American Literature
1865-1914

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A NATION

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the fertile, mineral-rich continent west of the Appalachians and Alleghenies was occupied, often by force, largely by Europeans, who exploited its resources freely. These new Americans, their numbers doubled by a continuous flow of immigrants, pushed westward to the Pacific coast, displacing Native American cultures and Spanish settlements when they stood in the way. Vast stands of timber were consumed; numberless herds of buffalo and other wild game gave way to cattle, sheep, farms, villages, and cities and the railroads that linked them to markets back east; various technologies converted the country’s immense natural resources into industrial products both for its own burgeoning population and for foreign markets.

The result was that between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I the country was wholly transformed. Before the Civil War, white America had been essentially a rural, agrarian, isolated republic most of whose idealistic, confident, and self-reliant inhabitants believed in a Protestant God. By the time the United States entered World War I in 1917, it was an industrialized, urbanized, continental world power forced to deal with some of the implications of Darwin’s theory of evolution as well as with profound changes in social institutions and cultural values. Increasingly, it would be obliged to acknowledge (if not to remedy) racism that emancipation had not eradicated, military expansionism initiated by the war of aggression against Mexico in 1846-48, and the policy of Indian removal that was a prominent fact of its pre-Civil War life.

The Civil War, the seemingly inevitable result of growing economic, political, social, and cultural divisions between north and south, lasted four years, cost some eight billion dollars, and claimed over six hundred thousand lives. Its savagery seems also to have left the country morally exhausted. Nevertheless, in spite of the astonishing loss of life and ruin of property, especially in the South, the country prospered materially over the five following decades. The war effort stimulated technological innovations and developed new methods of efficiently organizing and managing the movement of large numbers of men and materiel. After the war these accomplishments were adapted to industrial modernization on a massive scale. The first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869; industrial output grew exponentially, and agricultural productivity increased dramatically; electricity was introduced on a large scale; new means of communication such as the telephone revolutionized many aspects of daily life; coal, oil, iron, gold, silver, and other kinds of mineral wealth were discovered and extracted, producing large numbers of vast individual fortunes and making the nation as a whole rich enough, for the first time, to capitalize its own further development. By the end of the century, no longer a colony politically or economically, the United States could begin its own overseas imperialist expansion (of which the Spanish-American War in 1898 was only one sign).

The central material fact of the period was industrialization on a scale unprecedented in the earlier experiences of Great Britain and Europe. Between 1850 and 1880 capital invested in manufacturing industries more than quadrupled, while fac-
tery employment nearly doubled. By 1885 four transcontinental railroad lines were 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. As major industries were consolidated into monopolies by increasingly powerful (and ruthless) individuals, a very small number of men came to control such enormously profitable enterprises as steel, oil, railroads, meat-packing, banking, and finance. Among these men were Jay Gould, Jim Hill, Leland Stanford, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller. Robber barons to some, captains of industry to others, they successfully squeezed out their competitors and accumulated vast wealth and power-social and political as well as economic.

In 1865, the United States, except for the manufacturing centers of the northeastern seaboard, was a country of farms, villages, and small towns. Most of its citizens were involved in agricultural pursuits or small family businesses. By the turn of the century, only about one-third of the people lived on farms. During the same time, the population of New York City had grown from around 500,000 to nearly 3.5 million, including many immigrants from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. Chicago, at mid-century a town of 20,000, had more than 2 million inhabitants by 1910. Some of this urban growth was the result of population shifts from country to cities, but even more of these new urban dwellers were immigrants. Indeed, as many as 25 million such immigrants, mostly from Europe, entered the United States between the Civil War and the First World War. By the end of World War 1, one-half of the American population resided in a dozen or so cities; the vast majority of all wage earners were employed by corporations and large enterprises, 8.5 million as factory workers. Nothing like this explosive population and industrial growth had been experienced anywhere else in the world, and in many respects the rapidity of change in every aspect of life was as bewildering to writers as it was to other citizens. Perhaps this bewilderment accounts for the fact that the most enduring writing of the period saw print from the late 1870s on; it took time to understand and give shape and meaning to the new energies unleashed after the war.

The transformation of an entire continent, outlined above, involved incalculable suffering for millions of people even as others prospered. In the countryside, increasing numbers of farmers, dependent for transportation of their crops on the monopolistic railroads, were squeezed off the land by what novelist Frank Norris characterized as the giant “octopus” that crisscrossed the continent. Everywhere independent farmers were placed “under the lion’s paw” of the land speculators and absentee landlords that Hamlin Garland’s story made infamous. Large-scale farming—initially in Kansas and Nebraska, for example—also squeezed family farmers even as such practices increased gross agricultural yields. For many, the great cities were also, as the socialist novelist Upton Sinclair sensed, jungles where only the strongest, the most ruthless, and the luckiest survived. An oversupply of labor kept wages down and allowed industrialists to maintain inhumane and dangerous working conditions for men, women; and children who competed for jobs.

Neither farmers nor urban laborers were effectively organized to pursue their own interests, and neither group had any significant political leverage until the 1880s, when the American Federation of Labor, an association of national unions of skilled workers, emerged as the first unified national voice of organized labor. Before then legislators almost exclusively served the interests of business and industry, and the scandals of President Grant’s administration, the looting of the New York City treasury by William Marcy (“Boss”) Tweed in the 1870s, and the later horrors of municipal corruption exposed by journalist Lincoln Steffens and other “muckrakers” were symptomatic of what many writers of the time took to be the age of the “Great Barbecue.” Early attempts by labor to organize were crude and often violent, and such groups as the “Molly Maguires,” which performed acts of terrorism in the coal-mining area of northeastern Pennsylvania, confirmed middle-class fears that labor organizations were “illegal conspiracies” and thus public enemies. Direct violence was probably, as young radical writer Emma Goldman believed, a necessary step toward establishing meaningful ways of negotiating disputes between industrial workers and their employers; it was, in any event; not until collective bargaining legislation was enacted in the 1930s that labor effectively acquired the right to strike.

**THE LITERARY MARKETPLACE**

The rapid transcontinental settlement and new urban industrial circumstances summarized above were accompanied by the development of a national literature of great abundance and variety. New themes, new forms, new subjects, new regions, new authors, new audiences all emerged in the literature of this half century. American literature in these years came to fulfill in considerable measure the condition Whitman had called for in 1867 in describing his own *Leaves of Grass*: it treats each state and region as peers “and expands from them, and includes the world ... connecting an American citizen with the citizens of all nations.” Self-educated pioneers, adventurers, and journalists introduced as major characters in fiction industrial workers and the rural poor, ambitious business leaders and vagrants, prostitutes and unheroic soldiers. Women from all social groups, African Americans, Native Americans, ethnic minorities, immigrants: all began to write for publication, and a rapidly burgeoning market for printed work helped establish authorship as a possible career as literacy rates reached unprecedented levels.

Some account, however brief, of the growth of this market may be helpful in understanding the economics of American cultural development. Since colonial times, newspapers had been important to the political, social, and cultural life of America, but in the decades following 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 had already made the San Francisco *Examiner* the dominant newspaper in the Far West, and in 1895 he bought the New York Journal to compete with Pulitzer’s World. Many of the “writers” who went on to become “authors” got their start as newspaper journalists (Bierce, Clemens, Crane, Dreiser, Harris, Howells, and Norris among them). Perhaps of equal importance to the development of literary careers and literature as an institution was the establishment of newspaper syndicates in the 1880s by Irving Bacheller and S. S. McClure. These syndicates published humor, news, cartoons, and comic strips (by the 1890s), but they also printed both short fiction and novels— including Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*—in installments.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin and Andrew Bradford were among the first to publish monthly magazines, in no small part to demonstrate that a distinctly American culture was forming on the North American continent. By the early years of the nineteenth century, weekly magazines such as the Saturday *Evening Post* (founded in 1821), the Saturday Press (1838), and the New York Ledger (1847) published many writers of fiction; including Samuel Clemens. East Coast monthly magazines such as Harper’s *New Monthly Magazine* (1850), Scribner’s *Monthly* (1870), *Illustrated* Monthly Magazine (1881.), the Atlantic Monthly (1857), and the Galaxy (1866) all provided outlets for such figures as Kate Chopin, Sarah Orne Jewett, Henry James, William Dean Howells, and Samuel Clemens. On the West Coast the *Overland Monthly* (1868) emerged as the leading literary periodical, publishing Mary Austin, Bret Harte, Samuel Clemens, Ambrose Bierce, and Jack London among other western writers of the period. This bare listing of magazines and literary contributors is intended only to suggest the importance of periodicals in providing sources of income and audiences crucial to the further formation of a complex American literary tradition.

Many of these periodicals also played a part in the emergence toward the end of
the nineteenth century of what critic Warner Berthoff aptly designates "the literature of argument"-powerful works in sociology, philosophy, and psychology, many of them 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 Henry George's Progress and Poverty (1879), Henry Lester Ward's The Psychic Factors in Civilization (1893), Henry Demarest Lloyd's Wealth Against Commonwealth (1894), Brooks Adams's The Law of Civilization and Decay (1895), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Women and Economics (1898), Thorstein Veblen's The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), and Ida Tarbell's The History of the Standard Oil Company (1904).

In short, as the United States became an international political, economic, and military power during this half century, the quantity and quality of its literary production kept pace. In its new security, moreover, it welcomed (in translation) the leading European figures of the time-Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, Thomas Hardy, Emile Zola, Benito Peres Galdos, Giovanni Verga-often in columns in Harper's Weekly and Harper's Monthly, the North American Review, and other leading journals of the era. American writers in this period, like most writers of other times and places, wrote to earn money, earn fame, change the world, and, out of that mysterious compulsion to find the best order for the best words, to express themselves in a permanent form. The nature of that form-what might be called the "realistic international art story"-was itself, of course, a product of the complex interplay of historical forces and esthetic developments apparent, in retrospect, from the time of the publication of French writer Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary (1856) and, especially, his Three Tales (1877). But before turning to a discussion of the dominant literary mode we call realism, a review of the three leading American realists is in order.

SAMUEL L. CLEMENS, W. D. HOWELLS, AND HENRY JAMES

The three figures who for their American contemporaries dominated prose fiction in the last quarter of the nineteenth century were Samuel L. Clemens, William Dean Howells, and Henry James. For half a century, Howells was friend, editor, correspondent, and champion of both Clemens and James. These latter two, however; knew each other little, and liked each other's work even less. Clemens was without doubt the most popular of the three, in part because of his gift as a humorous public speaker. There is, indeed, much truth in the observation that Clemens's art was essentially that of a performer. Unlike many of his comedic contemporaries, however, Clemens had the even rarer ability to convert spoken humor into writing. He was a master of style, and there is wide agreement among writers and literary historians alike that his masterpiece, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), is the fountainhead of American colloquial prose-one crucial feature of realistic writing.

Clemens's friend and adviser Howells, editor, arbiter of taste, and promoter of fresh talent, was unquestionably the most influential American literary figure during the last quarter of the century. Relentlessly productive, Howells wrote and published the equivalent of one hundred books during his sixty-year professional career, including novels, travel books, biographies, plays, criticism, essays, and autobiography. He was the first American writer self-consciously to conceive, to cite the title of one of his essays, of The Man of Letters as a Man of Business. Howells, however, was no mere acquisitive hack. He wrote always with a sense of the presumed demands of a genteel, largely female audience, but also took risks and opened new territories for fiction, including divorce in A Modern Instance (1881), the self-made businessman in The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885), spousal abuse in The Landlord at Lion's Head...
international culture. Together, in short, they set the example and charted the future course for the subjects, themes, techniques, and styles of fiction we still call modern.

**VARIETIES OF REALISM**

We have seen that in the half century between the Civil War and the First World War rapid change and exponential growth remade the United States. We have also examined the expansion of the literary marketplace and some of the ways in which three major writers responded to the new physical, psychological, and social circumstances of American life. It may now be useful to extend our analysis of the varieties of literary expression during the period, and to do so it will be helpful to explore further the dominant fact of imaginative writing during these years—realism. Realism is a notoriously oversused term, and it is important to acknowledge at the outset that the concept of literary realism should be thought of as more like a Swiss Army knife than like a sledgehammer. The concept can help us, that is, to address many key features of the literary production of the period if it is used flexibly and with what Poe called "kindred art"; for that, fingers rather than shoulder and back muscles are called for.

Broadly speaking, realism is used to characterize a movement in European, English, and American literature that gathered force from the 1830s to the end of the century. As defined by William Dean Howells, who not only practiced realism but argued powerfully in support of its esthetic and ethical rightness, realism "is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material." While this definition does not answer every question that may be raised about truth, treatment, or even about material, it offers a useful point of departure. When Henry James, in the letter quoted above, spoke of the "documentary" value of Howells's oeuvre, he called attention to realism's fascination with the physical surfaces, the particularities or even about material, it offers a useful point of departure. When Henry James, in the letter quoted above, spoke of the "documentary" value of Howells's oeuvre, he called attention to realism's fascination with the physical surfaces, the particularities of the sensate world in which fictional characters lived. Here, for example, is a passage from The Rise of Silas Lapham, the novel many literary historians have identified as quintessentially realistic in the American tradition:

"No chance to speed a horse here, of course," said Lapham, while the horse with a spirited gentleness picked her way, with a high, long action, over the pavement of the street. The streets were all narrow, and most of them crooked, in that quarter of the town; but at the end of one the spars of a vessel penciled themselves delicately against the cool blue of the afternoon sky. The air was full of a smell pleasantly compounded of oakum, of leather, and of oil. It was not the busy season, and they met only two or three trucks heavily straggling toward the wharf with their long string teams; but the cobble-stones of the pavement were worn with the dint of ponderous wheels, and discolored with iron-rust from them; here and there, in wandering streaks over its surface, was the gray stain of the salt water with which the street had been sprinkled. The precise rendering of the horse's movement, the sharply etched image of the ship's spars against the "cool blue" of the afternoon sky, the mixed odors of oakum, leather, and oil, the rust and saltwater stains on the cobblestones—all of these are designed to ground us quite literally in place and time.

This same novel illustrates another aspect of American literary realism—its tendency to select "representative" or ordinary characters—characters one might meet on the street without noticing them. Unlike their romantic counterparts, they don't walk with a limp, their eyes don't blaze, they don't emanate diabolical power. Silas Lapham is certainly representative in the sense that he stands for a new kind of American—the self-made businessman who by luck and pluck (and a willingness to short-circuit his moral scruples) achieves financial success of a kind that became as common after the Civil War as it had been uncommon before it. His is the life of a successful man who works hard, drives his horses hard, is paternalistically generous to his wife and two daughters, and finds little comfort in self-examination, cultural activities, or the use of his mind in noninstrumental ways. Although Howells succeeds in making Lapham a distinctive individual, he at the same time creates him as a familiar type of the 1870s and 80s.

To verisimilitude of setting and ordinariness of characters living conventional lives as markers of realism, we may add the use of a point of view that reduces authorial intrusion. In Lapham the proportion of dialogue—all of it attempting to render accurately the spoken language of individuals—is very high. And on occasions when the author intrudes, he or she does so in plain language and simple syntax.

Realism as practiced by Howells, then, seeks to create the illusion of everyday life being lived by ordinary people in familiar surroundings—life seen through a clear glass window (though partly opened to allow for the full range of sense experience). It is important to be conscious, however, that Howells selects details with full awareness of the symbolic potential of each one. Like all writers, Howells backpacks every item into his narratives and is thus ever-mindful of the need for careful selection. Throughout the novel, for example, we observe the effects of heat on Silas-the way he flushes in the arrogant and reckless driving of his horse and carriage, his unconsciously racist threat to be "the death" of the "darkey" who tends the furnace in his Nankeen Square house, his carelessness with fire that results in the conflagration that destroys his expensive and uninsured, nearly completed house on Beacon Street. All of these constitute a leitmotif of imagery designed to give us access to the unconscious motives that drive so much of Lapham's behavior. Howells finds ways to show rather than tell us about Lapham's pride, greed, and other potentially deadly sins. In the end, though, Lapham does the right thing; he acts ethically out of his free will and thus fulfills yet another aspect of American realism (one most clearly identified by Donald Pizer in Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (1966)), its ethical idealism.

To take another example, Edith Wharton's practice of realism is even more complex than Howells's. In her early story Souls Belated (anthologized below), setting is rendered with the fine precision we associate with realism: one of the belated souls, the recently divorced Lydia Tillotson, returns to her hotel sitting room, which she now uncomfortably shares with her lover:

She sat glancing vaguely about the little sitting room, dimly lit by the pallid-globed lamp, which left in twilight the outlines of the furniture, of his writing table heaped with books and papers, of the tea roses and jasmine drooping on the mantelpiece. How like home it had all grown-how like home!

Wharton had a portrait painter's eye for detail, and especially for the subtle ways light made the physical world plastic. The characters in the story, while they belong to a higher social class than the Laphams, are all recognizable as members of that class. Indeed, another passage from the story will suggest that it is the aspiration of the wealthy to be as much like each other as possible-to live a life without surprises or drama:

The moral atmosphere of the Tillotson interior was as carefully screened and curtained as the house itself: Mrs. Tillotson senior dreaded ideas as much as a draft in her back. Prudent people liked an even temperature; and to do anything unexpected was as foolish as going out in the rain. One of the chief advantages of being rich was that one need not be exposed to unforeseen contingencies: by the use of ordinary firmness and common sense one could make sure of doing exactly the same thing every day at the same hour.

While Wharton, like Howells, creates a physical setting of particular particularity and familiar character types, her concluding sentence reveals a satirical intent as delicious as it is authorially intrusive. A judgment of this kind would be as jarring
bined with other perspectives. In short, it would be a mistake to believe that American writers simply cobbled their understandings of Darwin, Spencer, or Zola into some rigid, absolutist, dogmatic position shared by all of them. Rather, writers responded to these challenges to traditional belief systems in diverse and innovative ways. They were all concerned on the one hand to explore new territories—the pressures of biology, environment, and other material forces—in making people, particularly lower-class people, who they were. On the other hand, Bierce, Crane, Dreiser, London, and Norris all allowed in different degrees for the value of human beings, for their potential to make some measure of sense out of their experience, and for their capacity to act compassionately—even altruistically—under the most adverse circumstances. Even though, therefore, they were challenging conventional wisdom about human motivation and causality in the natural world, the bleakness and pessimism sometimes found in their fiction are not the same as despair and cynicism.

Critic Cathy Davidson characterizes Ambrose Bierce as "a literary hippogryph who combines elements that by standard literary historiography should not be conjoined: realism and impressionism, naturalism and surrealism." So while in some respects and in some stories Bierce might be said to be "naturalistic," a careful reading of any of his best short stories—Chicamauga, An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, and The Man and the Snake—to name a few—makes clear the inadequacy of "naturalism" as a way of explaining or interpreting Bierce. Undue attention to the sensational and grotesque, Davidson argues, can blind readers to the postmodern self-reflexiveness of Bierce.

Stephen Crane is another case in point. Crane believed, as he said of Maggie, that environment counts for a great deal in determining human fate. But not every person born in a slum ends up as a hoodlum, drunk, or suicide. "A great deal, moreover, is not determined by anything. Nature is not hostile, he observes in The Open Boat, only "indifferent, flatly indifferent." Indeed, the earth, in The Blue Hotel, is described in one of the most famous passages in naturalistic fiction as a "whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb." At the end of the story, however, the questions of responsibility and agency are still alive. In Crane's The Red Badge of Courage, Henry Fleming responds to the very end to the chaos and violence that surround him with alternating surges of panic and self-congratulation, not as a man who has fully understood himself and his place in the world. All the same, Henry has learned something—or at least he seems to have done so. Crane, like most naturalists, is more ambiguous, more accepting of paradoxes than a reductive notion of naturalism would seem to allow for.

Biology, environment, psychological drives, and chance—play a large part in shaping human ends in Crane's fiction. But after we have granted this ostensibly "naturalistic" perspective to Crane, we are still left with his distinctiveness as a writer, with his "personal honesty" in reporting what he saw (and his concomitant rejection of accepted literary conventions), and with his use of impressionistic literary techniques to present incomplete characters and a broken world—a world more random than scientifically predictable. We are also left, however, with the hardly pessimistic implication of The Open Boat: that precisely because human beings are exposed to a savage world of chance where death is always imminent, they would do well to learn the art of sympathetic identification with others and how to practice solidarity, an art often learned at the price of death. Without this deeply felt human connection, human experience is as meaningless as wind, sharks, and waves—and this is not, finally, what Crane believed.

Theodore Dreiser certainly did not share Crane's tendency to use words and images as if he were a composer or a painter. But he did share, at least early in his career, Crane's skepticism about human beings; like Crane he was more inclined to see men and women as more like moths drawn to flame than lords of creation. But, again, it is not Dreiser's beliefs that make him a significant figure in American letters: it is what his imagination and literary technique do with an extreme creativity.
these early and allegedly happier times. At a more practical level, much of the writing was a response to the rapid growth of magazines, which created a new, largely female market for short fiction along with correlated opportunities for women writers. By the end of the century, in any case, virtually every region of the country, from Maine to California, from the northern plains to the Louisiana bayous, had its "local colorist" (the implied comparison is to painters of so-called genre scenes) to immortalize its distinctive natural, social, and linguistic features. Though often suffused with nostalgia, the best work of these regionalists both renders a convincing surface of a particular time and location and investigates psychological character traits from a more universal perspective. This melange may be seen in such an early example of regional, also called local-color, writing as Bret Harte's The Luck of Roaring Camp, which made Harte a national celebrity in 1868. The story is locally specific (though it lacked true verisimilitude) as well as entertaining, and it created mythic types as well as reliable depictions of frontier character.

Hamlin Garland, rather than creating a myth, set out to destroy one. Like so many other writers of the time, Garland was encouraged by W. D. Howells to write about what he knew best—in this case the bleak and exhausting life of farmers of the upper Midwest. As he later said, his purpose in writing his early stories was to show that the "mythic quality connected with free land ... was a myth." Garland's farmers are no longer the vigorous, sensuous, and thoughtful yeomen depicted in Crevecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer (1782) but bent, drab figures reminiscent of the protest poet Edwin Markham's Man with a Hoe. In Under the Lion's Paw, from the collection Main-Travelled Roads (1891), we see local color not as nostalgia but as realism in the service of social protest.

The work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman may be seen as an invitation to consider the world from the perspective of women awakening to, protesting against, and offering alternatives to a world dominated by men and male interests and values. Mary Austin was also a feminist and much of her writing, including The Walking Woman, anthropologized here, invites readers to see the world from a woman's perspective. But Austin's larger claim on literary history is that she made the deserts of Southern California palpable for the first time in literature. The marginal characters who people this inhospitable terrain cannot be imagined as existing anywhere else. Stowe, Jewett, and Freeman do more than lament the postwar economic and spiritual decline of New England; their female characters suggest the capacity of human beings to live independently and with dignity in the face of community pressures, patriarchal power over women and most men, and material deprivation. Together with Alice Brown of New Hampshire and Rose Terry Cook of Connecticut—to mention only two others—these regional writers created not only places but themes that have assumed increasing importance in the twentieth century.

Kate Chopin, not unlike Samuel L. Clemens, may be thought of as a regional writer interested in preserving the customs, language, and landscapes of a region of the South. We have no better record of the antebellum lower Mississippi River Valley than Clemens provided in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Life on the Mississippi, and Chopin's short stories and her novel The Awakening pick up, almost literally, where Clemens's books leave off—in the northern Louisiana countryside and, downriver, in New Orleans.

Chopin began her writing career only after she returned to St. Louis from her long sojourn in Louisiana, and in some measure her narratives are tinged with personal nostalgia for a more relaxed and sensuous way of life than people in America's rapidly growing cities could any longer provide. As an urban outsider, Chopin was perhaps all the more sensitive to the nuances of Louisiana country life in particular. Perhaps, too, as a woman, she made distinctive use of a way of life that centered around families and small communities. In any case, her treatments of the Creoles, Cajuns, and blacks of New Orleans and Natchitoches (Nakitsuh) Parish provide fine exam-
in very different ways Washington’s Up From Slavery and Du Bois’s Souls of Black Folk-adorable literary achievements in themselves—anticipated a tide of black literary production that continues with great force to the present day. One could also argue that the thought and language of Washington and Du Bois are everywhere to be felt in the thought and language of the distinguished line of black thinkers, writers, and artists who followed them.

In the half century we have been considering, material, intellectual, social, and psychological changes in the lives of many Americans went forward at such extreme speed and on such a massive scale that the enormously diverse writing of the time registers, at its core, degrees of shocked recognition of the human consequences of these radical transformations. Sometimes the shock is expressed in recoil and denial—thus the persistence, in the face of the ostensible triumph of realism, of the literature of diversion: nostalgic poetry, sentimental and melodramatic drama, and swashbuckling historical novels. The more enduring fictional and nonfictional prose forms of the era, however, come to terms imaginatively with the individual and collective dislocations and discontinuities associated with the closing out of the frontier, urbanization, intensified secularism, unprecedented immigration, the surge of national wealth unequally distributed, revised conceptions of human nature and destiny, the reordering of family and civil life, and the pervasive spread of mechanical and organizational technologies.

NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY AND LITERATURE

For the history of the native peoples of the United States, 1830 and 1890 mark the watershed moments within the nineteenth century: 1830 is the date of the passage by Congress of the Indian Removal Act, granting President Andrew Jackson permission to relocate eastern Indians to lands west of the Mississippi, and 1890 is both the year the census bureau announced the closing of the frontier and the year of the massacre of Lakota people by U.S. troops at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. It was in the cold of Wounded Knee that Indian “history” seemed to come to an end.

In the years leading up to Wounded Knee, a familiar pattern of events had emerged: advancement by white settlers onto Indian lands contrary to treaty provisions, failure of the state and federal governments to take action against the settlers, exasperated retaliation by the Indians—and then the Indian wars, against Black Hawk and his Sauk and Fox (in 1832, the last Indian war fought east of the Mississippi) and then on to the Plains and into the Northwest and Southwest, against the Lakota and Cheyenne and Nez Perces, the Navajo and the Apache. In the wake of these conflicts, Indians were forced to accept as “reservations” tracts of land far reduced from those they had traditionally occupied.

Although the colonists and—after the American Revolution—the federal government had made treaties with the tribes on a nation-to-nation basis, Native American sovereignty was severely challenged from the Jackson presidency (1829–37) forward. Congress’s decision to end the policy of making treaties with the Indians in 1871 was a downgrading of the political status of the tribes, one that reflected an increasingly clear post-Civil War military reality. This is to say that in spite of the well-publicized defeat of General George Armstrong Custer’s Seventh Cavalry on the Little Bighorn River in 1876 by the combined forces of the Cheyenne and Sioux, armed resistance to the advancing settlers by the Natives was not pursued. In 1877, when Chief Joseph and his Nez Perces attempted to flee to Canada rather than be restricted to reservations, they were forced finally to surrender. By 1886, when
Army in the Southwest, the plight of many of the tribes was desperate. In these circumstances, consistent with tradition, many Native people turned to spiritual means to bring about healing and renewal. Thus arose the movement called the Ghost Dance religion.

On New Year's Day 1889, a Paiute from present-day Nevada, known by his adoptive name Jack Wilson or by his boyhood name Wovoka, experienced a powerful vision that was followed by a total eclipse of the sun. In his vision, Wovoka was transported to heaven, where God gave him a number of instructions to bring to his people. Interestingly, these were an amalgam of various American Indian traditions and Christian teachings: no lying, no stealing, no wars, and the performance of a set of dances that was to last (accounts vary) five or six nights. If the Indians performed the dances, sang the accompanying songs, and followed the teachings of Wovoka, the virtually extinct buffalo herds would return and the white invaders would miraculously (and, in Wovoka's Christian-influenced teaching, nonviolently) disappear.

Although Wovoka's message was essentially pacific, some of the warrior groups of the Plains largely abandoned the Christian elements or altered them in accordance with their own cultural patterns. It was fear of the ghost dancers that brought the Seventh Cavalry—Custer's former command—to Wounded Knee in December 1890.

Although the dates 1865 and 1914 are not especially important for a sense of history from the Native point of view, still, the almost fifty-year period between those two dates is certainly important for Native American literature. In that period, Native oratorical performances—the formal speeches that always accompanied treaty-making—began to be more carefully recorded. (Some of the earlier oratory that had become models of indigenous eloquence, like Jefferson's citation of Chief Logan's speech, for example, are highly suspect—or as in the case of the widely anthologized 1855 address attributed to Chief Seathl, largely fabricated. The version most commonly reproduced was actually written by William Arrowsmith in 1969!) In the 1880s and 1890s, amateur and professional anthropologists did fieldwork among the tribes and began to transcribe as faithfully as they could traditional oral performances. Then, going far beyond these early fieldworkers in their linguistic and cultural competence, anthropologists of the decades around the turn of the century produced translations that conveyed something of the sophistication and beauty of an oral tradition that was not, as the Native American was supposed to be, "vanishing" but, indeed, persisting vigorously in spite of trying circumstances.

Not only early anthropologists but—as we now call them—ethnomusicologists like Alice Fletcher and Frances Densmore paid particular attention to the songs of Native peoples. So did Natalie Curtis Burlin, whose curious compilation The Indians' Book appeared in 1907 with an approving endorsement by the great outdoorsman (and so admirer of the Indian!) former president Theodore Roosevelt. If many of these people viewed these literatures mainly as records of what was past or passing, still their publications had a current effect—on such people as Mary Austin, who, in an introduction to one of the first anthologies of American Indian poetry, George Cronyn's The Path on the Rainbow (1918), predicted that a relationship was "about to develop between Indian verse and the ultimate literary destiny of America," noting a similarity between the work of Native "poets" and that of the latest "literary fashions," the imagists.

While many Native people who remained on the reservation continued to perform in the various modes of the oral tradition, others who left the reservation began to use the written forms of Euro-Americans. For most of these people, English and writing were attained through attendance, forced or voluntary, at one of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools. That the boarding school experiences of many Native children was a horror has been thoroughly documented. Upon arrival, Native American children had their long hair cut short and their clothes burned. The boys, dressed in stiff collars, woolen pants and coats, and the girls in long dresses, were forbidden to speak their own languages and were humiliated for not obeying instructions in a language they did not understand. Many of the Indian school boards attempted to run away or commit suicide. Run by Catholics and Protestants of various denominations, these schools aimed to turn American Indians into people who would, like Booker T. Washington's modestly educated Negroes, take their decent but subordinate places in American society as blacksmiths, artisans, or for the women, domestic workers.

Other boarding-school children, such as Zitkala Sa and the medical doctor Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa), both Lakota people, and the Cherokee John Milton Oskison, made adjustments to this harsh setting in order to pursue an education that, painful as it was to acquire, was of value to them. Not surprisingly, their writing makes use of the familiar Western genres of autobiography, personal memoir, and short story to convey varieties of native experience and value.