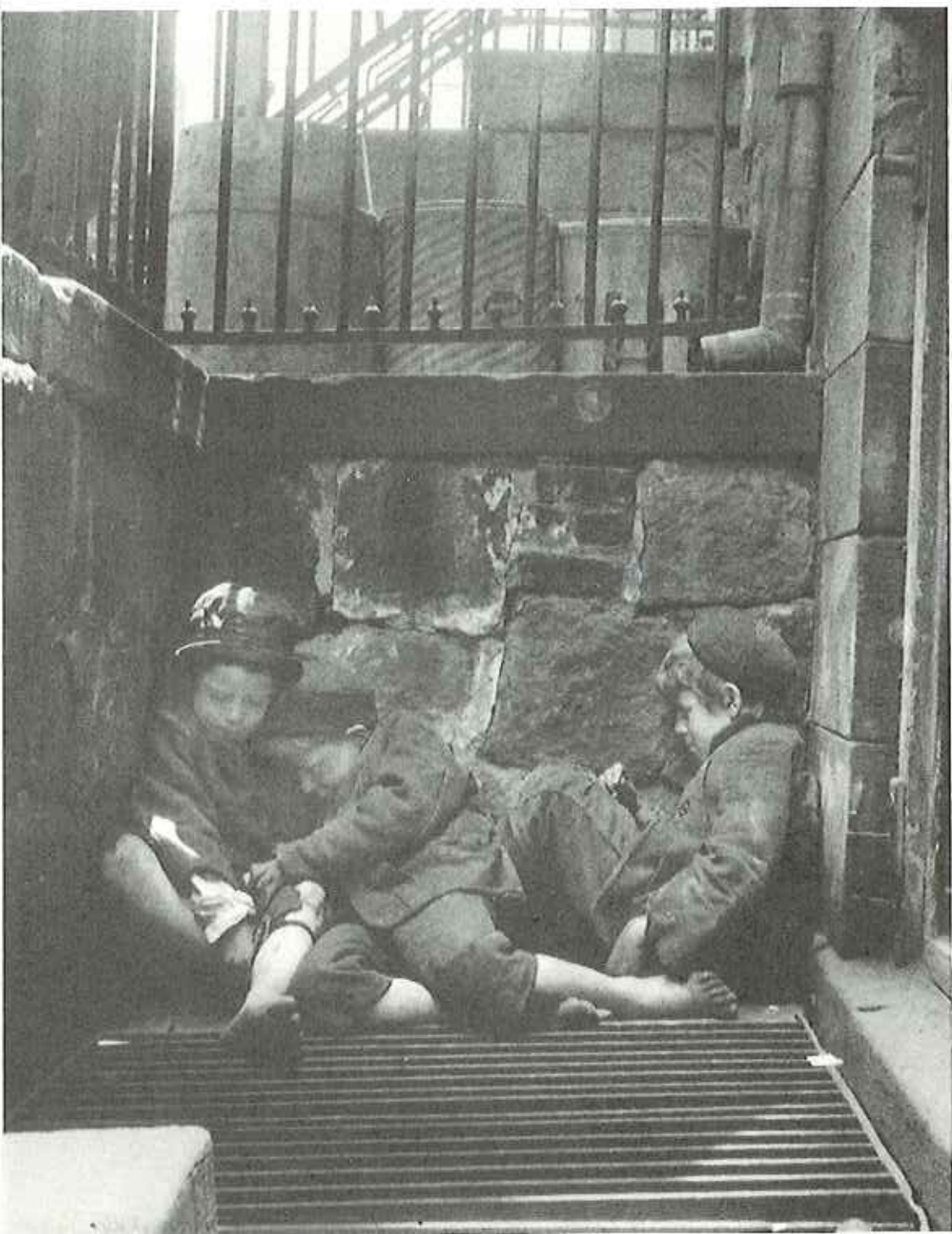


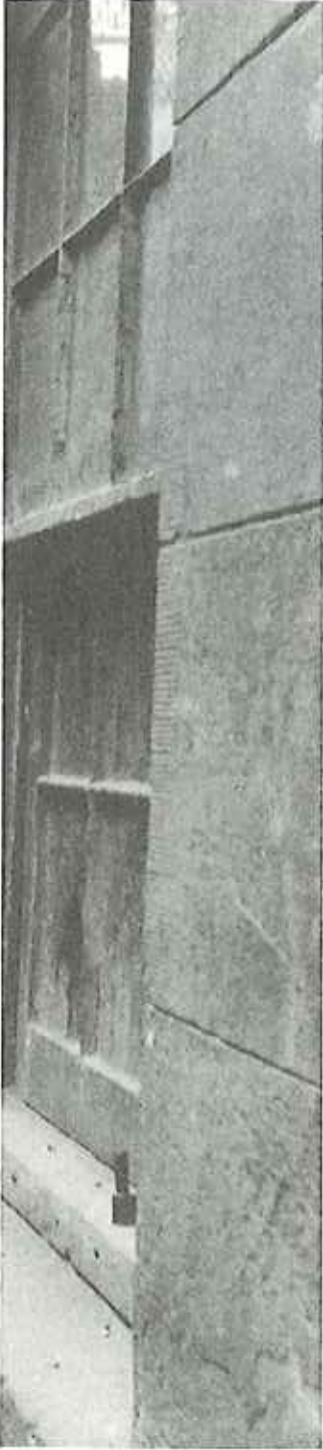
THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF

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American Literature 1865–1914

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A NATION

From the earliest moment of settlement in what would become the United States, the nation's borders were relentlessly pushed westward. Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase (1803) added a huge swath of territory west of the Alleghenies; the outcome of the Mexican War (1846–48) brought the entire Southwest, including California, into the nation; and the discovery of gold in California in 1848 increased the pace of westward movement beyond anything that could have been imagined even one year earlier. White Americans, mostly of English, Scottish, German, and French descent, settled across these regions, increasing the pace by which the U.S. government was forcibly relocating Native American tribes—the term was Removal and the practice had begun in the 1830s—from their homelands to places further west, and attempting to force Hispanic Americans south of the new border with Mexico. As these settlers moved into the extensive terrain west of the Mississippi River, they leveled vast stands of timber, exterminated the buffalo and other wild game in favor of cattle and sheep, and established farms, villages, cities and the railroads that linked them to markets in the Midwest and East. New technologies converted the country's immense natural resources into industrial products both for its own burgeoning population and for foreign consumers.

The Civil War (1861–65), the seemingly inevitable result of growing economic, political, social, and cultural divisions between North and South, cost some eight billion dollars and claimed more than six hundred thousand lives. Its savagery seems also to have left the

Children Sleeping in Mulberry Street, 1890, Jacob Riis. For more information about this image, see the color insert in this volume.



Golden Spike Ceremony. Joining the tracks for the first transcontinental railroad, Promontory, Utah Territory, 1869.

country morally exhausted. Nevertheless, the country prospered materially over the next five decades, as the war effort had stimulated innovations in methods of efficiently moving large numbers of people, raw materials, and goods. The first transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869 with the use of poorly paid laborers from China brought in through Western seaports—especially in San Francisco and Seattle—made it possible to cross the country quickly and inexpensively. The railroad also allowed for rapid, inexpensive shipments of goods, thereby moving the American economy itself into the industrial age, once and for all. The telegraph, introduced in the 1840s, now ran into small towns (many of them newly settled); electricity was introduced on a large scale; and around the end of the nineteenth century the telephone began to revolutionize daily life. Coal, oil, iron, gold, silver, and other kinds of mineral wealth were discovered and extracted, producing many individual fortunes that helped to capitalize further development. Such development required more people, preferably (from the point of view of employers) in numbers sufficient to keep down the cost of labor. Often lured by advertisements from railroad and land companies, immigrants arrived in the United States from the Scandinavian countries beginning in the 1870s and 1880s, and in the 1880s to the turn of the century and beyond, from eastern and southern European countries like Italy, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, and Russia. Many European newcomers, taking advantage of the railroads, went to the plains to farm; but most became urban dwellers, causing enormous population growth in such cities as New York, Boston, and Chicago at the same time that Chinese and then Japanese immigrants hastened the growth of San Francisco and other Western cities.

The historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared in 1893 that the Western frontier, which he regarded as crucial to the formation of America's demo-



Ellis Island. Staff interviewing new immigrants, c. 1910. From 1892 to 1954, New York's Ellis Island was the gateway for millions of immigrants to the United States.

cratic character, no longer existed. He based his analysis on the census of 1890, which found no place in the United States with fewer than two people per square mile. (Native Americans were not counted in this estimate.) Now the United States, eager to compete with European nations, attempted to expand its influence beyond its continental borders, looking to gain the former Spanish possessions of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines following the Spanish-American War in 1898. U.S. colonization also included Hawaii, annexed as a colony in 1898. The effects of American expansionism had long been experienced by indigenous peoples. From the time of the earliest treaties with the United States, Native nations agreed to cede large tracts of land with some territory specifically "reserved" for themselves. What we currently think of as Indian reservations came about as a result of President Ulysses S. Grant's policies of the late 1860s, which sought—and mostly forced—the agreement of various Native nations to limit themselves to lands designated by the federal government. Around this time, anthropologists (then known as ethnologists) began to study tribal lifeways, especially of the Zuni and other tribes of the Southwest. In 1883, two years after Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* surveyed the history of whites' treaty-breaking behavior with the Indians, an organization of eastern philanthropists calling itself "Friends of the Indian" began to agitate in favor of assimilating Native Americans into the white mainstream. This organization meant well, but its methods inevitably devalued Native ways of life in favor of white schooling, white patterns of town settlement and agriculture, and above all white religion. Throughout this period, however, Native writers such as Zitkala Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), a Lakota woman, insisted on contributing to the national discussion, speaking in their own voices in published texts as they had been doing at least since the 1830s.

At the same time that the frontier came to be regarded as a crucial constituent of American identity, industrialization on a scale unprecedented in Great Britain and Europe came to the fore in the United States. (Some historians believe that the frontier myth served to mask the reality of the industrial economy.) Between 1850 and 1880, capital invested in manufacturing more than quadrupled and factory employment nearly doubled. By 1885 four transcontinental railroad lines had been completed, using in their own construction and carrying to manufacturing centers in Cleveland and Detroit the nation's quintupled output of steel from Pittsburgh and Chicago. Major industries were consolidated into monopolies, allowing a small number of men to control such enormously profitable enterprises as steel, oil, railroads, meatpacking, banking, and finance, among them Jay Gould, Jim Hill, Leland Stanford, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller. Called "robber barons" by some and celebrated as captains of industry by others, these men squeezed out competitors and accumulated vast wealth and power. The new millionaires formed a wealthy class whose style of life, reported on in the mass media, offered a startling contrast to the lives of ordinary people.

But the ordinary was by the end of the century a quite different thing from what it had been before or shortly after the Civil War. In 1865 the United States, except for the manufacturing centers of the northeastern seaboard, was still a country of farms, villages, and small towns. Manufacturing was more a matter of workshops than factories. In 1870 the U.S. population was 38.5 million; by 1910, 92 million; by 1920, 123 million. This increase in population was due almost entirely to the arrival of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe: Russia, Poland, Italy, and the Balkan nations. The percentage of city versus country dwellers was reversed as cities like New York grew from half a million to nearly 3.5 million between 1865 and the turn of the twentieth century. Chicago, with a population of only 29,000 in 1850, had more than 2 million inhabitants by 1910. These immigrants and their descendants enabled the United States to become an urban, industrial, international, capitalist power while altering the ethnic composition of the still mostly white population and contributing immeasurably, albeit not without considerable conflict, to the democratization of the nation's cultural life. By 1890, New Englanders and their now-scattered descendants were no longer numerically dominant.

This transformation of the continent brought hardships for many. Farmers in the Midwest and High Plains depended on the railroads for transport of their crops but were squeezed off the land by the pricing policies of these very same railroads—what the novelist Frank Norris characterized as the giant "octopus" of corporate power wielded by the Southern Pacific and other railroads. Though the Homestead Act of 1862 promised free or cheap acreage to every individual or family who would settle and "improve" land according to a set formula, much of the available land was donated to railroads to encourage their growth. Speculators bought land as well. It is estimated that only 10 percent of the land opened by the Homestead Act actually went to would-be independent farmers. Buying at high prices, or forced to rent, such farmers were "under the lion's paw," as the midwestern writer Hamlin Garland put it, of land speculators and absentee landlords, or faced with mortgage payments they could not make. Large-scale farming took over from the family farm,

increasing agricultural yields but displacing many farmers who joined the population of the cities. These cities were also, as the socialist novelists Jack London and Upton Sinclair argued—adapting the ideas of Darwin to the social field—"jungles" where only the strongest, most ruthless, and luckiest survived. Wages were low, and workers faced inhumane and dangerous working conditions; at this time there were few laws regulating safety and working hours. In addition, the 1890s saw severe economic depressions caused by changes to the gold standard, overspeculation by banks and investors in railroads, sporadic droughts, and foreign debts.

Neither farmers nor urban laborers organized effectively to pursue their own interests. Legislators usually favored business and industry, sometimes in the honest belief that a healthy economy required capitalism, sometimes via bribery and kickbacks—as in President Ulysses S. Grant's administration, or in the looting of the New York City treasury by William Marcy ("Boss") Tweed in the 1870s, or in municipal corruption cases exposed by the journalist Lincoln Steffens and other "muckrakers" including Stephen Crane and Frank Norris. Early attempts by labor to organize were often violent, and such groups as the terroristic "Molly Maguires," active in the 1870s and 1880s in the coal-mining area of northeastern Pennsylvania, bolstered the conviction of those who believed in open markets and free enterprise that labor organizations were un-American. Industrial workers had little political leverage before the 1880s, when the American Federation of Labor emerged as the first unified voice of workers. But not until collective bargaining legislation was enacted in the 1930s did labor acquire the right to strike. As for farmers, their organizing efforts involved experiments in cooperative farming and storage, which usually failed—partly for lack of funds but also because of the long tradition of independence among agricultural people. It was with the hope of owning one's own land that immigrants and native-born white people had moved to the prairies in the first place. On the other hand, individual ownership of land parcels was forced on many Native American nations through the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887—an outgrowth of "Friends of the Indian" policies. Whatever the intentions of the Dawes Act, it fragmented the collectively held Native lands and reduced the Native land base by some 90 million acres.

THE LITERARY MARKETPLACE

The rapid transcontinental settlement and new urban industrial conditions summarized above had a significant impact on the literature of the time. New themes, new forms, new subjects, new regions, new authors, and new audiences all emerged in the half century following the Civil War. In fiction, characters rarely represented before the Civil War became familiar figures: industrial workers and the rural poor, ambitious business leaders and vagrants, prostitutes and unheroic soldiers. Women from many social groups, African Americans, Native Americans, ethnic minorities, immigrants: all wrote for publication, and a rapidly burgeoning market for printed works helped establish authorship as a possible career for many.

Newspapers had been important to the political, social, and cultural life of America since colonial times, but after the Civil War their numbers and

influence grew. Joseph Pulitzer established the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* in 1878, and in 1883 he bought the New York *World*; both papers were hugely successful. William Randolph Hearst, a Californian who inherited a fortune from his mining entrepreneur father, made the San Francisco *Examiner* the dominant newspaper in California, then bought the New York *Journal* in 1895 to compete with Pulitzer's *World*, and gradually acquired newspapers across the country. In 1897 the *Jewish Daily Forward*, in Yiddish, was founded by Abraham Cahan; its circulation eventually reached 250,000, and it was read by three or four times that number. Many of the noted authors of the period started as newspaper journalists: Abraham Cahan, Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Sui Sin Far, Joel Chandler Harris, William Dean Howells, Frank Norris, and Mark Twain among them. Perhaps of equal importance to the development of literary careers and literature as an American institution was the establishment of newspaper syndicates in the 1880s by Irving Bacheller and S. S. McClure. These syndicates distributed material to newspapers and magazines in all sections of the country, publishing humor, news, and serialized novels such as Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*.

Magazines had become important in American life by the mid-eighteenth century, but they too increased in number and scope. New York City and Boston magazines such as *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1850), *Scribner's Monthly* (1870), *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* (1881), the *Atlantic Monthly* (1857), and the *Galaxy* (1866) published work by Kate Chopin, Sarah Orne Jewett, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Charles Chesnut, Sui Sin Far, Zitkala Ša, and Mark Twain. In San Francisco, the *Overland Monthly* (1868) emerged as the leading western literary periodical with a regional focus; it published Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, Jack London, Mary Austin, Sui Sin Far, and Mark Twain among others. Without these periodicals, many writers would not have been able to support themselves; the income and audiences were crucial to the further formation of the complex literary tradition of a vast nation undergoing modernization.

Periodicals also contributed to the emergence of what the critic Warner Berthoff has called "the literature of argument"—writings in sociology, philosophy, and psychology impelled by the spirit of exposure and reform. It would be hard to exaggerate the influence—on other writers as well as on the educated public—of works such as Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879), Henry Demarest Lloyd's *Wealth against Commonwealth* (1894), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1898), Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), and William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). For many women writers, magazines provided an important public space for exploring new perspectives on gender and women's rights.

As the United States became an international political, economic, and military power during this half century, editors and readers welcomed (in translation) works by the leading European figures of the time, such as Russians Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov, Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, and French novelist Émile Zola. American writers during this period increasingly adopted the form of realism—itsself a product of the interplay of historical forces and aesthetic developments early apparent in the French writer Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (serialized in 1856, published as a book

in 1857), which followed the mundane although ultimately tragic life of an ordinary housewife. Among the most critically praised American writers of the period were Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Henry James, and Edith Wharton, who encompassed literary style from the comic vernacular through ordinary discourse to impressionistic subjectivity, while still under the sway of literary realism. These writers, two from the Midwest (Twain and Howells) and two from the East Coast (James and Wharton), recorded life on the vanishing frontier, in the village, small town, and turbulent metropolis, as well as in European resorts and capitals. They established the literary identity of distinctively American protagonists, specifically the vernacular boy hero and the "American Girl," the baffled and strained middle-class family, the businessman, and the psychologically complicated citizens of a new international culture. They set the example and charted the future course for the subjects, themes, techniques, and styles of the U.S. fiction we still call modern.

Developments in the literary marketplace and in the nation's preoccupations had the effect of greatly enhancing the reputation of prose fiction—the idea of a "great" American novel was first enunciated soon after the Civil War. But two of the most important American writers of their time and beyond, both of whom began working before the Civil War, were devoted to the idea that poetry was a crucial expression of the human spirit. In different ways each pointed towards the huge renaissance of poetry after World War I. Walt Whitman promulgated an expansive, gregarious open form fit for the "open road" of American life; Emily Dickinson's tight, elliptical verses reflect a sense of the psychological interior where meanings are made and unmade: "internal difference, where the meanings are."

FORMS OF REALISM AND NATURALISM

The two great literary movements of the late nineteenth century were realism and naturalism. The term *realism* refers to a movement in English, European, and American literature that gathered force from the 1830s to the end of the century. As defined by William Dean Howells, the magazine editor who was for some decades the chief American advocate of realist aesthetics as well as the author of over thirty novels, including *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), realism "is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material." But truthful treatment of material depends on the material in question; Henry James spoke of the documentary value of Howells's work, thereby calling attention to realism's preoccupation with the observable surfaces of the world in which fictional characters lived, surfaces that made the world seem lifelike to readers. Characters in Howells's novels were "representative," that is, composites of the sort of people readers thought they already knew, people without fame or huge fortunes, without startling accomplishments or immense abilities.

By contrast, the realism practiced by Edith Wharton and Henry James focused on the interior moral and psychological lives of upper-class people, although always taking care in describing these people's surroundings. Wharton and James hoped to convince readers—most of whom were from the middle class—that the inner lives of the privileged were in accord with

the truths of human nature. Wealthy people had what working people did not—time to develop and display their inner selves; they were just like everybody else, although more so. In novels such as *The House of Mirth* (1905), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920), Wharton depicts the intangibles of thwarted desire, self-betrayal, hostile emotion, and repressed voices. At times, her accounts of the struggles of individuals such as Lily Bart of *The House of Mirth* to survive in a seemingly pleasant but actually hostile society reflect an almost Darwinian view of upper-class life, a naturalistic vision of human struggle; this is not the pleasant world of Howells's well-meaning characters, but it is no less "realistic."

Realist writers believed in the power of language to represent reality in ways that were aesthetically satisfying and true to their sense of the world. But realism could never once and for all convey the real world through language; the world was always out there waiting for another writer to decide how to treat it. What they were trying to represent was always able to elude their desire to fix it in print; but that did not stop them from trying. Two of the most acclaimed artists of the era—Mark Twain and Henry James—understood that language was an interpretation of the real rather than the real thing itself. As a western writer, Twain worked within a tradition of vernacular tale-telling, which some later writers saw as the essence of a truly American style. Because this style was already an exaggeration, it could not truly be called "realistic" in the Howellsian sense; and Twain's later work is infused with pessimism and social critique well beyond the realistic norm. James, beginning with recognizably realistic fiction, using a large cast of individualized, although usually upper-class characters described by an all-knowing narrator, as in *The American* (1876), developed increasingly subtle metaphorical and proto-modernistic representations of the flow of a character's inner thought—the so-called "stream of consciousness"—as in *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

Naturalism can be thought of as a version of realism, or as an alternative to it. Literary naturalists, unlike the realists for whom human beings defined themselves within recognizable settings, wrote about human life as it was shaped by forces beyond human control. For them, their view was truly realistic, while Howellsian realism was a form of prettifying. Naturalism introduces characters from the fringes and depths of society, far from the middle class, whose lives really do spin out of control; their fates are seen to be the outcome of degenerate heredity, a sordid environment, and the bad luck that can often seem to control the lives of people without money or influence. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1870) theorized that human beings had developed over the ages from nonhuman forms of life, successfully adapting to changing environmental conditions. Darwin was not interested in the social world, but in the 1870s, the English philosopher Herbert Spencer applied Darwin's evolutionary theory of the "survival of the fittest" to human groups. This idea was enthusiastically welcomed by many leading American businessmen. Andrew Carnegie, for example, argued that unrestrained competition was the equivalent of a law of nature designed to eliminate those unfit for the new economic order.

For the novelists, naturalism was thought to make their work scientific—thus truly realistic—rather than romantic. Émile Zola (1840–1902), the