinema "*The Revenant*"**

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandmother, whose passion for English civilization inspired me to embark on this academic journey with enthusiasm. I hope you are in a better place!

To my beloved parents, my pillars of strength, whose prayers have guided and sustained me during these 5 years.

To my siblings Amine, Fedwa, Ali for their unwavering love.

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Abstract

Throughout history, humans have continually faced challenges across various fields, requiring them to adapt and compete for survival. Herbert Spencer, influenced by Charles Darwin, introduced the concept of "survival of the fittest," exemplified in the Oscar-winning film "The Revenant" directed by Iñárritu, where characters must navigate a harsh environment to thrive. The purpose of this study is to investigate if this philosophy is applicable on "The Revenant" movie. This philosophy emphasizes the need to adapt, compete, and endure in a settings governed by natural laws. This philosophy while essential for survival was misused to justify colonialism and exploitation in the movie, echoing the oppressive actions of white supremacy against indigenous peoples in the movie.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

The *Revenant* immediately seized the spotlight since its release in 2015. With a total worldwide gross of \$533 million, the film was nominated for twelve Academy Awards, including Best Picture. It also won three Oscars: Best Actor (DiCaprio), Best Director (Iñárritu), and Best Cinematography (Lubezki).

The ultimate moral of the *Revenant* is “what a one man can do; does not necessarily mean that another man can do it as well”. Put another way, our ancestors endured attacks by fierce animals in the forests, lack of food resources, water, territory and basic survival elements long before civilization and its luxuries started to isolate us from the natural world. Some because of their cunning managed to survive while others perished.

The story of "*The Revenant*" delves into the themes of competition and survival, highlighting the philosophical contributions of well-known figures like Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Thomas Malthus. The ideas of these philosophers helped to define the concept of the never-ending struggle for survival, which Spencer famously coined as "**survival of the fittest.**"

Expanding on Darwin's theories, Herbert Spencer redefined the notion of natural selection by emphasizing competition and adaptation, suggesting that those lacking the necessary traits for survival should perish, diverging from Darwin's original ideas. Spencer applied the principles of evolution not only to biology but also to philosophy and sociology. He believed that organisms evolve through a process of competition, with the most capable individuals or groups emerging victorious.

"*The Revenant*" effectively illustrates social Darwinism by having the audience envision Darwinian competition. Hugh Glass faced many challenges, such as the bear attack, serious injuries, food scarcity, and betrayal by his companions, leading to his abandonment in the wilderness. Glass must adapt to survive, endure the harsh environment, and simply persevere.

After looking thoroughly and examining a variety of sources, it was found that while *Survival of The Fittest* is taken from books, articles, doctoral theses, or book chapters, the majority of research on *The Revenant* has been done on articles. So far, no research study has tackled the topic of examining the movie's survival themes by delving into its roots in philosophy.

The method used in acquiring Data is descriptive qualitative in order to give the reader an accurate visualization of the scenes.

General Introduction

Though this ideology places a strong emphasis on competition, it has been misused to advance one's own interests by dominating those who are seen as weak or "less fit," which helped to justify the ideas of Manifest Destiny, Westward Expansion, and the Doctrine of Discovery.

In this respect, the research beforehand raises some queries that should be answered properly:

- Are the characters in the movie "*The Revenant*" subject to the survival of the fittest theory?
- What consequences might arise from improper application of this philosophy?

The questions asked above may accept the following hypotheses:

- Characters in "*The Revenant*" will exhibit behaviors consistent with Spencer's concept of survival of the fittest, demonstrating adaptation, competition, and individual struggle in the wilderness.
- Its application reinforces systemic inequalities and justifies exploitation.

This study is divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on early scholars who explored the concept of the struggle for existence, alongside a concise biography of Herbert Spencer, emphasizing his significant theories on social evolution and survival of the fittest. The same chapter offers a background information on the film "*The Revenant*," highlighting how it reflects the Western justification for expansionism as an inherent right. The second chapter analyses the movie, applying the concepts discussed in the first chapter to its characters.

Chapter One :

**Herbert Spencer's Doctrine and Its
Cinematic Influence in "*The Revenant*"**

Chapter One : Herbert Spencer's Doctrine and Its Cinematic Weave in "The Revenant"

1.1. Introduction

The chapter explores the warrior spirit, the drive to thrive, and the willingness to do whatever it takes to survive, emphasizing the integrity to fight for one's own well-being, lest one perish. This mentality embodies a live-or-die ethos. Before delving into the survival aspect, the chapter traces the origins back to the earliest scholars who observed and studied the concept of the struggle for existence through a Darwinian lens.

Ever since the beginning of human history, survival has been a constant battle for humans. Famine, illness, and warfare have always been obstacles in history, signifying the never-ending struggle for survival. Since the late 1700s, the idea of the “struggle for existence” has been present in human discourse; its roots can be found in the century prior. The 17th century saw the rise in popularity of this theory, especially in regard to the issue of population increase outpacing resource availability. Thomas Robert Malthus provided a comprehensive analysis of this problem in his seminal work “An Essay on the Principle of Population.”

The notion of the Malthusian disaster was first introduced by the eminent academic Thomas Robert Malthus (1798) in his work “An Essay on the Principle of Population.” Malthus proposed in this seminal study, which was initially published in 1798, that an increasing number of people puts a pressure on the finite resources that are meant to sustain them. He foresaw a time when living standards would drastically decline as a result of this population imbalance in the absence of policies like self-control or natural calamities to slow population increase (p.71)

1.2. Early Scholars on Survival: Trailblazers of Inquiry

Early academics alluded to the idea of survival of the fittest in an implicit manner, implying that only the most capable and strong people would succeed in a certain subject. Without regulation, people would constantly compete and strive with one another. It is rare to note that other scholars have discussed the existential issue before Thomas Malthus. There have been myriads of Scholars of the Malthusian school before him; such as Plato¹ who

¹ Plato : An ancient Greek philosopher who lived from around 428 to 347 BCE. He is known for founding the academy in Athens.

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suggested the regulation of marriage as a means to promote gender equality. In “*The Republic*,” Plato (1992) makes the case that historically, men because of their greater strength have curtailed women’s rights. Notwithstanding any apparent disparities in aptitude, Plato maintains that in his ideal society, women should pursue the same goals as men and have equal access to educational opportunities (p. 164-165).

Plato came under fire from Aristotle² (1941) for not placing the cap on the number of children, claiming that without such limitations, property and assets could not be distributed equally. Without these limitations, there would be war everywhere (p.1149).

Adam Smith³ (1904) In “*Wealth of Nations*,” established a connection between the supply of food and population expansion that occurs naturally. He brought out the idea that some people cannot support large families without suffering difficulty or deprivation since they have fewer resources available to them. Consequently, he contends that within these socioeconomic strata, population growth may be naturally constrained by the paucity of subsistence supplies (p.79)

It is crucial to note that the struggle for survival entails more than only making ends meet and surviving on necessities like food and water. It also holds true for other disciplines, like anthropology. In his influential essay “*On the Origin of Species*,” Charles Darwin⁴ (1859) took a more expansive view of the “struggle for existence,” devoting a whole chapter to explaining its importance. Darwin saw this conflict as inevitable and essential to the theory of evolution by natural selection. According to Darwin’s theory, advantageous mutations provided a competitive advantage to individual organisms, raising the probability of their survival over that of their contemporaries. As a result, only those people who are able to survive will procreate, leading to diversification and evolutionary advancement and outnumbering those who lack the requisite qualities (pp. 80-81).

Darwin’s theory of the struggle for survival included three main types of struggles: intraspecific struggle, which is the competition between members of the same species for

² Aristotle : A greek philosopher who lived from 384 to 322 BCE. He is one of the most influential figures in western philosophy and science.

³ Adam Smith : A Scottish economist and philosopher is often considered as the father of modern economics.

⁴ Charles Darwin : An English naturalist and biologist best known for his contributions to the science of evolution.

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resources like food and territory; interspecific struggle, which is the competition between members of different species for resources; and environmental struggle, which is the struggle against obstacles posed by the physical environment itself, such as climate and geography.

Hence, Darwin's explanation of the fight for existence as a complex process involving multiple types of competition and environmental pressures made a substantial contribution to our knowledge of evolutionary dynamics and the complex interactions that occur between organisms and their environments. Prosper in a certain field, outlasting the weak and controlling them (ibid.pp.62-63).

This idea was applied in a variety of domains, including politics, as was previously mentioned. Niccolò Machiavelli's⁵ *The Prince* (1532) also touches on the existential struggle in a roundabout way. He emphasized the need of adaptation, strength, and cunning to thrive in political and social environments. In this work, Machiavelli offers rules for rulers on how to acquire and maintain power. He is cognizant of the challenges of surviving in competitive environments, as seen by his views on power dynamics and social and political survival strategies. (pp.45-46)

In "*An Essay on the Principle of Population*", Malthus (1798) claimed that there would not be a single country of hunters and fishers today if hunger had been the only factor forcing the American Indian nations to adopt more plentiful means of obtaining nourishment (1817). Malthus emphasizes the importance of adaptation, pointing out that certain traits, like flexibility, might be present in someone with a survival mindset and a strong will to survive. For example, although hunger is one of the American tribes' greatest forces, it has not been sufficient on its own to push these civilizations toward alternative means of existence. Their inability to evolve with society was the cause of their lack of adaptation. A combination of internal and environmental factors results in a higher social standing. Consequently, they have persisted in their old, traditional ways, which have finally led to their downfall, rather than interacting with new people and making an effort to adapt to the new environment and technological improvements. (p.19)

Charles Darwin, the renowned biologist who developed the theory of evolution by natural selection, was greatly influenced by the theories of Thomas Malthus. He saw the similarities

⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli : A famous renaissance political philosopher known for his pragmatic advice on how to maintain power.

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between his own findings of variety and competition within species and Malthus's observations of population growth and competition for resources. Darwin stated that his own thinking had been greatly influenced by Malthus's work in "*On the Origin of Species*," which was published in 1859. The notion that competition for limited resources would result in the survival of the fittest individuals and the evolutionary adaptation of species over time was really proven by him studying Malthus's work with other data.

In "The Origin of Species," Darwin (1859) wrote:

"...the more prolific any species becomes, the more will its numbers be curtailed by its various enemies. Hence, in a state of nature, almost every full-grown animal must suffer great destruction from some other cause than old age, and even during the few months of each year when food is abundant, must suffer from enemies or from accidents. Malthus on man should hereafter be referred to, for this subject will be treated of in the 9th chapter of this volume." (p.84)

Consequently, Darwin's theory of natural selection was based on Malthus notion of the Malthusian disaster, which established a vital connection between evolutionary biology and demography theory. Schwartz in "Charles Darwin's debt to Malthus and Edward Blyth" (1974) mentions that the upper of the form Like Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace claimed that Malthus was the source of his own theory of species transition. Darwin's hypothesis was very different from its main ancestors in terms of the historical background. Consequently, Darwin's theory of natural selection was based on Malthus's notion of the Malthusian disaster, which established a vital connection between evolutionary biology and demography theory. (pp.301-318)

1.3. Darwin's Influence on Herbert Spencer

The renowned biologist Charles Darwin embarked on a global exploratory journey that brought him from the Galápagos Islands to South America. He made some important discoveries on this trip that would have a big influence on later researchers. Darwin saw substantial differences between islands in the traits of some species, such as finches. He was drawn to these distinctive characteristics, especially the differences in beak form between finch species. (*For Darwin's Finches, Beak Shape Goes Beyond Evolution*, 2021, p.33)

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Darwin hypothesised that the various food supplies that each island offered over time led to the evolution of these variations in beak morphology. Following its publication, Darwin's book "*On the Origin of Species*" caused a great deal of controversy and discussion among scientists. It presented an innovative theory that humans, plants, and animals change throughout time to become more adapted to and resilient in their environments that went against the traditional view on divine creation. The foundation of Darwin's work is his theory of natural selection, which is based on five essential ideas: variation, overproduction, adaptation, inheritance, and selection. It is possible to think of natural selection as the mechanism by which populations of living things change and adapt. The term "adaptation" originates from the mashup of ad and aptus, signifying "toward +fit." ("Adapt," 2024)

A group's members are distinct from one another since they are all naturally different. This variation suggests that some individuals have traits that are more suitable for a given environment than others. Individuals with advantageous traits, or traits that are adaptable, are more likely to thrive and reproduce. These individuals then pass on their adaptive traits to their descendants. Over time, these advantageous traits dispersed throughout the community. Darwin on the "Origin Of Species " argues that the process of natural selection ensures that advantageous traits are passed down through the generations. (p.83)

The phrase "survival of the fittest" was actually first used by Spencer (1855) in his book "Principles of Psychology." This book was published years before Darwin's seminal work "On the Origin of Species." (p.468)

1.4. The Difference Between Herbert Spencer's Philosophy of the Fittest and Darwin's Theory of Evolution

Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin both contributed significantly to the understanding of evolutionary theory, but their philosophies diverge in a key way.

In "Principle of biology", Spencer (1864) wrote

"The survival of the fittest, which I have here sought to express in mechanical terms, is that which Mr Darwin natural selection, or the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life."(p.444)

Spencer's interpretation of social Darwinism differed greatly from Darwin's original ideas. Spencer used the idea of natural selection from biology to study "use-inheritance," or

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the passing down of acquired traits, in sociology. He saw natural selection as only a supporting role. The broad endeavour of "cosmical philosophy," which embraces evolution on all fronts—physical, biological, and social—was proposed by him.(Scoville, 2019)

According to Stephen Jay Gould⁶ (2002), the expression "survival of the fittest" in reference to natural selection is deceptive and tautological. In fact, biological survival is always dependent on "fitness" in the strict sense of species-specific variations in reproduction rates. However, the term "fittest" is not a moral or ethical assessment; rather, it does not allude to any significant notion inside human society. (p.356)

Although the term "survival of the fittest" has been used extensively in sociological contexts, it is crucial to understand that this usage is different from its biological meaning, according to Michael Russe (2016), an expert in the philosophy of biology. 'Fittest' is a term used frequently in sociology to describe people or groups that perform well in competition; however, this is not a literal application of the laws of natural selection, but rather a metaphor. (p.172)

1.5. Herbert Spencer's Early Life and Intellectual Development

A key player in the 19th-century intellectual scene, Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) is well-known for his contributions to psychology, sociology, biology, and philosophy. He is still remembered today, especially by libertarian philosophers like Robert Nozick, for his definition of natural rights and criticisms of utilitarian positivism. Spencer was raised with a strong desire to learn and a strong sense of curiosity. He was born in Derby, England. He did not receive any formal schooling until he was 13 years old, but that did not stop him from starting a remarkable journey of self-study. He immersed himself in a variety of subjects, from literature and philosophy to science and mathematics. Spencer worked as a journalist and a civil engineer in his early career, but he soon focused on writing and philosophical studies. The concepts of natural selection and evolution, which were gaining traction in science during the 19th century, piqued his intense curiosity. (Acton, 2024.p.55)

One of Spencer's most significant and long-lasting accomplishments was developing the idea of "survival of the fittest." This term was really originated by Spencer, not Darwin, as is commonly believed. Spencer put forth the hypothesis that creatures that are most adapted to

⁶ Stephen. J. Gould : A prominent American biologist and historian of science. He is well known for his contributions to evolutionary theory.

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their surroundings have a higher chance of surviving, procreating, and passing on their beneficial features to subsequent generations. This theory was based on his knowledge of evolutionary theory. He applied this theory to human civilizations, contending that institutions and social structures change similarly and that the most resilient and effective ones endure throughout time. (*Survival of the Fittest*, n.d.)

Spencer made revolutionary contributions to sociology. In "*The Principles of Sociology*", he attempted in his book to offer an all-encompassing framework for comprehending social progress. He proposed that natural selection drives the evolution of societies from simple to complex forms, with advances in culture and technology serving as the primary catalysts. (Spencer, 1880)

Michael and Taylor in "Herbert Spencer legacies" (2014) argue that Spencer made important advances in philosophy alongside his contributions to sociology. He created "Spencerianism"; a comprehensive philosophical framework that sought to unite all fields of knowledge under evolutionary theory. His writings, which included "First Principles" and "Principles of Biology," influenced later generations of academics greatly and established the foundation for contemporary evolutionary theory. (p.60)

Herbert Spencer made a lasting impression on the intellectual landscape of his day and beyond with his unwavering quest of knowledge and innovative ideas. His theory of "survival of the fittest" transformed how individuals think about evolution and continues to influence discussions in sociology and biology.

Even though Herbert Spencer faced health issues and lived a solitary existence in his latter years, his impact was felt all over the world, even though his political beliefs lost favor as he aged. His methodology was scientific and empirical, influenced by Auguste Comte's positivism, which gave priority to knowledge that was based on actual data and flexible. With the integration of Lamarckian theories into his evolutionary worldview that accepted human nature and progress without teleology, Spencer made a lasting contribution to the intellectual climate of his day and beyond.

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1.6. The Doctrine of Survival

The idea of survival whether physical or metaphoric is frequently associated in different contexts with a jungle law that says that those who do not stand up for themselves risk being left at the mercy of others. This idea, which is embodied in Spencer's theory, highlights how the strong, who have what it takes to succeed, always seem to rise to the top, leaving the weak behind since they cannot adjust and compete well. It emphasises the constant rivalry that permeates human existence and makes success the yardstick by which one is ultimately judged. (*Survival for the Fittest*, 2021)

In order to survive, species in the natural world must compete with one another. William Graham Sumner (1883) was a sociologist and proponent of laissez-faire capitalism. He believed that people should be allowed to compete freely in the market without interference from the government and supported little government action in social and economic matters. He made the contentious claim that the weak should be allowed to perish, claiming that aid from the government would stifle free market forces and prevent society's progress. (p.148)

1.7. Spencer Evolutionary Doctrine

The complex philosophical framework of Herbert Spencer's evolutionary position looks at how development and change interact in a variety of contexts, including biology and society. Spencer in his book "The Principles of Biology" stated that the doctrine has three major tenets which are diversity, the death of the weakest member of the population, and unity. (Spencer, 1898, p.78)

1.7.1. Homogeneity: Spencer postulated that throughout the early phases of evolution, individuals would have comparable characteristics and be homogeneous members of a single species or population. Put otherwise, any species that speaks a language will be reflected in the inclinations, including mental and physical characteristics. When two people share the same ancestry or the population's diversity is almost identical, homogeneity of this type results. (chapter 14)

1.7.2. Heterogeneity: Spencer explained that as a species or group evolves, there is a propensity for individuals within it to become more and more diverse, a phenomenon known as heterogeneity. The variations in each person's qualities and attributes are

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what lead to this heterogeneity. Natural selection only affects those differences that ultimately result in the creation of distinct forms that are well suited to particular habitats or ecological niches.(ibid)

1.7.3. Survival of the Fittest: Spencer's remarks regarding the fittest individuals surviving in intensely competitive environments may minimize his contribution to the theory of evolution. This idea represent that, within any given population, individuals who possess traits better suited to their surroundings have a higher chance of surviving and procreating, hence transferring their advantageous traits to the next generations. In this process, individuals within their specific surroundings eventually select for adaptive and advantageous features that tend to boost an organism's fitness.(ibid)

The fundamental tenets of Spenser's evolutionary doctrine, which emphasises that natural selection is the active force behind these adaptations and that populations progressively adapt to their environments over time; are established by combining the concepts of homogeneity and heterogeneity in populations and viewing them as dynamic forces.

1.8. Cinema as a Reflective Medium

Walter Murch stated in an interview that movies have the power to revive long-gone reality. not only historically but also morally, emotionally, and emotionally. His claim suggests that the creation of movies aims higher than simple entertainment. Its purpose is to give viewers a better understanding of historical events and to immerse them in a sensuous journey filled with a range of emotions and moral lessons. (Web of Stories - Life Stories of Remarkable People, 2017)

Just like any other kind of art, making movies demands dedication, perseverance, and an intense drive to faithfully convey the producer's vision. Old or new, movies always stand for society; they display its issues, worries, attitudes, and modes of thought. Mexican filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu, who is best known for his modern psychological drama films that examine the human condition, took on the challenge. He succeeded remarkably in creating "*The Revenant*," which is widely regarded as one of the most exceptional movies of the twenty-first century. Movies show the real story and let viewers relive the hardships faced by the ancient people. Movies also made the ugly aspects of western exploitation and colonization visible.

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The well-known historian Foner (2010) has admitted that films have a significant role in raising awareness of historical subjects like expansionism. He makes the case that movies have the ability to speak to a wide range of people and spark thought about difficult historical topics, shedding light on historical details that could be missed in more conventional academic contexts. (p.200)

The American historian and diplomat Deborah Lipstadt (2017) recognizes the value of movies in teaching people about past injustices and crimes. She contends that movies have the ability to arouse empathy and emotional response, which contributes to ensuring that the lessons of the past are remembered. But Lipstadt also issues a warning, stressing the value of critical analysis and contextual information, against depending only on movies to learn about the past. (p.205)

During an interview with *The Revenant* (Hailey), director Alejandro G. Iñárritu asserts that the essence of moving pictures as an art form is the "true power of cinema: visual storytelling." Even for those who haven't seen the film, this quote gives away a lot about it. Hugh Glass's experiences on this thrilling journey are aptly described by the title "The Revenant". The definition of "revenant" in French, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, is "someone who has returned, seemingly from the dead." (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus)

1.9. An Overview of the Movie "The Revenant"

Alejandro G. Iñárritu is the director of the 2015 American Western action-drama film *The Revenant*. The 2002 book of the same name by Michael Punke⁷, which chronicles the life of frontiersman Hugh Glass in 1823, served as a partial inspiration for the film. The film is based on the true story of Hugh Glass and several fur trappers who are seen in the American backcountry.

During the trip, a mama bear protecting her cubs attacks Hugh Glass leaving him with deadly injuries. His fellow tradesmen, including the cunning John Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy), forsake him as a result. Glass survives despite having sustained serious injuries and sets out on a perilous quest to exact revenge on those who deceived him, killed his son and abandoned

⁷ Michael Punke : an American Author, attorney, and a former government official well-known for his historical novel (*The Revenant*) in 2002.

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him in the wilderness . He experiences intense struggles and potentially fatal situations brought on by the harsh environment while travelling.

The film's breathtaking cinematographer, Lubezki, masterfully captures the harsh and breathtaking grandeur of the natural world. The concerts have received great praise, particularly DiCaprio and Hardy's. At the global box office, The Revenant brought in over half a billion dollars, making it an undisputed smash hit. It received 12 nominations overall for the Academy Awards, and it won 3 of them, including Best Director for Iñárritu and Best Actor for DiCaprio.(The Revenant (2015) - Awards - IMDB, n.d.)

- **Character Portrayal in 'The Revenant' and Frontier Realism**

The characters in "The Revenant" include:

- Hugh Glass: A frontiersman who guides Andrew Henry's party of trappers along with his Pawnee son.
- John Fitzgerald: An antagonist who disagrees with Andrew Henry's decisions and has a strained relationship with Glass.
- Captain Andrew Henry: The expedition leader who faces challenges and dissent within the group.
- Hawk: Hugh Glass's son who plays a significant role in the story.
- Jim Bridger: A young man who is part of the trappers' group.
- The Arikara (Ree): A Native American tribe seeking to rescue their kidnapped daughter.
- Powaga: The abducted daughter of Elk Dog, central to the conflict between Glass, the Trappers, and the Arikara.
- Toussaint: The leader of a band of French-Canadian voyageurs with closer relations to indigenous nations.

The eleven-month procedure shoving proved to be rather difficult. Alejandro González Iñárritu, the Mexican filmmaker of Birdman and Amores Perros, made it apparent from away that he did not envision a green screen; in fact, 93% of the film is set outside.(20th Century Studios, 2016)

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1.10. Confronting the Cinematic Hurdles in The Movie

"*The Revenant*" not only exemplifies a commitment to realism in its cinematic portrayal, captivating audiences through visually striking sequences and notable performances, but also bears witness to the immense challenges faced during production. A compelling and inspirational tale of unwavering survival in 1823 America is the basis for a film. From one perspective, the endeavor of making "*The Revenant*" was a show unto itself. However, it was a real hassle behind the scenes.

The choice to film in secluded and hostile locales like the Canadian wilderness and Argentina proved to be the most challenging obstacle the filmmakers faced during the production process. The goal is to show nature as it is, while still being real and legitimate, even if this may provide a number of logistical and technical challenges for the actors and crew. Their ability to build modern services and accommodations where freight can be carried freely, hotels can be easily reserved, and personnel safety is ensured has been hampered by these isolated locations.

In addition, the choice to film the film in natural light added to the production's challenges. Emmanuel Lubezki, the cinematographer of "The Revenant" had one goal in mind ; to capture the world's wild scenery, therefore capturing those views during the few available daylight hours presented challenges due to the unpredictability of the weather. Since this was a true challenge, those who required breaks between the images and the shifting hues and tones decided on a time of year rather than a certain month.(Goldberg .para 5)

In addition, the cast and crew had the most difficulty getting into the big action sequences in the movie, especially the bear assault scene. At the core of Leonardo DiCaprio's⁸ ambitions was realism, which motivated him to endure the most trying circumstances, like submerging himself in very cold seas and consuming raw bison liver. In addition, Tom Hardy's portrayal of the dishonest John Fitzgerald was a voyage that tested his will and tested his understanding of psychology and emotions.(Flicks And The City Clips, 2016)

Still, Iñárritu's avant-garde directing coupled with the perseverance and skill of the actors and crew resulted in the creation of the cinematic classic. In addition to pushing the boundaries of the film business, "*The Revenant*" won accolades and was praised by audiences

⁸ Leonardo DiCaprio : A famous American actor who is known globally for his Role in the blockbuster (*The Titanic*).

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across the globe, including in America, where it ultimately took home three Oscars. The incredible triumph of this film is a testament to the boundless energy, inventiveness, and camaraderie of the actors, crewmembers, art directors, and other individuals who had to overcome obstacles along the path.(Flicks And The City Clips, 2016)

1.11. Expansionism and The Fur Trade Industry

During the 19th century, North America experienced significant expansion driven by the burgeoning fur trade industry. As European powers and American settlers ventured westward, extensive territories were incorporated into growing economies, leading to intense competition and cultural interchange among Indigenous nations, European traders, and new arrivals. This era fundamentally reshaped the region's geography and economic structure while setting the stage for intricate geopolitical developments that would shape its future

1.11.1. Manifest Destiny and the Doctrine of Discovery

The film is set in 1823, a time when Westward Expansion was gaining momentum. The term "Westward Expansion" describes the migration of settlers across North America into the west throughout the 1800s. Land-seeking, economic opportunity, and the belief of "Manifest Destiny," which claims that Americans are destined to colonize the entire continent, are some of the driving forces behind this movement. The "Westward Expansion" was used to legitimize the claims of the Americans and Europeans to newly discovered lands and justify the colonization and exploitation of indigenous peoples. (*7-Context: Continental Colonialism*, 2023, p.89)

The belief held by Europeans and Americans that they could claim ownership of newly encountered lands under the premise of having "discovered" them is known as the "**Doctrine Of Discovery**". This belief refers to the ideas, motives, and justifications that fueled European discovery and growth throughout this period.(*The Doctrine of Discovery, 1493 / Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, n.d.)

Patricia Nelson Limerick in the "The Legacy of Conquest" (1987), stated that Europeans used the idea of "**Manifest Destiny**" to colonize North America because they saw the land as a "clean" state that allowed them to impose their will on anyone without consequence. Under the pretext of racial supremacy, this philosophy was used as a cover for horrific crimes like rape, murder, theft, and other atrocities. (p.197)

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Historian and author of "*A People's History of the United States*," Howard Zinn (1980) questions accepted knowledge about American history while exposing the cruelty and exploitation inflicted upon Native Americans by European colonists. He says: "The treatment of heroes and their victims - the quiet acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of progress - is only one aspect of a certain approach to history, in which the past is told from the point of view of governments, conquerors, diplomats, leaders." (p.9)

In the film, the fur trade acted as a sobering reminder of the human cost of unrepentant exploitation and greed. An understanding of the setting time period is necessary to fully comprehend the film. The fur trade became a powerful influence in the economy of North America in the 19th century. The fur trade peaked during this time, resulting in fierce rivalry between European nations and ultimately igniting hostilities between the US and the UK. Fur-rich regions were sought after for their economic potential, and North America turned into a battlefield for colonization and imperial aspirations. In his book "*Fur, Fortune, and Empire*," Eric Jay Dolin (2010) eloquently portrays the times' prevalent mindset of "getting the furs while they last." This conceptual framework captures the mad dash to take use of North America's plentiful fur resources before they ran out.(p.12)

The slaughter of buffaloes, sea otters, and beavers all sought after for their priceless pelts was essential to the fur trade's success. Because of the unrelenting hunting, the populations of these animals were completely destroyed in order to satisfy the demand for fur items. The opulent headgear, jackets, and sleigh blankets made from these pelts became status symbols and fuelled demand among the emerging middle and upper classes in North America and Europe.(Aneja & Rothman, 2016)

1.11.2. Lasting Effects of Fur Rush Mentality

Native Americans were caught in the crossfire of colonial expansion and exploitation since they had long depended on fur resources for commerce and livelihood. As hunters, guides, and traders, some indigenous tribes profited from their involvement in the fur trade, but many others experienced cultural adjustment, land loss, and displacement. (Richter & White, p70)

In addition, the fur trade fanned geopolitical unrest and rivalries between European nations fighting for control of valuable fur regions. The goals of territory expansion and economic domination led to the negotiation of treaties, the fighting of wars, and the formation

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of alliances. For example, disagreements over North American borders and rights to fur trafficking contributed to the United States and Great Britain's War of 1812. (ibid. p.75)

1.12. The Mountain Man Epiphany

The mountain men of North American legend represent the three main characteristics of the darkness: bravery, tenacity, and patriotism. The stories that are passed down through the years tend to exaggerate and widen their legendary traits, which have earned them praise.

These mountain men also represented the idea of self-isolation as a means of surviving without assistance from human habitation, whether they were living alone or in pairs. They used instincts developed over years of hunting and trapping, as well as their ability to track and travel across difficult terrain, to show that they were masters of the wild. In an interview with Blacktree TV, De Caprio stated that the locals felt a sense of nostalgia, particularly for the mountain man, who he described as "a spiritual philosophy." He claimed that because there was not much written about this period, they had to rely on the diaries of fur trappers and make pleading efforts with the people. (BlackTree TV, 2015,00:03:07)

Leonardo DiCaprio's character represents the most fundamental instinct for survival. He understands the growing need for mountain men to hold on to their days of self-reliant freedom. The quintessential mountain man is not only a historical persona but also a spiritual embodiment characterized by fortitude, sturdiness, and a deep connection to the natural world. The nineteenth-century mountain man faced thrilling challenges simply to survive in the densely populated area. Their life consisted of constant, basic struggles, whether it was battling the harsh mountains, enduring the bitter cold, or coexisting with ferocious animals. These men's affinity with nature was forged by the hardship of their lives, and this companionship helped to define their worldviews and spiritualities.

According to renowned American historian Richard Hofstadter's book (2008) "*The Paranoid Style in American Politics*," the mountain man holds a unique place in the nation's consciousness because he represents both the untamed wilderness of the frontier and tough individuality. (p.20)

In addition to memorizing their lines and researching the historical correctness of their attire, the performers in the movie "The Revenant" had to put themselves in the shoes of the trappers and experience both the emotional and physical components of their everyday life.

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Even though they were strong survivalists, traveling great distances for the sole purpose of filming and enduring significant hardships was sufficient to fit the role of the character they were portraying.

"Logistically we had to go to far places, untouchable locations in the middle of wilderness and do every intricate shots." Leonardo stated in the same interview with the BlackTree Tv. (Ibid.01:47)

1.13. Conclusion

To conclude, the views of Herbert Spencer, particularly the notion of "Survival of The Fittest," have significantly influenced fields such as biology, sociology, and philosophy. Spencer's theories, which drew inspiration from Darwin, proved fundamental to the individual's knowledge of adaptation and survival. Though these ideologies have fostered advancement and creativity, they have also been manipulated to defend colonization and other forms of exploitation. Furthermore, the concept of adaptation and survival has been widely explored in the "Revenant" movie, demonstrating its ongoing influence on cinema. Thus, Spencer's legacy draws attention to the revolutionary potential of applying evolutionary ideas to human civilizations, as well as their possible ethical drawbacks.

Chapter Two:

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Chapter Two : Survival and Social Dynamics in "The Revenant"

2.1 Introduction

The second chapter is dedicated to analyze the basic tenets of “**Survival of The Fittest**” which are adaptation and competition in the context of the characters of “The Revenant.” Some individuals interpret it as “**jungle law**”, implying that those people, who do not assert themselves, fall prey to others. Hugh Glass, the protagonist, is a man with resolve, and his attempts to live are analyzed in many critical technicalities. The movie also explains how the notion of ‘survival of fittest’ was used to justify imperialism; the doctrine of discovery, and acts of violence against Indigenous people of North America, a true and bloody chapter in history.

2.2. Struggle for existence: A Darwinian lens

In "The Revenant," the characters vividly experience the three types of struggles that Charles Darwin outlined: the struggle against nature, the struggle within the same species, and the struggle against other species.

2.2.1 Natural selection

In “*The Revenant*,” North America is presented as the ideal place among tradespeople from Europe, America, and other territories to get the finest furs. This place with the backdrop of the Rocky Mountains, with extremely low temperature, severe food shortage, and mandatory fight with big wild animals and the indigenous people – is hysterical for the ‘survival of the fittest’.

Colonel Bernd Horn in "*Battle Cries in the Wilderness*" (2004) states that that formal tactics and protocols which Europeans learned in wars were not solid in comparison to the harsh terrain of the new World “In that context, Herbert Spencer's philosophy of "survival of the fittest" is applicable; those who are able to sustain themselves in extreme conditions of savage nature endure, whereas those who fail to adapt perish. (pp.50-51)

The movie emphasizes the concept of natural selection favoring the individuals who can endure harsh conditions. Nevertheless, the absence of European women in the movie is noticeable emphasizing that there is no place for vulnerability. It displays that women who were not born in North America like the indigenous women, find struggles to adapt to such a brutal and unforgiving environment in comparison to the urban areas of Europe.

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2.2.2. Interspecific Struggle

At the beginning of "*The Revenant*," specifically in the scene (00:05:55), the tradesmen are attacked by Indigenous people of America. This scene demonstrates how other foreign communities are a threat to one's survival, a feature that is in line with the concept of struggle of existence of external objects between other species of Darwin.

The book "*On the Origin of Species*" (1859) by Charles Darwin reveals the notion that there must always be a struggle for existence either within species or of diverse species. (p. 61)

2.2.3. The Intraspecific Struggle

Darwin focuses on the Intraspecific conflict pointing out that it is even more intense than the interspecific one, as individuals belonging to the same species have the same needs, greed all resulting from combat for similar resources. (ibid. 62)

Scene (00:13:47) of "*The Revenant*" indicates the intraspecific struggle when there is a heated debate over the group's future action. Fitzgerald says that staying in the boat on the Mississippi River is the safest plan to follow in order not to be caught by the Native Americans. However, Hugh Glass, the most experienced man in the team, suggests the necessity of taking risks in order to survive by heading to the land and hiding between the trees. As a result, the team follows Glass, which makes Fitzgerald even more furious.

Gonzales in "*Deep Survival: Tubridy's "Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why"*" (2004) confirms that Survival necessitates preparedness, determination and the readiness to take risks, move effectively under pressure and that those who survive are those who are able to overcome fear and risk by overriding them with action (p. 39). Certainly, Glass's strategies are riskier than some of the more conventional ones, but undertaking such risky actions is critical for survival.

Fitzgerald's enmity with glass reaches new heights when he tries to murder Glass. Due to Glass's injuries, the team is unable to carry on his journey. Thus, Fitzgerald aiming to get a reward, volunteers to stay with Glass until he recovers. Fitzgerald perceives Glass as an obstacle to their progress and tries to murder him. Hawk, shielding his father, gets stabbed which fuels Glass's will to recover and start his vengeance journey to hunt Fitzgerald. Wilson

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in "*Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*" (1975), highlights how intraspecific conflict frequently involves more than just competition for resources; it also includes complex social behaviors like retaliation and self-interest, which can have a substantial impact on a species' chances of survival. (pp. 180-182)

2.2.4. Environmental Struggle

For actual threat to the characters' ability to survive and thrive "*The Revenant*" features the environment as the main antagonist. These landscapes were under a singular rule: where only the fittest could survive the stringent conditions that this futuristic society seemed to present. It is man against nature, which means people who once lived in this environment had to adapt by understanding the geography and other practical means to hunt for food.

Looking at the book "*A Life Wild and Perilous*" (1997) Utley discusses how mountain men were the fittest people in North America since they could fend for themselves in a world filled with savage animals, hard weather and many other related factors. (p. 70)

In the 1800s, people like fur trappers experienced and came to accept harsh nature. The unbearable shot which DiCaprio stated as the toughest to capture was the part where he had to swim in the frozen water wearing bear fur which had stayed in water making it weigh 120 pounds then drag it up a hill and when his body is gradually freezing. In an interview, he said, "I don't know how these men did it! I did it for five minutes and I was in absolute agony," he adds, "people actually lived like this! Like in Siberia ... how they were able to survive these elements." (Will King, 2017, 4:19- 5:10)

2.3. The Social Evolution in "The Revenant"

The conflict between the characters in the movie illustrates the dynamics of social evolution and the struggle for dominance. Through the character dynamics, "The Revenant" portrays the transition from a simple, unified group to a complex, conflicted society, echoing Spencer's ideas on how social structures evolve and adapt in response to internal and external pressures.

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2.3.1. Homogeneity in "The Revenant"

Fur trappers are culturally similar with each other and have similar goals and purposes i.e. fur collection. The men share similar roles also: Hunting, trapping and learning how to survive both the wilderness and the attacks from indigenous people.

Durkheim (1997) examines and underlines the way integration based on common ties and similarities play a vital role for societies' stability and existence. (The Division of Labor in Society, pp.31-34)

2.3.2. Heterogeneity in "The Revenant"

In the movie, the characters are in a struggle between each other moving from the state of homogeneity to heterogeneity.

Hugh Glass's journey is different from everyone else's throughout the entire movie. The group's collective struggles are in stark contrast to his personal struggles, which include surviving a bear attack, being abandoned, and seeking revenge against Fitzgerald. Glass is different from his friends because of his special experiences and survival, healing, and tracking abilities. According to Laurence Gonzales (2003) in *Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why*, p. 66, survivors frequently discover that surviving life-threatening circumstances necessitates moving away from collective mentality and depending instead on their own innovation and tenacity.

In contrast, John Fitzgerald's motivations diverge from the rest of the team. His main goal is self-preservation and amassing wealth, which alienates him from the group's shared objectives. Fitzgerald's readiness to betray and kill for personal gain creates a fundamental conflict that distances him from the group's original mission. Nevertheless, the dynamics of betrayal by Fitzgerald and the loyalty shown by Bridger and Henry add complexity to the group's social interactions. These evolving relationships and conflicts highlight the increasing diversity within the group. As Edward O. Wilson explains in "*Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*" (1975), such internal dynamics are essential to the evolutionary process, driving the development and refinement of advantageous traits that enhance an organism's fitness and survival prospects (pp. 251-254).

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2.4. Characters' Struggles for Survival: A Spenserian Perspective

The conflicts in the movie demonstrate survivor main traits: endurance, isolation, tenacity, and the ability to survive classic features of a primary survivor the manifestation of a person's emotional, physical, and spiritual state is a result of these traits in an isolated environment. The film prompts audiences to contemplate the question: what would a human do in face of a natural survival crisis?

Glass has one goal in mind: not to die, while some of his acts were well reasoned and allowed him to live; others are examined through a realistic lens to determine the best course of action in a given circumstance.

2.4.1. The Native Attack on the Tradesmen

Figure 1

Escaping the Indigenous People



Note. Quora. (n.d.). Wwww.google.com. Retrieved June 10, 2024, from <https://images.app.goo.gl/vZKATqFiFntkUp5K8>

- **Aid and Cooperation**

The first act of resistance and survival occurs at the beginning of "*The Revenant*" (00:05:57), showing an attack by the aborigines. From the outlook of the film, everyone – tradesmen and natives – are involved in protection of resources for their own sake. The tradesmen are struggling to outlive the sudden attack, and the natives are defending their

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lands, following the unyielding Laws of the Jungle as shown in **(figure01)** (1985), where the only option to stay alive is to eliminate the opponent. (Hobbes, Thomas, p.185)

Spencer in the “*Principles of Sociology*” (1896) states: “The life of each individual is made more secure and abundant in proportion as social cooperation is developed. Hence, cooperation is the essential factor in social progress.”(pp. 469-471) This idea aligns with the scene (00: 08:36) , where Glass is saved by a character and Fitzgerald saves Jim Bridger. Such actions are manifestations of what Spencer called the survival of the fittest cooperation.

- **Cleverness and Cunning**

Glass, drawing on his experience and strategic acumen, decides to seek cover on land despite the risks, as it will make them less exposed in comparison to the river. Glass exemplifies the qualities of strong leaders, such as having a clear vision and the ability to make quick, strategic decisions. This involves gathering relevant information, generating multiple options, evaluating them collaboratively, and implementing the chosen course of action. (para,3 , how to Apply Their Skills, February 23, 2024)

After careful deliberation, Glass decisively implements the chosen strategy, demonstrating his ability to translate analysis into action effectively. This ability to navigate uncertainty with confidence and decisiveness underscores his leadership capabilities, inspiring confidence and resilience in those around him. Through his actions, Glass not only mitigates risks and maximizes opportunities but also sets a compelling example of leadership in challenging and unpredictable environments.

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2.4.2 Surviving the Bear Attack

Figure 02

The Bear Assault.



Note. Hollywood Reporter. (n.d.). The Revenant bear attack: Producer on the scene that took on [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://images.app.goo.gl/Tv3nzu3CeyrQ5FbPA>

In (00:23:57) the main character encounters a sudden attack from a grizzly bear that was trying to protect her cubs (**figure 02**). Spencer's idea emphasizes the ability of individuals to adjust to unexpected situations, which Glass demonstrated by playing dead during the attack instead of panicking. Spencer's words echo the importance of such adaptability: "The fittest are those who can adapt best to the changing environment." (1896, p. 444)

Bear encounter specialists often recommend this technique, as bears may lose interest in prey they perceive as no longer a threat. According to the National Park Service in California, which provides guidelines for surviving bear encounters, bears are generally reclusive and prefer avoiding humans. By pretending to be dead, the bear no longer feels threatened, reducing its protective instinct to defend its cubs (*Staying Safe Around Bears - Bears*, para 4). To survive, Glass had to adapt to the situation, demonstrating an important trait in the concept of survival of the fittest.

Hugh Glass's decision to shoot the bear can be understood as a desperate attempt to defend himself in an extreme survival scenario. However, this course of action was not the

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most effective survival strategy. According to the National Park Service in California, the best survival strategy while encountering a bear is avoidance. (ibid)

Glass had no other choice that was open to him. These parts of the scene remind the audience about the fact that although they are watching a realistic representation of the conditions of living in the wilderness, much of what is portrayed might be entirely impossible to execute because of certain conditions, which people might encounter and which are beyond their control. What Paul Auerbach, a leading authority in survival techniques, reveals about the essentials of surviving in the bush: "Survival in wilderness very often occurs in an undesirable, unpredictable situation where even basic strategies cannot be applied" (Auerbach, 2017, p.100).

The Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, in his "Meditations," frequently reflected on the importance of enduring pain and hardship with dignity. He wrote, "You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength" (Aurelius, 2002, p. 19).

Glass's mental resilience and ability to endure and overcome such severe physical adversity exemplifies the principle of natural selection or "The preservation of favored races in the struggle for life" (Spencer, 1864, p. 444). Furthermore, the insights of modern survival experts corroborate this view. As noted by Laurence Gonzales, "In a true survival situation, the mental aspect is often the most crucial. Those who survive are not always the strongest physically, but they have an inner strength and adaptability" (Gonzales, 2004, p. 17). This highlights that beyond physical capability, mental resilience and the will to persevere are paramount, as illustrated by Glass's ordeal.

To create this intense moment, director Alejandro G. Iñárritu and his team conducted extensive research, watching over 100 clips of real bear attacks in order to grasp their behaviors accurately. (Saad, 2015, para 4)

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2.4.3. Survival at The Expense of Others

Figure 03

Fitzgerald's Attempt to Kill Glass.



Note. DeRaze Books and Films. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://images.app.goo.gl/PL8yqBQKN5DaTv8f6>

The team's progress is paralyzed by Glass's injury. Captain Henry makes the decision to reward the person who stays with Glass instead of killing him. Jim and Hawk offer their services without charge, while Fitzgerald volunteers to get the full reward of staying for himself (**figure 03**).

Fitzgerald, terrified that the aboriginal people would track him down and murder him, defies the captain's orders and seeks to kill Glass as soon as possible so he may join the other members of the team and claim the reward.

Thus, Fitzgerald kills Glass's son, Hawk, who was attempting to stand up for his father, manipulates Jim Bridger by telling him that he spotted the Native Americans approaching and buries Glass while he is still alive.

Fitzgerald embodies a harsh interpretation of "survival of the fittest." He views Glass, in his incapacitated state, as a liability. From a social Darwinist perspective, Fitzgerald sees the situation as one where the strong (he) must prioritize their survival over the weak (Glass).

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Spencer ideas suggest that in a struggle for existence, those who are unable to compete and survive naturally perish. Fitzgerald's actions, although ruthless and unethical, align with this principle by removing what he perceives, as weakness in their group is dynamic.

Hobbes, in his book Leviathan (1651) argues that in the state of nature, individuals are primarily motivated by self-preservation. He states that the right of nature is the freedom each person has to use their own abilities in whatever way they see fit to preserve their own life (p.19)

However, while Fitzgerald's actions align with a simplistic and harsh interpretation of social Darwinism, they neglect the ethical and cooperative dimensions that Spencer also acknowledged as vital to human societies. (The Principles of Ethics,1978. p. 15)

2.4.4. Utilizing the Available Sources

Figure 04

Gunpowder to heal the wounds.



Note. Screenshot, F. (2020, August 5). Lookmovies. Retrieved from <https://lookmovie.foundation/movies/play/1689756728-the-revenant-2015>

In the scene (01:06:00) Hugh Glass uses gunpowder as a survival strategy to cauterize his severe wounds after being mauled by a bear. This technique, while extremely painful, helps stop the bleeding and prevent further blood loss in a life-threatening situation.

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The scene depicts Glass pouring gunpowder into his deep neck wound and then pressing a lit candle against it to ignite the powder. The heat from the burning gunpowder seals the wound, preventing him from bleeding out (**figure 04**).

Soldiers in war sometimes used this method of cauterization when other options were unavailable (DeVries, 1990, para2). Ambroise Paré, the father of modern surgery in "The Apologie and Treatise of Ambroise Paré" discusses numerous surgical techniques and battlefield practices used in the 16th century including using the gun powder to stop the bleeding. (ibid, para 4).

2.4.5 Natural Selection as a Swimmer

Figures 05

Jumping into the River.



Note. The Inertia. (n.d) Retrieved from <https://images.app.goo.gl/DDyPBwLgi4yJQ1Gu9>

In the scene (01: 11: 22), Hugh Glass outmaneuvered the indigenous people, by jumping in the treacherous river. This action, while daring, was fraught with danger. One wrong step on a rocky riverbed could have trapped Glass's foot, potentially leading to drowning. Moreover, the sudden exposure to cold water triggers a cold shock response, causing rapid gasping for air. If his head had been submerged by strong currents, he risked swallowing a significant amount of water and drowning (**figure05**). (Tipton, 2003, pp. 361-368.).

Glass's competence as a swimmer and physical endurance is noticeable. Without this skill, he could have drowned. According to Spencer, traits that enhance an individual's ability

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to survive and reproduce are naturally selected over generations. Glass's combination of physical endurance, swimming ability, and quick thinking are traits that would be favored in such a harsh environment, exemplifying the concept of natural selection.

2.4.6. Eating Raw Buffalo and Fresh Meat

Figure 06

Bison Liver Scene.



Note. Maria. (July 11, 2023). Retrieved from <https://images.app.goo.gl/3hQVBvkWPqyL4Hgf9>

Because of Glass' deadly wounds, he is rendered powerless in (01:26:13), unable to walk or hunt. Glass's survival depends on eating raw buffalo and fresh fish in two different sequences. His urgent need for food exceeds the possible risks of contracting foodborne illnesses, despite the high likelihood of contracting infections and parasites. This action emphasizes the need of using every source available to live (**figure 06**). According to the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, every man has a right to risk his own life for the preservation of it (p. 22) in his work *The Social Contract* (1762)

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2.4.7 Getting Refuge in an Animal Carcass

Figure 07

Horse Carcass Scene.



Note. Creative Commons Attribution. (n.d.) .Retrieved from <https://images.app.goo.gl/StxF8sZF5gDP12fdA>

In an unexpected scene (01:54:44), Glass, to survive the unforgiving freezing weather, seeks shelter within the body heat of a horse that just died. By utilizing the residual warmth from the decomposing body, Glass attempts to stave off hypothermia and maintain his core body temperature (**figure 07**).

Furthermore, modern survival experts, such as Bear Grylls, have acknowledged the potential effectiveness of this method in extreme survival situations. Grylls, in his book "How to Stay Alive: The Ultimate Survival Guide for Any Situation"(2018) gave the importance of utilizing available resources, including animal carcasses, for shelter and warmth in survival scenarios.(p.320)

However, there are also risks and drawbacks to this survival strategy; the carcass may attract predators like wolves or bears, putting the person at risk. The warmth provided by the carcass is temporary and will diminish over time as the body heat dissipates.

2.5. Altruism and Self-interest in the Movie

In extreme conditions, some individuals demonstrate compassion and care, while others prioritize their own survival and personal gain, often at the expense of ethical manners.

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2.5.1 Altruism in the Movie

In a critical situation, Glass encounters Hikuc, a Native American, who chooses to help him despite the cultural conflict. Moreover, Hikuc goes further to ensure Glass' well-being by constructing a shelter to shield him from the harsh weather. This narrative of Hikuc's altruism aligns with scholarly discussions on altruistic behaviors.

According to anthropologist Marshall Sahlins in his seminal work "Stone Age Economics" (1972), such acts can be understood as part of the "Generalized Reciprocity" common among indigenous communities, where helping others without immediate expectation of return strengthens communal bonds and survival (pp. 15-39).

Furthermore, historian James Axtell (1985) has documented numerous instances where Native Americans extended help to European settlers, often at great personal risk, highlighting a tradition of altruistic behavior that transcended cultural boundaries (*The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*, p. 30). Herbert Spencer (1879) also emphasizes the importance of altruism, stating, "The ultimate purpose of altruism is to achieve the greatest happiness for the greatest number, which sometimes necessitates the subordination of personal interests to the welfare of others" (*Data of Ethics*, p.201).

Glass's altruistic act of saving Powaga significantly affects his survival, as it earns him the Pawnee tribe as allies, who later spare his life. Nick Bostrom (2005) argues that risky altruistic actions can have long-term benefits, and in Glass's case, saving Powaga ultimately ensures his survival (pp. 273-277). This aligns with Herbert Spencer's philosophy, which, while emphasizing "survival of the fittest," also acknowledges the strategic importance of altruism. Spencer noted that altruism could achieve the greatest happiness for the greatest number, often requiring the subordination of personal interests for the welfare of others (Spencer, 1879, p. 201).

2.5.2. Self Interest

The entire process of collecting fur in the film is driven by personal interest. According to Kathleen DuVal (2006), in order to maintain their positions in the fur trade, European traders frequently forged connections and relationships with Pawnee women; nevertheless, these partnerships were usually exploitative and transient. When these women and any children they had with them returned to Europe or moved on, many traders abandoned them,

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illustrating a larger pattern of disposability and exploitation that marked European interactions with Native communities. (The Native Ground, p.198)

Fitzgerald's pursuit of wealth in "*The Revenant*" reveals the dangers of unchecked greed in survival scenarios. His obsession with profit blinds him to the humanity of others, leading to betrayal and violence. Erich Fromm's insights on self-interest further illuminate how this behavior disregards ethical obligations, ultimately leading to downfall. In the survival of the fittest, Fitzgerald's story serves as a cautionary tale, demonstrating how ruthless self-interest can lead to failure despite short-term gains, emphasizing the need for a balance between ambition and ethical cooperation.

2.6. Expansionism as an Excuse to Survive

The Doctrine of Discovery was based on the idea that non-Christian lands and their inhabitants could be considered "terra nullius" which means territory without master. This doctrine provided a legal justification for European colonization and the displacement and mistreatment of indigenous peoples around the world.(Terra Nullius, n.d.)

2.6.1. The Doctrine of Discovery

In the movie, there is misuse of the "survival of the fittest" concept to justify unethical practices like exploitation and imperialism. Herbert Spencer, stating in his book "Principles of Sociology": "The development of civilization is a process of natural selection in which the most fit individuals and cultures survive and prosper, while the less fit are eliminated or assimilated. This process inevitably leads to the dominance of the most advanced cultures over others, as they possess superior traits that enable them to thrive and expand their influence."(1875, p.200). Herbert Spencer's concept of civilization as a result of natural selection, where advanced cultures dominate, essentially supports colonialism as a justified outcome. This notion is evident in the film's depiction of brutal exploitation.

2.6.2. White Supremacy in the Movie

In the movie, the settlers' disregard of the native way of life and their view of indigenous people as obstacles to be overcome mirror Spencer's notion of the elimination or assimilation of less fit cultures.

Chapter Two : Survival and Social Dynamics in "The Revenant"

Ethnocentrism and white supremacy are evident throughout the movie in several scenes. At one point (00:17:03), Fitzgerald repeatedly uses the term "savages" to refer to Glass's Pawnee wife and calls their son "the hybrid" due to his mixed race. This language underscores the sense of superiority based on his ethnicity.

In another notable scene (00:31:40) of *"The Revenant,"* the leader of the Arikara tribe offers fur to the French colonists, seeking horses in return to search for his kidnapped daughter. The Frenchman mocks and humiliates him, lecturing him on respecting their agreement and accusing him of stealing from the Americans, saying, "vous avez volé les américains? ils sont déjà marqués". The furs originally belonged to the indigenous people having been taken from them unjustly. The indigenous leader, in a heartfelt defense, retorts that the French have no right to give moral lessons, as they are the ones who have stolen everything—fur, animals, and more—from his people.

Churchill Ward (1997) states that the colonizers who came to the Americas to seize its riches had to justify their actions by blaming the victims (the indigenous people) as savages and subhuman, justifying the colonial powers' brutal suppression and exploitation. (*A Little Matter of Genocide*, p.98)

2.7. Manifest Destiny and the Use of Religion to Justify Immoral Acts

Manifest Destiny and the concept of "survival of the fittest" are closely intertwined in the context of American expansionism as both justify colonialism mentioning that unfit will inevitably perish. Several scenes in the movie depict that Christians used their religion to justify their mistreatment of the indigenous people of America.

Reza Aslan, a religious scholar, discusses this issue in his book *"God: A Human History"*, stating that throughout history, individuals and groups have hidden their ambitions and injustices behind the guise of divine mandate, using God as a shield to justify acts of violence. (2017, p.100)

At scene (01:40:50) Hikuc, who had been more loyal to Glass than to his own fellow tradesmen, is found hanging from a tree with a sign that reads "on est tous des sauvages" (we are all savages). The French, who killed Hikuc—the peaceful man—without any reason other than his indigenous background, demonstrate extreme cruelty and inhumanity.

Chapter Two : Survival and Social Dynamics in "The Revenant"

Throughout recorded history, people have sought guidance from the gods on how to behave. Fitzgerald exemplifies the Divine Command Theory, which suggests that in times of confusion, people blame God. In the scene (00:59:21), Fitzgerald justifies his actions by saying, "I ought to be god ... god give it, god took it away," when confronted by his friend for lying and manipulating him about being chased by the Arikara tribe, leading to Glass's abandonment.

2.8. Conclusion

In summary, the second chapter offers a very perceptive study of the movie "*The Revenant*" using Herbert Spencer's theory of the survival of the fittest. This viewpoint presents a complex picture of social relationships and human challenges. By portraying relationships and conflicts against the backdrop of an unrelenting struggle for survival and portraying the world as brutally competitive, the novel effectively demonstrates these themes.

The foundation of this study is Spencerian social Darwinism, which holds that societies change because of competition and adaptation. The interplay between egoism and altruism, collaboration and mutual aid, and the innate survival instinct shows that human behavior in extreme situations cannot be adequately explained by simplistic divisions. The characters in the novel's wilderness environment are significantly shaped by natural selection. The narrative emphasizes the constant struggle for life by favoring and promoting adaptive features as necessary for survival and quickly eliminating non-adapted traits. This supports Spencer's claims about the survival and procreation of the fittest and most carefully chosen individuals.

Furthermore, the movie provides a critical analysis of American history, focusing in particular on white Americans' westward expansion and racial ideology. Indigenous people are represented as exploited and disenfranchised, with their deplorable living conditions serving as a stark reminder of the negative consequences of colonialism and the enduring racism ingrained in ideas of "civilizing mission" and "progress." This critical viewpoint offers a sobering commentary on the historical and current injustices that indigenous populations must endure.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

Taking into account the previous discussions, the study investigated the complex connection between Herbert Spencer's theory of "**survival of the fittest**" and how it is portrayed in the movie "The Revenant." The foundation of this investigation was an awareness of the philosophical and historical roots of the fight for existence, a concept that was further expanded by Spencer under the influence of Charles Darwin and had its origins in the writings of early intellectuals. Although Spencer's theories of social evolution and survival of the fittest were first meant to explain natural occurrences, they have historically been misapplied to support exploitation, colonialism, and the enslavement of indigenous peoples a terrible legacy of white supremacy.

The study examined Herbert Spencer's biography in the first chapter, emphasizing his contributions to the idea of social evolution. According to Spencer's theory of "survival of the fittest," people who are the most resilient and adaptive in a particular environment have a higher chance of thriving. The idea that human societies were subject to the same natural principles guiding species existence was groundbreaking since it applied to both biological and social situations.

The first chapter also gave a synopsis of the movie "*The Revenant*," which effectively conveys the bleak reality of existence in a hostile environment. Alejandro González Iñárritu is the director of the film, which narrates the tale of Hugh Glass, a frontiersman who faces unbelievable hardships when his friends abandon him for dead. The movie is set on the early 19th-century American frontier, a time marked by fierce rivalry for resources, territorial expansion, and recurrent hostilities with Native American groups.

The study examined the characters in "*The Revenant*" using Spencer's theory of survival of the fittest in the second chapter. The main character, Hugh Glass, personifies the qualities of flexibility and tenacity. Glass faces overwhelming odds in his quest to survive and exact retribution, even in the face of severe injuries and his foes' unrelenting pursuit. His trip through the harsh wilderness is a potent metaphor for the struggle for survival, highlighting the need for perseverance and smart thinking. On the other hand, John Fitzgerald, the antagonist, represents the darker side of survival of the fittest. His actions, driven by selfishness and a ruthless desire to eliminate any threats to his own survival, highlight the moral ambiguities inherent in the struggle for existence. Fitzgerald's betrayal of Glass and his subsequent efforts to cover his tracks demonstrate a survival strategy based on deceit and treachery, contrasting sharply with Glass's more honorable quest for justice and retribution.

General Conclusion

The film also touches upon the broader implications of survival of the fittest in the context of colonialism and expansionism. The interactions between the European settlers and the Native American tribes illustrate the violent and often exploitative nature of territorial expansion. The settlers' sense of entitlement to the land, justified by their perceived superiority and the right to dominate, echoes the historical misuse of Spencer's theories to support colonial endeavors. This aspect of the film serves as a poignant reminder of the devastating impact of such ideologies on indigenous populations, whose own struggles for survival are depicted with a deep sense of respect and empathy.

In conclusion, "*The Revenant*" serves as a compelling cinematic representation of Herbert Spencer's survival of the fittest. Through its portrayal of individual and collective struggles, the film underscores the timeless relevance of this concept in understanding human behavior and societal dynamics. However, it also cautions against the misuse of such theories to justify exploitation and oppression. By examining the characters and themes of "*The Revenant*," we gain a deeper appreciation of the complex interplay between survival, morality, and the relentless forces of nature. This study reaffirms the importance of critical reflection on historical and philosophical ideas, ensuring that their application serves to enlighten rather than to perpetuate injustice.

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ملخص :

في فيلم "The Revenant"، تقمص هيو جالس وشخصيات أخرى فلسفة البقاء اللقوى، وهي فلسفة مرتبطة بفكر هربرت سينسر و تشارلز داروين. تعكس هذه الفلسفة فكرة التحدي والصمود من أجل البقاء على قيد الحياة، حيث يتنافس الأفراد والكائنات للبقاء في بيئة صعبة. في تاريخنا، استخدمت هذه الفلسفة لتبرير أفعال غير أخلاقية مثل النخبي عن المبادئ واستعمار الأمم والسيطرة على السكان الأصليين.

Résumé :

In "The Revenant," characters like Hugh Glass exemplify the survival of the fittest ethos akin to ideas put forth by Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin. This philosophy underscores the struggle for survival in a challenging environment, where individuals and entities vie for existence. Over time, this ideology has rationalized controversial practices such as abandoning moral principles, colonization, and asserting dominance over indigenous peoples