



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on January 18, 2012

Presidential Nonsense on Economics

President Obama's vision was shared by our Pilgrim Fathers of the Plymouth Colony in modern-day Massachusetts. They established a communist system. They all farmed together, and whatever they produced was put in a common storehouse. A certain amount of food was rationed to each person regardless of his contribution to the work. Many Pilgrims complained that they were too weak from hunger to do their share of the work. As deeply religious as the Pilgrims were, they took to stealing from one another. Gov. William Bradford, writing his history of the colony in [Of Plymouth Plantation](#), said, "So as it well appeared that famine must still ensue, the next year also if not some way prevented."



In 1623, after much debate, a new system was set up, in which every family was assigned a parcel of land, and whatever they produced belonged to the family. Gov. Bradford then observed, "The women now went willingly into the field, and took their little ones with them to set corn; which before would allege weakness and inability; whom to have compelled would have been thought great tyranny and oppression." After Gov. Bradford's establishment of what Obama calls "you're-on-your-own economics," harvests were so bountiful that Bradford is credited with establishing what we now call Thanksgiving.

There are several seemingly immutable, hard-wired characteristics about humans that socialists, liberals, and progressives find difficult to deal with and would like to change. People tend to work harder and produce more when they own what they produce. Property is better cared for when it is privately owned. People love to exchange, what Adam Smith called a "propensity to truck (and) barter." To suppress these characteristics requires brute force.

President Obama also told the Washington Hilton crowd that "we are not a country that was built on the idea of survival of the fittest." Obama is not by himself, but "survival of the fittest" is one of the greatest misunderstandings of Charles Darwin's pathbreaking work *On the Origin of Species*. When Obama and most other people use the expression "survival of the fittest," they suggest that a bunch of people or animals are competing with one another and the strongest, smartest or cleverest survives. That's not what Darwin and evolutionary biologists have in mind. Instead, what they have in mind is that those who survive have characteristics that make them better-equipped to survive and hence reproduce themselves in a particular environment. They are not laying waste to their competitors.

Let's try a few survival of the fittest questions. Which companies do you think should survive and expand, those that can meet the changing wants of their customers in a least-cost fashion or those that cannot do so? If the means of communication become cheaper through fax machines, the Internet and telephones, should subsidies be expended to help the U.S. Postal Service survive? Years ago, typing was done on a mechanical typewriter; milk was delivered to doorsteps via horse and wagon; slide rules were



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used to make calculations. Should any of these products and practices have survived, or was it OK for natural selection to consign them to the dustbin of history?

Try cornering the President or his supporters, and ask them whether they believe government should ensure that the unfit survive and rather than “you’re-on-your-own economics” there should be “you’re-on-somebody-else economics.”

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