The Corporation and the Transformation of American Culture

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, as the corporation was becoming a dominant force in American life, American writers responded to its torrid growth with praise and trepidation. One of the most pervasive manifestations of the corporation – the railroad – was both celebrated and feared. In 1868, Walt Whitman sang of the “mighty railroad” as one of “the great achievements of the present,” a wonder that “spann’d” the New World. But in his 1901 novel, The Octopus, Frank Norris described the corporate railroad as “the soulless force, the iron-hearted power” – an unrelenting monster that ravaged and consumed the landscape “from horizon to horizon.” Whitman’s railroad symbolizes not only industry but “modern” expansiveness. For Norris, the railroad stands as the “symbol of a vast power” that has no soul and an unfeeling heart. Both writers suggest that the railroad’s significance resides in its capacity as an organized structure that offers unprecedented reach and unrelenting growth. Put another way, the railroad is the corporation made visible, a creation symbolizing the energy and power of a new age, yet also looming with the presence of an impersonal, menacing giant. Chroniclers of the nineteenth century like Whitman and Norris tempt us to examine the corporation by studying its most spectacular examples – like the railroad – as organizations to be revered or condemned. But the story of the corporation requires a far more complex accounting than what is revealed by such apparently polarized responses.

If we focus only on narratives of corporate progress and corporate doom, we risk losing sight of the more deeply embedded cultural shifts generated by the corporation. If we examine only the most visible aspects of the corporation – the mighty industries controlled by robber barons – we miss the way that the technical instrument of incorporation led to an organizational culture that became naturalized in the practices of ordinary individuals. The corporation brought forth not only the loud and steady hum of American big business, with its tales of heroism and villainy, but also new notions of personhood and agency. The daily rhythms, habits of mind, and personal yearnings of working individuals were all influenced by a structural change so pervasive and fundamental that, like the atmosphere itself, it often went unnoticed and unnamed. Individuals, it seems, could apprehend the corporation only by its effects. As the literature of the time reveals, Americans often struggled to find the words to describe the corporate age.

In 1869, the prominent writer and railroad regulator Charles Francis Adams Jr. wrote that “the system of corporate life . . . is a new power, for which our language contains no name. We know what aristocracy, autocracy, democracy are; but we have no word to express government
by moneyed corporations.” Adams sensed that his culture was experiencing radical transformations, but he recognized that no one could articulate the inscrutable ways of the force driving these changes. “[C]orporate life” is a “system” that exists beyond language; Adams’ America had not yet come to terms with this sublime power. Adams was well aware, though, that this “new power” was not only changing business structure but also shaping “government” and “life.” He realized that the corporate form – the mode of organizational structure designed to administrate modern businesses – was transforming the deep ways that Americans conceived of themselves and their places in the world.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, only decades before Adams wrote, the United States was an agrarian society with a dispersed population whose daily interactions were typically intimate and familiar. By the end of the century, America was an industrialized nation where people were concentrated in major urban centers and relationships were often structured by bureaucratic networks. Business corporations permeated the nation; corporate form and logic not only governed the financial and industrial worlds but also organized the entire social order. The legal and economic entity of the corporation established new hierarchies and systems of power, changed the roles of government and families, forged new forms of relationships among individuals, and altered basic notions of time and selfhood. The United States was on its way to becoming the world’s first corporate society.

I. The corporate form

The word “corporation” (from the Latin corporare – to embody) referred, at first, to any group of people united as a body for a single purpose. In Europe, early forms of nonbusiness corporations – guilds, colonies, and townships – go back to classical times. In the Middle Ages, universities and churches organized themselves as corporations. The public charters of these early corporations granted life to the organizations beyond the death of their founders. This relative immortality would become one of the hallmarks of the modern corporation. By the early seventeenth century in Britain, the word “corporation” gained the legal sense of “an artificial person created by a royal charter, prescription, or act of legislature, and having authority to preserve certain rights in perpetual succession.” British common law, which underlies much of American law, makes careful distinction between “natural person” and “artificial person.” While the category of “natural person” referred to human beings, “artificial person” was a category deployed so that governments, churches, and corporations might enter into contracts, pay taxes, and be accountable to the law. Early business corporations owed their artificial personhood to a sovereign power that granted them specific legal rights in return for serving the public good. With a charter, business was conducted under the name of the corporation, and the law dealt with the entity rather than with the individuals who formed it.

In the United States, even before corporations gained constitutional rights over the course of the nineteenth century, they had distinct advantages over family businesses and partnerships. The special charters issued by the government often granted monopoly power to corporations, freeing them from competitive pressures. Because the corporation existed as a separate entity from its owners, it could outlive them and stay intact through multiple generations. Most important, corporations were usually granted limited liability, meaning that individual owners and investors were not personally responsible for the debts of the business. When individuals invested in a corporation, they risked only the money they invested, not their personal assets. Owners could escape responsibility for a corporation’s financial obligations, errors, negligence, or malfeasance.

The corporate form would eventually allow single business firms to contain and control many of the operations that had previously been performed by multiple firms and governed by an
The corporation and American culture

unpredictable market. The corporate form began proliferating among American businesses in the
1790s and early decades of the nineteenth century. The movement toward widespread incorporation
started in the North and became a national phenomenon by the 1830s. Corporate businesses
innovated sophisticated forms of financing to raise huge amounts of capital. Corporations issued
stocks, bonds, and hybrid securities; they took out bank loans, bought government bonds, secured
insurance policies, and invested in other corporations. Corporate businesses were soon able to ben-

Changes in the organizational structure of American businesses brought changes in the way
that capitalism functioned. As the influential business historian Alfred Chandler wrote, “[T]he
visible hand of management replaced what Adam Smith referred to as the invisible hand of market
forces.” For Adam Smith, market fluctuations occurred beyond the influence of any individual
actor; in a modern corporate system, however, managers could manipulate production and distri-
bution in such a way that economic forces were no longer beyond the reach of human influence.
Managers designed systems that were newly powerful and profitable, yet many of the individuals
cought within these systems – managers and workers alike – felt alienated by their abstract rela-
tionship to a network whose hierarchical structure would outlive any individual within it. When
individuals tried to weigh the economic benefits of corporations against their social costs, their
considerations extended beyond the realm of business. While American producers were con-
erned that they might not be able to compete with large corporations, so, too, were owners and
workers afraid that the corporation might degrade the dignity of the American laborer.

II. Corporate expansion in nineteenth-century America

To fully understand the tension between the promise of economic progress and the fear of social
doom that characterized American attitudes toward corporations in the nineteenth century, it is
important to understand the role of the corporation in America before 1800. From its earliest
days, America had an unsettled relationship with corporations: corporate operations contained
the seed of democratic practice, but they also relied on undemocratic systems of exploitation.
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Yet even as corporations provided a framework for democratic governance, they also epitomized
the ways that wealth and power fed off society’s most vulnerable individuals. Many of the settlers
in Virginia were conscripted from among Britain’s dispossessed tenants, imprisoned vagrants, and
petty criminals. The Virginia Company had a corporate formation that “made conditions for
servants worse in Virginia than in England,” resulting in servants who frequently died working for abusive landowners who did not abide by the customs and laws that controlled the British system of servitude. The historian Edmund Morgan writes that Virginia in the early seventeenth century used “a system of labor that treated men as things,” setting the stage for slavery.

If the American system of governance has corporate roots, its origins also lie in the revolt against corporate power. In colonial America, most businesses were owned and run by families or partnerships that opposed corporations for fear that the corporations monopolized commodity markets. Leading American intellectuals followed their British and French counterparts in holding anticorporate views. The Boston Tea Party arose from economic opposition to the East India Company – a transnational corporation that had successfully influenced the government to deny local competitors a fair market. American Revolutionaries conflated massive corporate power with the crown and aristocratic privilege. The defeat of the British was, for many Americans, not just a victory over political tyranny but also a triumph over British corporate control.

Conveners at the Constitutional Convention knew that the politics and economics of the new nation would be intertwined. American leaders viewed corporations as both necessary engines of the economy and potentially undemocratic entities. They debated whether or not the new federal government should have the power to grant corporate charters, yet the United States Constitution makes no mention of corporations. What emerged was a system in which state legislatures issued special charters to incorporate businesses that would serve the public good.

State-issued corporate charters often granted monopoly power and limited liability for a specific amount of time; in return, the corporations were highly regulated. Just as the British monarchy had granted charters to massive trading companies in order to further the colonial ends of the British government, states granted corporate charters to advance government projects. The historian William G. Roy explains that the state depended on external resources to fund its much needed infrastructure: “While fledgling American governments were limited by both the low level of commercialization and the strong antitax sentiment that had helped fuel rebellion against colonial rule, the corporate form gave them access to the resources of the world of finance capitalism.” Granting corporate charters allowed state governments to navigate the narrow path that lay between their citizens’ mistrust of centralized authority and the clear need for public works projects.

Murat noticed that the corporation was both a public good and a profit-making enterprise. Impediments that might have checked corporate growth in other countries – unwieldy centralized governments, landed aristocracy, the church – did not exist in the United States. Before 1790, state governments had incorporated about thirty businesses; by 1861, state governments had incorporated over twenty-two thousand businesses.

Commentators in the early nineteenth century realized the uniqueness of the corporate form that was shaping the American economy; they were often eager to articulate the various ways that American systems of law and economy differed from those of England. In 1832, the American legal scholars Joseph Angell and Samuel Ames wrote:
What is done by England by combination is most generally done by a combination of individuals, established by mere articles of agreement. On the other hand, what is done here by the co-operation of several persons, is, in the greater number of instances, the result of a consolidation effected by an express act or charter of incorporation . . . [W]e cannot but be impressed with a deep sense of the importance of this law in our own country [because] in no country have corporations been multiplied to so great an extent, as in our own. 27

The American corporation gave Angell and Ames senses of distinction and national pride. The historian Kenneth Lipartito explains that American “openness to the corporation was no simple legal quirk. . . . Corporations came to be seen as little republics in the tradition of voluntary self-rule.” 28 The corporate form symbolized not only the importance of the American economy on a global scale but also the strength of a political system built not on inherited custom but on the written word of explicit law.

However, consumers did not always feel the benefits of the corporate form. In the first half of the nineteenth century, debates about corporations grew in intensity and frequency. These debates frequently involved questions of whether or not a corporation provided a sufficient public good in return for the special legal dispensations it received. For example, in 1818, the Pennsylvania Senate passed an act incorporating the Lehigh Navigation Company, granting it sole jurisdiction on the Lehigh River for mining and transportation purposes. The Company served a public good by opening up mountain streams that had been difficult to navigate. But ten years later, critics accused the Company of using its monopoly powers to discourage competition in coal mining. The legislature engaged in a fierce debate, arguing whether or not a charter granting a virtual monopoly remained necessary for a business that was stable enough to secure private funding. 29

American consumers were especially wary of corporations that seemed to use “monopoly” power to influence prices. 30 In 1835, a group of journeyman artisans in Newark, New Jersey, declared:

We entirely disapprove of the incorporation of Companies, for carrying on manual mechanical business, inasmuch as we believe their tendency is to eventuate and produce monopolies, thereby crippling the energies of individual enterprise, and invading the rights of smaller capitalists. 31

The artisans use the language of the American revolutionary spirit, pitting “individual” “smaller capitalists” against the “invading” imperial force of the corporation. These artisans, like many American producers who struggled to compete against corporations, were not antibusiness; rather, they feared that corporations were functioning mainly to concentrate power and help the rich grow richer.

The 1820s and 1830s saw the rise of conflicts over corporate charters. 32 The anticorporate spirit of Andrew Jackson’s party stemmed from an objection to the privileges and corruption that permeated a system of special incorporation. In his 1835 book, What Is a Monopoly?, the attorney Theodore Sedgwick declared:

Every corporate grant is directly in the teeth of the doctrine of equal rights, for it gives to one set of men the exercise of privileges which the main body can never enjoy. Every such grant is equally adverse to the fundamental maxim of free trade for it carries on its face that no one but the corporators are free to carry on the trade in question, with the advantages which the charter confers. 33
Sedgwick suggested that special incorporation was un-American at its core—an affront to both “equal rights” and “free trade.” But even with the widespread distrust of the charter system, many wage earners “clamored for shares” of stock, eager to invest in powerful companies.34

Instead of seeking an end to corporations in the United States, many critics sought to restore fairness by allowing universal access to the corporate form.35 Even some of the harshest critics thought that the problems of corruption and monopolism might be solved by making the process of incorporation more democratic. George Taylor, a critic of coal corporations, wrote in 1833, “Let us all be placed upon an equal footing. The door must either be thrown wide open or be entirely closed.”36 After continued public pressure from critics, the door to incorporation opened slowly with laws of general incorporation.37 The laws—which most states adopted by 1875—conferred corporate status on any organization that abided by certain rules.38 Instead of granting special charters one at a time, state governments detailed the circumstances under which individuals could incorporate. Under laws of general incorporation, any privileges or immunities that came with incorporation had to be available to anyone willing to file with the state. General incorporation laws reduced the image of special privilege and often made industries more competitive by making the corporate form’s many legal and financial benefits available to those who would compete.

The relationships between the corporation and the state and between the corporation and the public changed dramatically under laws of general incorporation. In the age of special incorporation, when corporations existed to serve the public good, the state granted a corporation authority and purpose. Laws of general incorporation eventually removed the state from the inner workings and objectives of corporate businesses; in turn, corporations became increasingly widespread and autonomous.39 Gradually, states replaced the limited terms of corporations with perpetual terms. As the legal scholar Gregory Mark puts it, “[T]he transformation of the private law of corporations from 1819 to the 1920s is best described as a move from a circumstance in which a corporation could do only those things specifically allowed by its charter to one in which a corporation could do anything not specifically prohibited by it.”40 Whereas corporations once had to demonstrate a “clear benefit to the larger community,” the new belief was that “the larger community was served by strengthening the individuals who formed corporations.”41 Under laws of general incorporation, corporations moved from the realm of public franchise to the realm of private interest. The American legal system encouraged the growth of a national market through its hospitality toward American business interests. So hastened, too, the tremendous growth of corporate political power.

III. The evolution of corporate personhood

By the end of the nineteenth century, corporations began to be assigned constitutional rights that on their face had been written for individuals. Because the Constitution makes no mention of corporations, it was up to the states and the courts to determine their legal status. Legal cases defined and clarified corporate power; among the most important were Dartmouth College v. Woodward42 (1819) and Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railway43 (1886). In Dartmouth College v. Woodward, the Supreme Court limited the states’ power to regulate or dissolve corporations. At issue was whether the state of New Hampshire could alter the charter granted to Dartmouth College by King George III in 1769. The New Hampshire government sought to turn the private college into a public one so that the governor could appoint trustees. Dartmouth sued the state, and the Supreme Court sided with the college. New Hampshire, effectively, could not convert corporate private property to public property, even if that private property was originally intended to serve the public good.
The Dartmouth College case set the precedent that a corporate charter has the status of a legal contract. Historian James Willard Hurst writes that the case extended the protection of the contract clause of the Federal Constitution not only over a donor’s gift and the college’s existing assets but also over the frame of organization and powers of the institution as created by the original charter, as against later intruding legislation. What the corporate charter gave and what the Constitution protected was thus not only an official license but also a pattern for organizing certain human relations.  

Governments could not interfere with existing corporate charters. In his famous ruling on the Dartmouth case, Chief Justice John Marshall used words that would carry special resonance in subsequent cases regarding corporations:

A Corporation is an artificial being, invisible, intangible, and existing only in contemplation of law. Being the mere creature of law, it possesses only those properties which the charter of its creation confers upon it, either expressly, or as incidental to its very existence.

Marshall insisted that corporations are subordinate to state power; yet his ruling also raised the legal status of the corporation, allowing for the eventual erosion of state control over corporations. Most important, Marshall’s view that the corporation is “an artificial being” offers later jurists the basis to decide that the corporation is entitled to a measure of constitutional protection and suggests that this “creature of law” has private rights.

When Marshall declared that the corporation was an “artificial being,” he meant that it was a creation of the state: the corporation was not a natural being, which would exist independent of the state. But as Mark suggests, “[T]he rise of general incorporation laws and the general elimination of the special privileges that accompanied special charters played major roles in making the corporation appear to be a natural way to organize property.” Put another way, as corporate values and functions were no longer under control of the state through specific charters, the corporate form became a common way of organizing business, and the corporation was considered less and less a creation of the state. By the 1880s, in fact, corporate property was no longer considered artificial. The corporation was no longer primarily a creature fashioned by the government for purposes of administration and regulation. Instead, the corporation was swiftly becoming the normal way for private firms to organize labor, management, and financial capital.

Corporate personhood naturalized the corporation. What might otherwise have seemed ghostly and abstract – a corporate body both immortal and unlocatable – became more human.

Mark writes:

Personification has been vital because it (1) implies a single and unitary source of control over the collective property of the corporation’s members, (2) defines, encourages, and legitimizes the corporation as an autonomous, creative, self-directed economic being, and (3) captures rights, ultimately even constitutional rights, for corporations thereby giving corporate property unprecedented protection from the state.

At the moment that corporations became increasingly dissociated from their shareholders, they began to gain the powers and rights guaranteed to individuals. Where corporations were once empowered by the state to act in its service, they became empowered by individual investors and
were increasingly protected from state intervention. Mark puts it succinctly: “The corporation, once the derivative tool of the state, had become its rival.”

In 1886, the Supreme Court granted corporations explicit constitutional protection. In *Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railway*, the Court ruled that corporate property was protected as the private property of the corporators. The Court asserted that a corporation was a legal person and that its property must be regulated in a way that conformed to the equal protection and due process provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Fourteenth Amendment, of course, was written to address one of the central ethical, legal, and moral crises in United States history. As one of the Reconstruction Amendments, it was intended to guarantee the citizenship and rights of former slaves. But following *Santa Clara*, the Fourteenth Amendment was used most frequently to procure rights for corporations. Chief Justice Hugo Black, in a 1938 dissent, remarked:

> [O]f the cases in this Court in which the Fourteenth Amendment was applied during the first fifty years after its adoption, less than one-half of 1 percent invoked it in protection of the negro race, and more than 50 percent asked that its benefits be extended to corporations.

The invocation of the Fourteenth Amendment on behalf of corporations would be used to invalidate hundreds of statues designed to limit corporate power, including child labor laws, safety standards, worker compensation for injuries, and work week limitations. While corporations were gaining the guaranteed rights of personhood, the labor force itself became increasingly impersonal and disempowered.

### IV. Work, opportunity, and the language of critique in corporate America

Even as courts granted corporations some of the same rights as humans, corporate organizations gained power beyond the grasp of any individual human. Corporations became increasingly depersonalized: instead of being guided by cultural norms and traditions, businesses abided by bureaucratic rules designed to maximize utility. As Chandler explains, a new figure emerged at the heart of the American economic landscape: the career manager. Managers owned little or no equity in the firm, but as full-time, salaried executives, they made administrative choices usually designed for the long-term benefit of the enterprise. Managers did not themselves buy, sell, or move products but monitored and coordinated production and distribution, and they soon monitored and coordinated other monitors and coordinators. As many theorists have remarked, the mechanical and inflexible constraints of bureaucracy threatened human agency. The structure of the workplace considered employees anonymous cogs in giant machines, connected to other humans only in an abstract flowchart of operations. The anguish of individuals in a bureaucratized firm stemmed not only from the possibility of exploitation but also from the depersonalization of the workplace. When personal relationships gave way to functionalized, systematized, and bureaucratized relationships, individual workers commonly felt atomized and alienated.

American literature of the nineteenth century often reflected the cultural anxiety that pervades a society in which relationships could be defined by their organizational status above all else. The literary critic Susan Mizruchi writes, “Next to the American legal system, there was perhaps no other cultural domain more interested in the affairs of business than American literature.” As if in response to Charles Francis Adams, American writers endeavored to find a language to describe the emerging corporate culture.
One of the first pieces of American fiction to take place in an office is Herman Melville’s 1853 novella, “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street.” Bartleby is an office worker who moves from being an effective scrivener who does his work “silently, palely, mechanically” to one who eventually declines to do any work at all, declaring at every request, “I would prefer not to.” Bartleby refuses to be a productive member of the Wall Street business, and, more crucially, he refuses to be humanized despite the narrator’s frantic efforts. As a figure who deflects all attempts at sympathy, Bartleby might stand for the alienated worker in a culture where personal relationships are being replaced by corporate ones. Indeed, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the rise of banks and insurance companies allowed businesses “both to raise capital and to distance themselves from the kinds of personal obligation that the existing credit system entailed.”

For Melville, as for Americans anxious about cultural change, the office is a place of inscrutability. What should be the site for rational action is actually laden with mystery.

Bartleby is a member of the emergent white-collar labor force made up of interchangeable figures. After all, when a corporation had a personhood distinct from its constituent members, the lives of the members themselves were not as important as they would have been in a partnership or family-owned business. The historian Barry Shank explains that the new labor demands of corporate culture created new social relations:

Large-scale business organizations were forced to hire such large numbers of managers that they had to reach beyond their immediate circle of family members and close acquaintances. Forced to deal with the contradictory needs of competitive capitalism and social affiliation, the modern corporation fostered the development of particular sensibilities and subjectivities. Shank describes the emergence of a corporate sensibility that had to navigate between modes of “affiliation” and “calculation.” Social relations in corporate America were shaped by what appeared to be a conflict between sympathy and profit.

As corporations became more pervasive and more powerful, critics felt new urgency in their endeavor to find the language of resistance. In 1871, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps published her novel The Silent Partner in response to what she perceived as the malignant values of corporate culture. She explains in her prefatory note, “Had Christian ingenuity been generally synonymous with the conduct of manufacturing corporations, I should have found no occasion for the writing of this book.” Phelps’s protagonist is Perley Kelso, a young woman who inherits a factory with hellish working conditions. She must overcome her role as “the silent partner,” a manager in name only who is relegated to silence in the business realm. The novel charts the restorative effects of her female influence on working conditions and labor unrest; she acts as a counter to the destructive, inhumane treatment imposed by the male managers. Perley refuses marriage – she does not want to become “a silent partner” in matrimony – but she brings a feminine sense of domesticity and care to her public work on behalf of laborers.

The Silent Partner describes woeful labor conditions, yet it also narrates a tale of new possibilities for women in the corporate age. Thousands of women moved from their farms to work in factories like the ones in Waltham and Lowell, Massachusetts. Millwork for women was exhausting and often dangerous, yet many women left their families for the factory. An 1858 article in The Atlantic Monthly, “Farming in New England,” declared that “farmer’s daughters . . . contemn the calling of their father, and will nine times out of ten marry a mechanic in preference to a farmer. They know that marrying a farmer is a serious business. They remember their worn-out mothers.” The article describes a generational change that was shocking to many Americans.
As the historian Thomas Dublin shows, the letters of mill women in the 1840s reveal their desires to leave rural life for the excitement of cities. Women wrote of new degrees of independence and freedom, as well as new expectations of friendship and love.

Corporate life seemed to offer unprecedented opportunity. Amidst the populist and reformist voices decrying corporate power were individuals eager to take advantage of new routes of social mobility. The historian Martin Sklar writes, “For many Americans, the corporation became the new frontier of opportunity that the western lands had once symbolized.” Large business organizations dwarfed traditional social institutions in their power and reach. The middle class was divided between those who contributed to corporate growth and those who “clung to proven, and presumably more fulfilling, ways of doing business.” The women who left for the factories and the men who chose professional positions over traditional vocations dramatized an embattled cultural shift – away from the family, the church, the small farm, the local community – and toward the corporation.

V. Corporate space and corporate time

The simultaneous anxiety and attraction that many Americans felt for an emergent corporate culture is given poetic form by Walt Whitman in his poems “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1855) and “Passage to India” (1868). Whitman recognizes that American corporate culture has rendered a new physical and spiritual landscape. But where some critics saw only the dismantling of tradition, Whitman yearned to discover new, inclusive forms of humanity. As if responding to the etymological roots of “incorporation,” Whitman repeatedly returns to the human body as he ponders new forms of intimacy in a corporate world. In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” the poet declares his wonder at the commuting masses and suggests an unbridgeable psychological distance from them: “Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes! How / curious you / are to me!” Human relations are strained in the corporate age: physical closeness seems not to yield intimacy. The poet ominously notes the “fires from the foundry chimneys / burning high / and glaringly into the night.” But he also begins to feel deep sympathy for these crowds of Americans and resolves the poem triumphantly: “Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! Cast black / shadows at nightfall! Cast red and yellow light / over the tops of the houses!” The poet feels doubt and hesitation toward a potentially alienating culture, but he is overcome by the promise of what one critic calls “the technological sublime.”

Whitman’s exuberance toward the technology of American progress resonates even more powerfully in “Passage to India.” The poem opens: “Singing my days, / Singing the great achievements of the present, / Singing the strong light works of engineers, / Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven / outvied,) / In the Old World the east the Suez Canal, / The New by its mighty railroad spanned, / The seas inlaid with eloquent wires; / Yet first to sound, and ever sound, the cry with thee / O soul, / The Past! the Past! the Past!” The poet yearns for “the Past!” even as he celebrates “the great achievements of the present” – the Suez Canal, the Union-Pacific railroad, the Atlantic cable. As in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” the poet’s hesitation is countered by the uplift of industrial promise: “I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the / shrill steam-whistle, / I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest / scenery in the world.” For Whitman, corporate technology seems not to disrupt the natural landscape so much as it opens up this pastoral utopia for all to experience. Yet there remains in the poem an undercurrent of doubt, a vision of the “unloving earth, without a throng to answer ours, / Cold earth, the place of graves.” The railroad and the telegraph transcend space and time, but the poet cannot help but sense a deathly gap between man and earth created by these technologies.
The railroad and telegraph enterprises epitomized American corporations; not only did they innovate modern corporate practices, but they also spread these bureaucratic innovations as they expanded. The railroad moved an unprecedented quantity of goods across great distances on a precise schedule. The telegraph allowed, for the first time ever, nearly instantaneous communication between distant locations. Prior to these technologies, owners generally managed their businesses personally. But the massive investment required for the construction and operation of rail and telegraph systems resulted in “the separation of ownership from management.”\textsuperscript{75} The operational requirements of the railroads demanded the first administrative hierarchies in the business world. Their financial requirements “brought trading and speculation on the New York Stock Exchange in its modern form.”\textsuperscript{76} In the 1850s and 1860s, managers of large American railroads “invented nearly all of the basic techniques of modern accounting.”\textsuperscript{77} By the 1880s, railroad managers constituted a recognizable business class, “the first professional business managers in America.”\textsuperscript{78} The railroad and telegraph systems assured businesses a continuous supply of raw materials and up-to-date information. The revolution in transportation and communication allowed for revolutions in production and distribution, making the American marketplace more efficient than ever before. On a deeper level, the railroad and telegraph brought with them new senses of space and time.

The sprawling geography of America, once thought to be virtually endless, became overlaid by a national system of commerce.\textsuperscript{79} In 1803, Thomas Jefferson had declared that it would take one thousand years for people to fully settle the region east of the Mississippi.\textsuperscript{80} By 1850, American settlers had reached the Pacific Ocean. And in 1869, the transcontinental railroad connected the coasts. A new view of the American landscape emerged: as the country made a push toward turning vast natural resources into manufactured consumer products, natural space became a commodity to be exploited for corporate profit. The historian Olivier Zunz describes the effect of national markets on Americans’ sense of space: “Each place became more readily identified as part of a network of places and relied increasingly on the network’s existence for its life.”\textsuperscript{81} Markets were no longer ruled by local merchants selling regional goods. Rather, corporations distributed brand-name products on a national scale as centers of commercial power became more concentrated. According to Lipartito, “[T]he tendency of modern business to sever the connection between the firm and its location” caused widespread consternation.\textsuperscript{82} As communities became more dependent on one another, many community members felt anxious about losing a sense of local belonging.\textsuperscript{83}

Corporations not only governed where and when workers would be employed but also changed their “inward apprehension of time.”\textsuperscript{84} Prior to the late nineteenth century, communities adhered to Local Mean Time, abiding by solar readings: when the sun was overhead, the local clocks and bells struck noon. Historian Alan Trachtenberg explains, “Local life arranged itself in relation to the most influential community timepieces: church bells and steeple clocks, and after the 1840’s, the cupolas and stark brick bell towers of mills and factories.”\textsuperscript{85} The public signals of time testified to the influence of industrial labor, but localities retained control over the community’s sense of daily time until corporations became powerful enough to institute a new system. In 1883, railway networks became sufficiently large to warrant a national timetable, and the railroad corporations introduced Standard Railway Time. Most cities quickly adopted the four uniform standards of time that the railroads agreed upon, and soon the Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific Standard Time zones “transcended the railroad world” and were broadly accepted by Americans.\textsuperscript{86} The sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel explains that this shift in understanding time engendered a shift in American values: “What seems to have replaced nature as a temporal referencing anchor is the principle of rationality, long viewed as one of the key characteristics of modern civilization.”\textsuperscript{87} National systematization brought with it a new mode
of consciousness, shaping how individuals conceived of their place in the world. Space and time may have felt natural, but they were corporate.

VI. Managerial culture

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, individual Americans began to adhere rigidly to quantified time. According to historian T. J. Jackson Lears, “the ‘pace of modern life,’ a staple of popular sociology, is a direct result of the bureaucratic imperative in organized capitalism – the demand for disciplined, systematic work.”

Thinkers such as Frederick Winslow Taylor developed management philosophies designed to increase the efficiency of labor. Managerialism spread rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century when Taylor and others brought into the factory the administrative structure that governed the railroad corporations. Though Taylor did not write *The Principles of Scientific Management* until 1911, his work ushering in the scientific management movement began in the 1880s. He wanted to end the “wastes of human effort” caused by the “awkward, inefficient, or ill-directed movements of men.” Taylor’s solution was to break down every factory task into a series of elements and prescribe precise movements in order to optimize each worker’s performance. Managers sought to design systems of labor that were fully comprehensive; in Taylor’s vision, every work detail would be dictated and controlled. The stopwatch and the flowchart became emblematic of a system in which managers timed and directed each labor task.

This is the age when corporations turned “artisans into workers,” to use historian Bruce Laurie’s resonant phrase. Laurie describes not only a shift in responsibility for laborers but also a dramatic transformation of identity. As late as the 1870s, the American economy was controlled by local merchants who worked with master craftsmen to produce and distribute goods. But as the labor historian David Montgomery writes, “[N]ew methods of industrial management undermined the very foundation of craftsmen’s functional autonomy. Job analysis through time and motion study allowed management to learn, then to systematize the way the work itself was done.” In the new administrative system, knowledge was to be held by management, not by laborers. Workers were valued insofar as they adhered to the precise guidelines of a bureaucracy that claimed to be scientific. The ideal worker in a Taylorized business used hands that were dissociated from the head; managers saw workers as brainless and compliant. Managers had always controlled work to a certain extent, but now they controlled the decisions made during the course of work. The business historian Peter Drucker writes, “Scientific management is all but a systematic philosophy of worker and work. Altogether it may well be the most powerful as well as the most lasting contribution America has made to Western thought since the federalist papers.”

Even if managers did not explicitly subscribe to Taylorism, scientific management provided the bedrock principles that governed the relationship between management and labor in most corporations. Although Taylor’s own efforts at scientific management never had the effect he intended, the once radical idea of treating human workers as so many parts of a vast machine quickly became normal practice, even outside the factory.

The quest for corporate efficiency took its toll on the American labor force. The financial distress of workers was compounded by what many experienced as new forms of social and cultural disorientation. Historian Robert H. Wiebe describes the alienating effects of corporate managerial culture on many American workers:

As the pace of industrialization quickened early in the eighties, the incomprehensible ways of the corporation were also alienating a multitude of wage earners. Rapidly losing control over their working lives, they knew only that decisions made somewhere else pushed them about like so many cattle.
Highly systematized labor forms crystallized into increasingly regulated social forms. Significantly, the anxieties brought about by this cultural change were not limited to individuals directly involved with big businesses. Even those who at one time appeared to live beyond the reach of corporate power felt its grasp. ⁹⁸

As a number of literary critics have remarked, the literature of the late nineteenth century responded to prevailing senses of alienation and dislocation. ⁹⁹ Many individuals felt that the nation was not living up to its promise, that Americans were not leading lives that followed the republican ideals of individualism and independence. Not only had the great fissure of the Civil War not been repaired – the devastating sacrifice never fully redeemed and a system based on racial exploitation never fully destroyed – but the emerging culture made many individuals question the possibility of self-determination in their daily lives. A number of writers believed that the end of the nineteenth century required a literary response that was clear-eyed, unromantic, and unsentimental. The novel might act as a cultural corrective. Leading literary spokesman William Dean Howells advocated literary realism, declaring, “[L]et fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know.” ¹⁰⁰ For Howells, morally complex men and women were often submerged in situations beyond their full control, beyond, even, their powers of comprehension. Trachtenberg writes of the literary movement, “On the whole, realism portrayed the old American credo of a community of autonomous natural beings as a sad illusion.” ¹⁰¹ For many Americans, life and work were no longer secure or reliable.

Howells’ 1884 novel, The Rise of Silas Lapham, is among the first of many American works to feature a businessman as its central character. ¹⁰² Howells reveals the social upheaval wracking individuals like Silas Lapham, a paint manufacturer who has risen from the family farm to “colossal fortune.” ¹⁰³ Lapham realizes he lives in a new age, declaring, “The day of small things was past, and I don’t suppose it will ever come again in this country.” ¹⁰⁴ But Lapham’s millions won’t buy him cultural capital, and he struggles with the moral choices he must make in order to maintain his fortune. When Lapham loses his wealth because he abides by his conscience in a business decision, the novel suggests that business interests and morality are not compatible. Howells punctures the myth of the American self-made man in the age of big business, and his narrative charts the painful choices of unheroic citizens in a newly corporatized world. The business world crunches onward, precipitating social uncertainty and operating without morality.

Perhaps the American writer who was most enthralled with the business world at the end of the nineteenth century was Mark Twain. He was a key figure in the commercialization of the literary profession, eager to connect himself to patrons and freely admitting his own money lust. ¹⁰⁵ Yet his novels are far from celebrations of the culture brought forth under corporate regimes. In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, for instance, Tom is a young schemer who manipulates boys into paying him for a chance to fulfill his chore of whitewashing a fence. In a day, Tom experiences a microcosmic version of the American dream: “And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth.” ¹⁰⁶ Tom learns a fundamental rule of capitalism: “[I]n order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain.” ¹⁰⁷ Readers are taught to be even more suspicious of Tom Sawyer in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, when Tom plays at being a young boss. He is the comical leader of a gang, leading with a paternal power upon which F. W. Taylor might nod his approval. Huck tells us that, “Tom superintended. He could out-superintend any boy I ever see.” ¹⁰⁸ As Huck and Jim find out, though, Tom is a cruel parody of a manager, inflicting pain in the name of control. Our last view of Tom, after he has led Huck and Jim in a violent, humiliating scheme, is with his watch: “Tom’s most well, now, and got his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch, and is always seeing what time it is.” ¹⁰⁹ In reminding
himself of his adventures, the boy fantasizes about being a corporate manager, keeping watch over
a systematized world, retaining precise command.

Tom's bullet watch symbolizes the confluence of violence and time management, two themes
that come together in Twain's next novel, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. Hank
Morgan, the Yankee, is the “head superintendent” of a massive arms factory that makes “guns,
revolvers, cannon, boilers, engines, all sorts of labour-saving machinery.” Embedded in Twain’s
joke – that the machinery saves labor by killing it – is a serious critique of the alienation facing
workers whose jobs were fully dictated by a detached managerial system. To save labor through
models of pure efficiency is to destroy the humanity of the labor force. The Yankee finds himself
in Camelot in the sixth century, where he quickly becomes known as “the Boss” and sets out to
industrialize the country stuck in the “ungente” codes of medieval aristocracy. Twain’s mock-
ery of a ridiculous chivalric culture turns into a devastating critique of a Taylorized system in
which Hank, like a grown-up and professionalized Tom Sawyer, plays out an unchecked fantasy
of managerial domination. Hank thinks of the country as a “corporation” and molds individuals
in a “Man-Factory.” Hank systematizes and mechanizes the world, fashioning himself into
a managerial class dictator who commands mass violence. The Boss’s vision of progress ends,
finally, in an electrified apocalypse.

A Connecticut Yankee was published with over 200 illustrations by Dan Beard, the most famous
of which is titled “The Slave Driver” (see Figure 3.1). It features a caped man holding a whip in
triumph and standing on the neck of a shackled young woman. The man’s face is unmistakably
that of Jay Gould, the most powerful and infamous speculator of the era. Beard literalizes
Twain’s allegory: yesterday’s slave drivers are today’s corporate titans. Indeed, for much of the
American public, corporate power at the end of the century felt tyrannical. It is notable that
the stepped-on “slave” is a white woman; the illustration suggests that white workers experienced
their labor exploitation as racial degradation.

Much of the public resentment toward corporations was a response to what historian Naomi
Lamoreaux calls the “great merger movement” of 1895 to 1904, when “hundreds of firms van-
ished suddenly into horizontal consolidations,” and the nation “transformed overnight from a
nation of freely competing, individually owned enterprises into a nation dominated by a small
number of giant corporations.” At the end of the century, the economy lacked any strong
countervailing forces to the corporation: consumers had few buying choices, the government was
friendly to corporate power, and militias violently overpowered the frequent strikes of unions.
Historian Roland Marchand writes, “For all the legal legitimacy” of corporate personhood, “the
great corporation of the early twentieth century still conspicuously lacked a comparable social
and moral legitimacy in the eyes of the public.” The staggering size and power of big business led
many individuals to believe that corporations were cold, corrupt, immoral behemoths. As Frank
Norris wrote in 1901, the railroad corporation was “the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching
into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus.”

But to think of corporate power in the nineteenth century only as a cruel industrialist stand-
ing on the necks of innocents or as a voracious monster consuming the nation is to miss the
quieter story of bureaucracy and regulation. As Jean-Christophe Agnew suggests, capitalism took
command not by fiery force but through a “flattened by the systematic and collective practices that habituated
Americans to the new, systemic rules of capitalism as a market form of life and that did so in ways
of which most Americans at the time were only dimly and bemusedly aware.” The corporation
transformed the American economic system in the nineteenth century, but its deepest effects
were felt on levels of culture that, for many Americans, were not obviously connected to modes
of capitalist exchange. As Agnew suggests, most Americans did not realize the extent to which
corporations governed their sense of agency, structured their feeling, and formed their notions of
Figure 3.1  Dan Beard, “The Slave Driver,” from *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (New York: Webster, 1889), 465
space and time. It took many years for critics and writers to find language that might accurately describe “the system of corporate life,” as Charles Francis Adams called it. By the time American individuals might have had the language and vision clear enough to weigh the benefits of corporate life against its costs, the corporate form had already pervaded their identities.

Notes

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1 Due to the size and complexity of their operations, railroads were pioneers in corporate innovation. Alfred Chandler writes, “[T]he rail and telegraph companies were themselves the first modern business enterprises to appear in the United States.” Alfred Chandler, The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977), 79.


4 Charles F. Adams Jr., “A Chapter of Erie,” in Chapters of Erie and Other Essays, ed. Charles F. Adams, Jr. and Henry Adams (Boston: Osgood, 1871), 97. Alan Trachtenberg opens his important study The Incorporation of America with this famous quote.


6 On the subject of personhood, the English jurist Sir William Blackstone wrote:

Persons are divided by the law into either natural persons or artificial. Natural persons are such as the God of nature formed us; artificial are such as are created and devised by human laws for the purposes of society and government, which are called corporations or bodies politic.


8 Ibid., 148.

9 Ibid., 156.

10 Chandler, Visible Hand, 1.

11 For an example of concern about unfair competition, see George Taylor, Effect of Incorporated Coal Companies upon the Anthracite Coal Trade of Pennsylvania (Pottsville, Pa.: Bannan, 1833), 19–22. For an example of concern about the degradation of labor, see Nathan Appleton, Introduction of the Power Loom and Origin of Lowell (Lowell, Mass.: Penhallow, 1858), 15–16.


14 Ibid., 208.


16 Ted Nace, Gangs of America: The Rise of Corporate Power and the Disabling of Democracy (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), 34.

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18 Adam Smith, for example, was a staunch critic of corporations, believing that they were unnecessary and yielded monopolies that would harm the public. In *The Wealth of Nations*, he wrote:

> Being the managers rather of other people’s money than of their own, it cannot well be expected that they should watch over it with the same anxious vigilance with which the partners in a private guild frequently watch over their own.

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776; New York: Modern Library, 2000), 800. Franklin and the framers of the Constitution, influenced by Smith and other moral sense philosophers, were skeptical of concentrated power, whether financial or political. They considered monopolies an economic and moral evil.


21 James Madison argued for putting the federal government in charge of corporations, but many delegates wanted to keep the power to grant charters in local hands. Some delegates were skeptical of the concentrated power and wealth of centralized institutions, arguing that the potential outsized power of corporations could be a threat to democracy. See Bruce R. Scott, *Capitalism: Its Origins and Evolution as a System of Governance* (New York: Springer, 2011), 252–3.

22 For example, a 1781 charter incorporating the Massachusetts Medical Society said it would help the “health and lives of many valuable individuals”; a 1789 charter incorporating the Beverly Cotton Manufactury explained that “the promotion of useful manufactures” would increase the “happiness and welfare” of the Commonwealth by “increasing the agriculture and extending the commerce of the country.” Quoted in Maier, “Revolutionary Origins,” 55.

23 The device of the charter “assumed that corporations were legally privileged organizations that had to be closely scrutinized by the legislature because their purpose had to be made consistent with public welfare.” Ronald Seavoy, *The Origins of the American Business Corporation, 1784–1835* (New York: Greenwood, 1982), 5.


26 Wright, “Capitalism,” 148. Wright lists some of the many business sectors that included corporate firms before 1861: infrastructure, banking, insurance, manufacturing, transportation, mining, utilities, education, cemeteries, and entertainment.


30 As Robert Wright points out, “[E]arly Americans did not possess the vocabulary to express market power with precision, so they labeled as ‘monopoly’ every business that did not function in . . . perfectly competitive markets.” Wright, “Capitalism,” 157.


32 According to the historian Martin Horwitz, special incorporation was the right form for an “under-developed society, with little available private capital” that required “that the legal system provide legal arrangements that guaranteed private investors certainty and predictability of economic consequences.” “But as development proceeded,” Horwitz continues, “the early monopolistic strategy for encouraging economic growth soon became a legal barrier to further growth.” Martin J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780–1860* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 111.


35 Many Americans believed that their economy depended on corporate strength. In 1858, the powerful textile merchant Nathan Appleton wrote, “[M]anufactures cannot be carried on to any great extent in this country in any other manner than by joint stock companies. A large capital is necessary to success.” Nathan Appleton, Introduction of the Power Loom and Origin of Lowell (Lowell, Mass.: Penhallow, 1858), 30.

36 Taylor, Effect of Incorporated Coal Companies, 26.

37 The first statute offering general incorporation was passed by New York State in 1811. By 1902, any individual in the U.S. “could receive a corporate charter merely by filing some papers with the state.” Nace, Gangs of America, 72.


39 Naomi Lamoreaux points out that when states began passing laws of general incorporation in the mid-nineteenth century, corporations were not immediately given free rein by the government: “[E]ven after the passage of general incorporation laws, public mistrust of corporations meant that firms that adopted this form of organization were exposed to a greater degree of public intervention than that borne by partnerships.” Naomi Lamoreaux, “The Partnership Form of Organization: Its Popularity in Early-Nineteenth-Century Boston,” in Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700–1850, ed. Conrad E. Wright and Katheryn P. Viens (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2005), 273.


41 Ibid., 1454.

42 17 U.S. 518 (1819).

43 118 U.S. 394 (1886).


45 State legislatures responded to the Dartmouth ruling by immediately asserting their sovereignty, adding clauses to charters that would allow the states to revoke or alter the charters. See Lawrence M. Friedman, A History of American Law (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 197–8.

46 Dartmouth College, 17 U.S. at 636.


48 Ibid., 1457.

49 A number of scholars have suggested that the shifting idea of corporate personhood over the course of the nineteenth century determined the corporation’s role in economic, political, and social life. See, especially, Mark, “Personification of the Business Corporation,” and Daniel Lipton, “Corporate Capacity for Crime and Politics: Defining Corporate Personhood at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” Virginia Law Review 96 (2010): 1911–64.


51 Ibid., 1482.

52 Technically, the ruling itself says nothing about corporate personhood. Instead, it was the court reporter, J. C. Bancroft Davis, who wrote in his “Headnotes,” “The defendant Corporations are persons within the intent of the clause in section I of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which forbids a State to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” The Supreme Court historian David M. O’Brien wrote:

There is perhaps no better illustration of the consequence of a headnote than in Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company (1886). There, after consulting Chief Justice Waite, the Reporter at his own discretion decided to note in an otherwise uninteresting tax case that the Court considered corporations “legal persons” entitled to protection under the Fourteenth Amendment. Corporations, like individual citizens, could thereafter challenge the constitutionality of congressional and state legislation impinging on their interests.


53 Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment reads:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.
56 Chandler, Visible Hand.
59 Herman Melville, Bartleby, The Scrivener (1853; New York: Melville House, 2010), 16.
62 See Jonathan Levy, who explains the rise of impersonal systems in the world of finance and agriculture:

> Until the middle of the nineteenth century there existed a direct, personal link between many mortgage lenders and borrowers. Most farmers knew who owned their mortgage. With the rise of mortgage-backed securities and new forms of financial intermediation, this was no longer the case. The relationship between lender and borrower became attenuated.

64 Ibid., 120.
67 Ibid., 262.
69 Dublin, Women at Work, 55–7.
74 Whitman, “Passage to India,” in Leaves of Grass, 345–53.
76 Chandler, Visible Hand, 92.
77 Ibid., 109.
78 Ibid., 132.
79 See Maier, “Revolutionary Origins.”
81 Zunz, Making America Corporate, 12.
83 See Thomas Bender, Community and Social Change in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

Ibid., 21.


According to Lyndall Urwick and E.F.L. Brech, Taylor’s work was a culmination of a trend: “What Taylor did was not to invent something quite new, but to synthesize and present as a reasonably coherent whole ideas which had been germinating and gathering force in Great Britain and the United States throughout the nineteenth century.” Lyndall Urwick and E.F.L. Brech, *The Making of Scientific Management, Vol. 1.* (London: Management Publications Trust, 1945–8), 17.


Henry Ford, for one, was obsessed with timepieces. In *My Life and Work*, he remembers that one of the biggest events of his youth was “getting a watch” when he was twelve years old. The year would have been 1875. Henry Ford in collaboration with Samuel Crowther, *My Life and Work* (New York: Doubleday, 1923), 22.


Harry Braverman writes:

> If Taylorism does not exist as a separate school today, that is because, apart from the bad odor of the name, it is no longer the property of a faction, since its fundamental teachings have become the bedrock of all work design.


The historian Louis Galambos offers an example of the widespread, pervasive influence of business culture when he describes the predicaments of Southern farmers in the 1890s. Galambos writes:

> While the cotton farmer (especially if he lived east of the Mississippi) was trapped in a painful cost-price squeeze, his economic plight alone does not provide an adequate explanation of his growing animosity toward the trusts. The anxiety grounded in economic interests was, in his case, bound up with a general sense of social disorganization.


The realist ambition to treat the most prevalent forms of American life tells us that the businessman had become a recognizable and pervasive figure in American culture. Other prominent early examples of works that feature businessmen include Andrew Carnegie’s *Gospel of Wealth* (1889), Henry Blake Fuller’s *The Cliff Dwellers* (1893), Orison Swett Marden’s *Pushing to the Front* (1894), Frank Norris’s *The Pit* (1903), Robert Herrick’s *Memoirs of an American Citizen* (1905), and Theodore Dreiser’s *The Financier* (1912).


Ibid., 15.

Twain’s notorious speculation in the Paige Typesetter, for instance, suggests his obsession with schemes that might save time and make money.


Ibid., 20–1.
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108 Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885; New York: Norton, 1999), 266.
109 Ibid., 295.
111 Ibid., 44, 4.
112 Ibid., 68.
117 Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 7.