

By the end of the Civil War (1861–1865), powerful forces began to emerge that would dominate life in America in the 20th century. The works of these naturalist writers continue to exert a strong influence on contemporary authors. He defined realism as "nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material," best exemplified in his novels such as "A Modern Instance" (1882), "The Rise of Silas Lapham" (1885), and "A Hazard of New Fortunes" (1890). Most American realism in the 19th century was limited to an optimistic treatment of the surface of life. However, the greatest American realists, Henry James and Mark Twain, went beyond mere superficial depiction of 19th-century America. James deeply explored the individual psychology of his characters, writing in a rich and complex style that supported his intense examination of the intricate human experience. Outside the narrow confines of local color, James described the scope of the American experience as no one had before or since, creating in "Huckleberry Finn" (1884) a masterpiece of American realism that stands as one of the greatest works of world literature. The term "Captain of Industry" was coined in the 1880s when financial and business magnates were celebrated for the first time as national heroes and models for young people aspiring to rise in the world through luck and courage. This marked the beginning of what Mark Twain called the "Gilded Age," an era of extremes: decline and progress, poverty and dazzling wealth, gloom and burgeoning hope—an age of spectacular excesses described by one historian as "the great barbecue." The pessimistic and deterministic ideas embraced by naturalism spread through the works of writers like Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, Henry Adams, and Theodore Dreiser. Skilled independent artisans became obsolete, unable to compete with machines operated by semi-skilled workers around the clock. During the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant (1869–1877), crimes of high-ranking federal officials were exposed in scandals unprecedented in U.S. history, with civic virtue reaching an all-time low. They wrote detailed descriptions of the lives of the oppressed and the extraordinary; frankly addressed human emotion and sexuality; and depicted men and women overwhelmed by the blind forces of nature. Amid the political turmoil of that time, the arts of political patronage and bribery reached new heights in the United States, leading to the first great age of political corruption in America. The war brought the first national conscription laws, imposed the first federal income taxes, and issued the first national currency in the form of paper money backed by the federal government instead of individual states and local banks. In America, it was shaped by the Civil War and social upheavals that undermined the comfortable faith of the era, and the unsettling teachings of Charles Darwin. The industrial North triumphed over the agricultural South, and from this victory arose a society based on collective labor and mass consumption. Traditional political alliances weakened, and new political groups emerged, drawing their strength from the working classes and declaring their allegiance to them. In cities, which were teeming with increasing numbers of the poor, ignorant, and unskilled, a great political change was taking place. As the lower classes sought and gained more power at the ballot box, political power centers shifted. Although realism and naturalism were products of the 19th century, their ultimate triumph came in the 20th century, with their spread among the general public and critics. William Dean Howells was the arbiter of literary realism in 19th-century America. Machines replaced more than half of the manual labor required in manufacturing. Naturalism, like realism, came from Europe.