

There's More Online!

- ✓ **BIOGRAPHY** Jane Addams
- ✓ **BIOGRAPHY** Mark Twain
- ✓ **IMAGES** Thomas Eakins Paintings
- ✓ **VIDEO** Social Darwinism and Social Reform
- ✓ **INTERACTIVE SELF-CHECK QUIZ**



## LESSON 3

# Social Darwinism and Social Reform

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS** • *Why do people migrate?* • *How is urban life different from rural life?*

Reading **HELPDESK**



**Academic Vocabulary**

- evolution
- publish

**Content Vocabulary**

- individualism
- Social Darwinism
- philanthropy
- settlement house
- Americanization

**TAKING NOTES:**

**Key Ideas and Details**

**Categorizing** As you read, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by filling in the main idea of each of the theories and movements listed.

Theory or Movement	Main Idea
Social Darwinism	
Laissez-Faire	
Gospel of Wealth	
Realism	

## IT MATTERS BECAUSE

*The industrialization of the United States led to new art and literature and new ideas about government's role in society. Social Darwinists believed society developed through "survival of the fittest." Other Americans thought steps needed to be taken to help the less fortunate.*

## Gilded Age Ideas

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What was the main idea of Social Darwinism, and how did it compare with the idea of individualism?*

In 1873 Mark Twain and Charles Warner wrote a novel entitled *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. Historians later adopted the term and applied it to the era in American history that began about 1870 and ended around 1900. The era was in many ways a time of marvels. Amazing new inventions led to rapid industrial growth. Cities grew in size and people thronged the crowded streets. Wealthy entrepreneurs built spectacular mansions. Skyscrapers reached to the sky, and electric lights banished the darkness.

By calling this era the Gilded Age, Twain and Warner were sounding an alarm. Something is gilded if it is covered with gold on the outside but made of cheaper material inside. A gilded age might appear to sparkle, but critics pointed to corruption, poverty, crime, and great disparities in wealth between the rich and the poor.

Whether the era was golden or merely gilded, it was certainly a time of great cultural activity. Industrialism and urbanization altered the way Americans looked at themselves and their society, and these changes gave rise to new values, new art, and new entertainment.

### The Idea of Individualism

One of the strongest beliefs of the era—and one that remains strong today—was the idea of **individualism**. Many Americans firmly believed that no matter how humble their origins, Americans could rise in society and go as far as their talents and commitment would take them. No one expressed the idea of individualism better than

Horatio Alger, who wrote more than 100 “rags-to-riches” novels. In his books, a poor person goes to the big city and, through a combination of hard work and luck, becomes successful. Even though such dramatic jumps upward in social standing were not commonplace, Alger’s popular books convinced many young people that no matter how many obstacles they faced, success was possible.

### Social Darwinism

Another powerful idea of the era was **Social Darwinism**. This philosophy, loosely derived from Charles Darwin’s theories, strongly reinforced the idea of individualism.

**Herbert Spencer** British philosopher Herbert Spencer applied Darwin’s theory of **evolution** and natural selection to human society. In his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Darwin argued that plant and animal life had evolved over millions of years by a process he called natural selection. In this process, those species that cannot adapt to the environment in which they live gradually die out, while those that do adapt, thrive, and live on.

Spencer used this theory to argue that human society also evolved through competition and natural selection. He said that society became better because only the fittest people survived. Spencer and others, such as American scholar William Graham Sumner, became known as Social Darwinists and their ideas as Social Darwinism. “Survival of the fittest” became the catchphrase of their philosophy.

Some industrial leaders used Social Darwinism to justify their support of laissez-faire capitalism. This economic doctrine opposed any government programs that interfered with business.

**Darwinism and the Church** Many devout Christians found Darwin’s conclusions offensive. They rejected the theory of evolution because they believed it contradicted the Bible’s account of creation. Some clergy, however, concluded that evolution might have been God’s way of creating the world. One of the most famous ministers of the era, Henry Ward Beecher, called himself a “Christian evolutionist.”

**Carnegie’s Gospel of Wealth** Andrew Carnegie advocated a gentler version of Social Darwinism that he called the Gospel of Wealth. This philosophy held that wealthy Americans should engage in **philanthropy**, using their fortunes to create the conditions that would help people help themselves. Building schools and hospitals, for example, was better than giving handouts to the poor. Carnegie funded the creation of public libraries in cities across the nation.

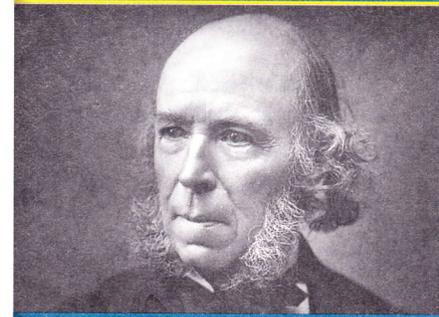
#### PRIMARY SOURCE

“In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves; to provide part of the means by which those who desire to improve may do so; to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise; to assist, but rarely or never to do all. Neither the individual nor the race is improved by almsgiving. Those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance. The really valuable men of the race never do, except in cases of accident or sudden change. . . . He is the only true reformer who is as careful and as anxious not to aid the unworthy as he is to aid the worthy, and, perhaps, even more so, for in almsgiving more injury is probably done by rewarding vice than by relieving virtue. . . .”

—Andrew Carnegie, from *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays*, 1886

#### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Summarizing** How did Horatio Alger’s books demonstrate the idea of individualism?



### Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)

Herbert Spencer was a philosopher who wrote about “survival of the fittest” several years before Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was published. In his major series, *Synthetic Philosophy*, Spencer tried to apply his beliefs about evolution to a variety of social sciences. He believed that both philosophy and science created an ordered system that supported human progress.

#### CRITICAL THINKING

**Drawing Conclusions** Why might Spencer’s ideas have seemed controversial at the time they were written?

**individualism** the belief that no matter what a person’s background is, he or she can still become successful through effort

### Social Darwinism

a philosophy based on Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution and natural selection, asserting that humans have developed through competition and natural selection with only the strongest surviving

**evolution** the scientific theory that humans and other forms of life have evolved over time

**philanthropy** providing money to support humanitarian or social goals

## The Rebirth of Reform

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What methods and philosophies were developed for helping the urban poor?*

The tremendous changes that industrialism and urbanization brought triggered a debate over how best to address society's problems. Some Americans embraced the ideas of individualism and Social Darwinism. Others disagreed, arguing that society's problems could be fixed only if Americans and their government began to take a more active role in regulating the economy and helping those in need.

### Challenging Social Darwinism

In 1880 journalist Henry George published *Progress and Poverty*, a discussion of the American economy that quickly became a national best seller. George observed, "The present century has been marked by a prodigious increase in wealth-producing power." This should, he asserted, have made poverty "a thing of the past." Instead, he claimed, the "gulf between the employed and the employer is growing wider; social contrasts are becoming sharper." In other words, laissez-faire economics was making society worse—not better.

Most economists now argue that George's analysis was flawed. Industrialism did make some Americans very wealthy, but it also improved the standard of living for most others as well. At the time, however, Americans in the midst of poverty did not see improvement. George's ideas spurred reformers to challenge Social Darwinism.

**Lester Frank Ward** In 1883 Lester Frank Ward published *Dynamic Sociology*, in which he argued that humans were different from animals because they had the ability to make plans to produce the future outcomes they desired. Ward's ideas came to be known as Reform Darwinism. People, he insisted, had succeeded in the world because of their ability to cooperate. Government, he argued, could regulate the economy, cure poverty, and promote education more efficiently than competition in the marketplace could.

**Looking Backward** Writer Edward Bellamy promoted another alternative to Social Darwinism and laissez-faire economics. In 1888 he published *Looking Backward*, a novel about a man who falls asleep in 1887 and awakens in the year 2000 to find that the nation has become a perfect society with no crime, poverty, or politics. In this fictional society, the government owns all industry and shares the wealth equally with all Americans. Bellamy's ideas were essentially a form of socialism.

**Naturalism in Literature** Criticism of industrial society also appeared in literature in a new style of writing known as naturalism. Naturalists challenged the idea of Social Darwinism by suggesting that some people failed in life simply because they were caught up in circumstances they could not control.

Among the most prominent naturalist writers were Stephen Crane, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser. Stephen Crane's novel *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893) told the story of a girl's descent into prostitution and death. Jack London's tales of the Alaskan wilderness demonstrated the power of nature over civilization. Theodore Dreiser's novels, such as *Sister Carrie* (1900), painted a world where people sinned without punishment and where the pursuit of wealth and power often destroyed their character.

A young newsboy sells papers on a street corner in 1910.





After visiting a settlement house in London, England, Jane Addams decided to open Hull House in 1889 to assist poor immigrants in Chicago. Addams wrote books about her experience at Hull House, giving an example to others throughout the nation.

► **CRITICAL THINKING**

**Drawing Conclusions** Based on her involvement with Hull House, how would you describe Jane Addams as a person?

## Helping the Urban Poor

The plight of the urban poor prompted some reformers to find new ways to help. The Social Gospel movement worked to better conditions in cities according to the biblical ideals of charity and justice. Washington Gladden, a minister, was an early advocate who popularized the movement in writings such as *Applied Christianity* (1887). Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister from New York, became the leading voice in the Social Gospel movement. The Church, he argued, must “demand protection for the moral safety of the people.” The Social Gospel movement inspired many churches to build gyms, provide social programs and child care, and help the poor.

The Salvation Army and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) also combined faith and an interest in reform. The Salvation Army offered practical aid and religious counseling to the urban poor. The YMCA tried to help industrial workers and the urban poor by organizing Bible studies, citizenship training, and group activities. The YMCA also provided low-cost boarding houses for young men. The head of the Chicago YMCA, Dwight L. Moody, was a gifted preacher whose revival meetings drew thousands of people. Moody rejected both the Social Gospel movement and Social Darwinism. He believed the way to help the poor was not by providing them with services but by redeeming their souls and reforming their character.

The **settlement house** movement began as an offshoot of the Social Gospel movement. In the late 1800s, idealistic reformers—including many college-educated women—established settlement houses in poor, often heavily immigrant neighborhoods. The reformers lived in these settlement houses, which were community centers offering everything from medical care and English classes to kindergartens and recreational programs. Jane Addams opened Hull House in Chicago in 1889. Jewish reformer Lillian Wald founded the Henry Street Settlement in New York City. Both women were a powerful force in social work and the settlement house movement.

**settlement house** an institution located in a poor neighborhood that provided numerous community services such as medical care, child care, libraries, and classes in English

**Americanization** the process of acquiring or causing a person to acquire American traits and characteristics

## Public Education

As the United States became increasingly industrialized and urbanized, it needed more trained and educated workers. The number of public schools increased dramatically after the Civil War. The number of children attending school rose from 7,562,000 in 1870 to 15,503,000 in 1900. Public schools were often crucial to the success of immigrant children. At school they were taught English and learned about American history and culture, a process known as **Americanization**.

Schools also tried to instill discipline. Grammar schools divided students into grades and drilled them in punctuality, neatness, and efficiency—necessary habits for the workplace. Vocational education in high schools taught skills required in specific trades. However, children in cities had greater access to education than those in rural areas. Many African Americans also faced education inequalities. Some started their own schools, following the example of Booker T. Washington, who founded the Tuskegee Institute in 1881.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Explaining** Why were public schools important to the success of immigrant children?

## A Changing Culture

**GUIDING QUESTION** Why do you think artists and writers started portraying America more realistically?

The late 1800s was a period of great cultural change for writers and artists. It was also a time when many urban Americans took advantage of new forms of entertainment.

### Realism

A new movement in art and literature called realism began in the 1800s. Just as Darwin tried to explain the natural world scientifically, artists and writers tried to portray the world realistically. Perhaps the best-known American realist painter was Thomas Eakins. He painted men rowing, athletes playing baseball, and surgeons and scientists in action.

Writers also attempted to capture the world as they saw it. In several novels, William Dean Howells presented realistic descriptions of American life. For example, his novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) described the attempts of a self-made man to enter Boston society. Also an influential literary critic, Howells was the first to declare Mark Twain an incomparable American genius. Twain, whose real name was Samuel Clemens, **published** his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in 1884. In this novel, the title character and his friend Jim, who has escaped from slavery, float down the Mississippi River on a raft. Twain wrote in local dialect with a lively sense of humor:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

“‘Say, who is you? Whar is you? Dog my cats ef I didn’ hear sumf’n. Well, I know what I’s gwyne to do: I’s gwyne to set down here and listen tell I hears it agin.’”

So he set down on the ground betwixt me and Tom. He leaned his back up against a tree, and stretched his legs out till one of them most touched one of mine. My nose begun to itch. It itched till the tears come into my eyes. But I dasn’t scratch. Then it begun to itch on the inside. Next I got to itching underneath. I didn’t know how I was going to set still. This miserableness went on as much as six or seven minutes; but it seemed a sight longer than that.”

—from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1884

**publish** to make a document available to the general public

## Popular Culture

Popular culture changed considerably in the late 1800s. Industrialization improved the standard of living for many people, enabling them to spend money on entertainment and recreation. Increasingly, urban Americans divided their lives into separate units—that of work and that of home. People began “going out” to public entertainment.

In cities, saloons often outnumbered groceries. As a place for social gathering, saloons played a major role in the lives of male workers. Saloons offered drinks, free toilets, water for horses, and free newspapers for customers. They even offered the first “free lunch”: salty food that made patrons thirsty and eager to drink more. Saloons also served as political centers, and saloonkeepers were often key figures in political machines.

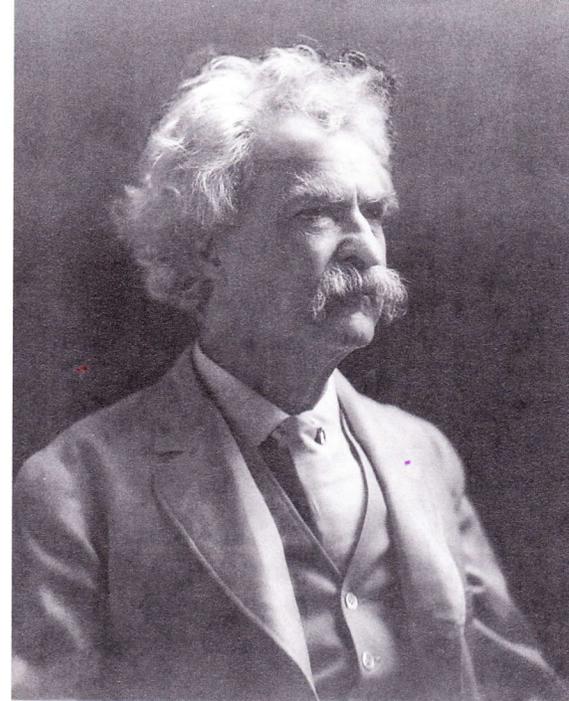
Working-class families and single adults could find entertainment at new amusement parks such as New York City’s Coney Island. Amusements such as water slides and railroad rides cost only a nickel or dime. People also began watching professional sports. Formed in 1869, the first professional baseball team was the Cincinnati Red Stockings. In 1903 the first official World Series was played between the Boston Americans and the Pittsburgh Pirates. Football gained in popularity and by the late 1800s had spread to public colleges.

As work became less strenuous, many people looked for activities involving physical exercise. Tennis, golf, and croquet became popular. In 1891 James Naismith, athletic director for a college in Massachusetts, invented a new indoor game called basketball.

People also enjoyed comic theater and music. Adapted from French theater, vaudeville took on an American flavor in the early 1880s with its hodgepodge of animal acts, singers, comedians, acrobats, and dancers. Like vaudeville, ragtime music echoed the hectic pace of city life. Its syncopated rhythms grew out of the music of riverside honky-tonks, saloon pianists, and banjo players, using the patterns of African American music. Scott Joplin, one of the most important African American ragtime composers, became known as the King of Ragtime. He wrote his most famous piece, “The Maple Leaf Rag,” in 1899.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Analyzing** Why was it possible to pursue more leisure activities and popular entertainment during this time period?



With his book *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain had written a true American novel. The setting, subject, characters, and style were clearly American.

### CRITICAL THINKING

**Making Inferences** Why did Mark Twain write *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* using local dialect?

PHOTO: Library of Congress

## LESSON 3 REVIEW



### Reviewing Vocabulary

**1. Explaining** Explain the significance of philanthropy, and identify the reason for its growth during the late 1800s.

### Using Your Notes

**2. Defining** Use your notes on the theories and movements of the Gilded Age to explain its defining characteristics.

### Answering the Guiding Questions

**3. Comparing** What was the main idea of Social Darwinism, and how did it compare with the idea of individualism?

**4. Summarizing** What methods and philosophies were developed for helping the urban poor?

**5. Making Connections** Why do you think artists and writers started portraying America more realistically?

### Writing Activity

**6. ARGUMENT** Suppose that you are a newspaper editor in the late 1800s. Write an editorial in which you support or oppose the philosophy of Social Darwinism.