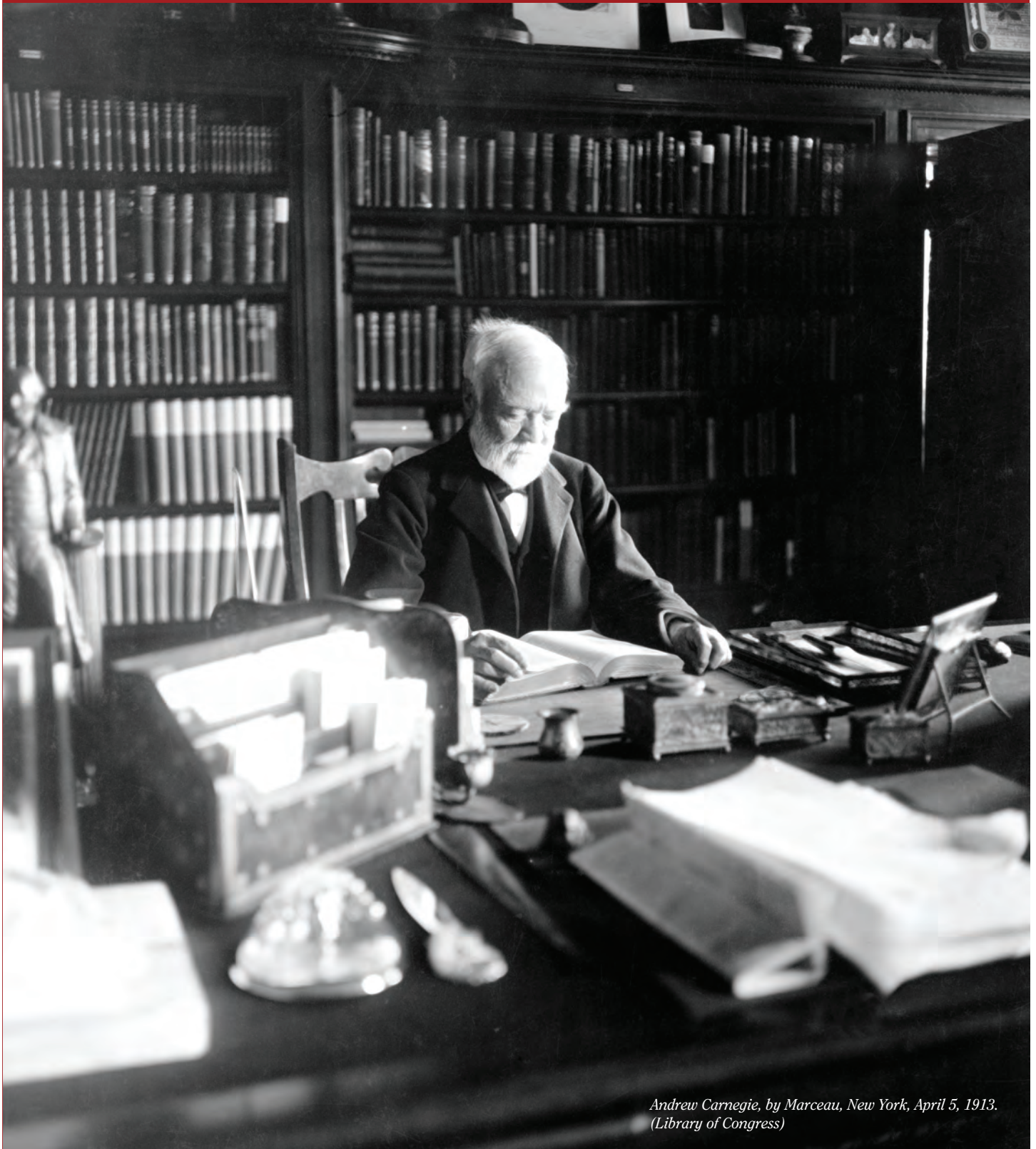


Wealth and Poverty in the Gilded Age



*Andrew Carnegie, by Marceau, New York, April 5, 1913.
(Library of Congress)*

THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE of AMERICAN HISTORY

TL TEACHING LITERACY
TH THROUGH HISTORY

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Wealth and Poverty in the Gilded Age

BY FRED RAPHAEL

OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original material of historical significance. Through a step-by-step process, students will acquire the skills to analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned viewpoints on primary sources.

In this lesson students will read, analyze, and assess two texts—the “Gospel of Wealth” (1889), an essay by the industrialist Andrew Carnegie, and *What Is Man?* (1906), a Socratic dialogue/short story by the American humorist Mark Twain—that address the ideas of destiny, free will, human nature, and philanthropy. The students will then engage in a written and oral debate with their classmates using quotations from these texts and their own words.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Close read informational text for comprehension and critical analysis
- Identify, explain, and summarize the key words and phrases, main ideas, and important issues in the primary source documents
- Cite evidence from the text to support responses to critical thinking questions
- Compare and contrast the viewpoints of different authors on a single idea
- Collaborate and debate effectively and fairly with classmates to develop, express, and justify their positions
- Develop a position and express a viewpoint, both orally and in a brief persuasive essay

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Can Social Darwinism and the Gospel of Wealth justify the inequalities in society?
- To what extent does government have a responsibility to address the inequalities in society?

NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS: 2

GRADE LEVELS: 8–12

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary source or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6: Compare the point of view of two or more for how they treat the same or similar topics, including the details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-level] topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1: Write arguments to support claims in the analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Transformations of the “Gilded” Age

by David Nasaw, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Professor of History, The Graduate Center, CUNY

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the United States transformed from a pre-industrialist, rural nation to the leading manufacturing nation in the world. In a single generation the country's politics, economy, values, and ways of doing business, making a living and finding shelter, eating and drinking and seeking entertainment, and interacting with one another changed dramatically.

Historians have labeled this period the *Gilded Age*, after the 1873 novel of that name co-authored by Charles Dudley Warner, co-owner and editor of the *Hartford Courant*, and Sam Clemens, or Mark Twain. The term, though it has stuck, is a misnomer. “Gilded” means covered in a thin layer of gold, but meant to look like solid gold. Twain and Dudley's goal, in their comic novel, was to peel back and look beneath the glitter, the glamour, the solidity of what was presented as a “golden age,” an American renaissance of business and prosperity after the calamity of the Civil War.

The problem with the *Gilded Age* as a term for this period in US history is that it covers up the unbelievable economic transformations that changed America forever. Between 1870 and 1900, the railroads connected city and rural areas, region to region. There was five times more railroad track in 1900 than there had been thirty years earlier. By 1900, the United States had 42 percent of the world's railroad track. Steel production increased 14 times during these same thirty years, and the United States produced more steel than the United Kingdom and Germany combined. None of this growth in industry or manufacturing could have happened without a corresponding growth in agricultural production. While the nation as a whole became more urban, from 25.7 percent in 1870 to almost 40 percent by 1900, the population increase in rural America and the number of farmers increased as dramatically, as did the number of acres under cultivation.

One of the byproducts of this astounding economic transformation was that by the turn of the twentieth century, most Americans, new and old, White and Black and Asian and Hispanic, lived better, healthier, longer lives than they had in 1870. Life expectancy increased from 42 in 1870 to 47 in 1900, much of it because of dramatic decreases in infant mortality.

With this economic progress came new waves of poverty and inequality. The gap between rich and poor widened considerably. Reformer Henry George got it right when he titled his 1879 book *Progress and Poverty*. “The ‘tramp,’” he wrote, “comes with the locomotive, and almshouses and prisons are as surely the marks of ‘material progress’ as are costly dwellings, rich warehouses, and magnificent churches.”

Andrew Carnegie, one of the richest men in the nation and the world, attempted to make sense of this inequality by proposing his “Gospel of Wealth” and urging his fellow millionaires to give away their wealth to those who had participated in creating it. Mark Twain also tried to make sense of the cataclysmic changes he had witnessed in his lifetime, not only in his novel *The Gilded Age*, but in his short story *What Is Man?*

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from Andrew Carnegie’s “The Gospel of Wealth,” *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (New York: The Century Co., 1901), 1–46
- Text Analysis: “Gospel of Wealth”
- Excerpts from Mark Twain’s *What Is Man?* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1906)
- Text Analysis: *What Is Man?*
- A Debate: Andrew Carnegie and Mark Twain on Social Darwinism
- Definition of Social Darwinism, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, britannica.com

PROCEDURE

You can choose to have the students work individually or collaborate in pairs (“pair-and-share”) or small groups to read and discuss the texts and complete the activity sheet that accompanies each reading.

1. The students should be familiar with the rapid transformation of American life at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly the wealth disparities, the importance of industrialists like Andrew Carnegie, the literary achievements of Mark Twain, and the ideas of Social Darwinism, laissez-fair economics, and limited government in the context of traditional ideals of individualism, self-reliance, and survival of the fittest.
2. Students will answer the following questions based on their personal experiences and points of view.
 - a) What major factors determine why some people are successful and others are not?
 - b) Should the government try to make society more equal through high taxes on the wealthy and social welfare programs for the poor?
3. Distribute the first reading, the excerpts from “The Gospel of Wealth” by Andrew Carnegie. Ask the students to read the text and complete the “Gospel of Wealth” activity sheet. The students can read the selection silently or “share read” it within their pairs or small groups. If the level of the text is too challenging for the students, you can “share read,” having them follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. After you read a few sentences, ask the class to join in with the reading while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
4. Once they have completed the activity sheet, facilitate a discussion among the students on the key words, phrases, and sentences that are highlighted in this reading, and ask them to share their responses to the critical thinking questions.
5. Repeat the process with the second reading, the excerpts from *What Is Man?* by Mark Twain.
6. Pair the students up (or keep their existing pairs) and assign the role of either Andrew Carnegie or Mark Twain to each student within the pair. Distribute the Debate: Andrew Carnegie and Mark Twain on Social Darwinism activity sheet. Each student will find quotations that reflect the assigned historical figure’s views on Social Darwinism and the appropriate role of the government in addressing the inequalities in society.
7. The pairs of students will engage in a debate between “Andrew Carnegie” and “Mark Twain.” One student will lead with a quote; the other student will react with a quote that offers a response. After the students have used 5 quotes each, they should continue in their own words. They will record their selection of quotations and remarks on the activity sheet.

Wrap up/Summary Activity

1. Facilitate a discussion in which the students share out the ideas and viewpoints of their assigned historical figures, Carnegie or Twain, on Social Darwinism and the appropriate role of the government in resolving the inequalities in society.
2. As a closure or summary activity for the lesson, the students should complete an exit card or write a brief persuasive essay responding to one of the lesson's essential questions:
 - Can Social Darwinism and the Gospel of Wealth justify the inequalities in society?
 - To what extent does government have a responsibility to address the inequalities in society?
3. In their written responses, the students should use evidence from the texts to support their positions and viewpoints.

Application Activity (optional)

You can orchestrate a class discussion on the impact and significance of Social Darwinism and the appropriate role of government (federal, state, and/or local) in social welfare programs that address inequalities in society today.

Excerpts from “The Gospel of Wealth” by Andrew Carnegie

. . . The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for cheap comforts and luxuries, is also great; but the advantages of this law are also greater still than its cost—for it is to this law that we owe our wonderful material development, which brings improved conditions in its train. But, whether the law be benign or not, we must say of it, as we say of the change in the conditions of men to which we have referred: It is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and while the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department. We accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment; the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few; and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential to the future progress of the race. . . .

Objections to the foundations upon which society is based are not in order, because the condition of the race is better with these than it has been with any other which has been tried. . . . The Socialist or Anarchist who seeks to overturn present conditions is to be regarded as attacking the foundation upon which civilization itself rests, for civilization took its start from the day when the capable, industrious workman said to his incompetent and lazy fellow, “If thou dost not sow, thou shalt not reap” . . . One who studies this subject will soon be brought face to face with the conclusion that upon the sacredness of property civilization itself depends—the right of the laborer to his hundred dollars in the savings-bank, and equally the legal right of the millionaire to his millions. . . . To those who propose to substitute Communism for this intense Individualism, the answer therefore is: The race has tried that. All progress from that barbarous day to the present time has resulted from its displacement. Not evil, but good, has come to the race from the accumulation of wealth by those who have had the ability and energy to produce it.

. . . Under its sway we shall have an ideal State, in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, the property of the many, because administered for the common good; and this wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if distributed in small sums to the people themselves. Even the poorest can be made to see this, and to agree that great sums gathered by some of their fellow-citizens and spent for public purposes, from which the masses reap the principal benefit, are more valuable to them than if scattered among themselves in trifling amounts through the course of many years. . . .

In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves; to provide part of the means by which those who desire to improve may do so; to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise; to assist, but rarely or never to do all. Neither the individual nor the race is improved by almsgiving. Those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance. The really valuable men of the race never do, except in cases of accident or sudden change. Every one has, of course, cases of individuals brought to his own knowledge where temporary assistance can do genuine good, and these he will not overlook. But the amount which can be wisely given by the individual for individuals is necessarily limited by his lack of knowledge of the circumstances connected with each. He is the only true reformer who is as careful and as anxious not to aid the unworthy as he is to aid the worthy, and, perhaps, even more so, for in almsgiving more injury is probably done by rewarding vice than by relieving virtue.

Source: Andrew Carnegie, “The Gospel of Wealth,” *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (New York: The Century Co., 1901)

NAME _____

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DATE _____

Text Analysis: "Gospel of Wealth"

Directions: Read the excerpts from Andrew Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth" and complete the following:

Select two (2) important phrases from this essay and briefly explain their significance.

1st phrase

Why is this phrase significant?

2nd phrase

Why is this phrase significant?

Create a sentence using the two phrases that summarizes their significance.

Repeat this process: Select two (2) additional important phrases from this essay and briefly explain their significance.

3rd phrase

Why is this phrase important or significant?

4th phrase

Why is this phrase important or significant?

Create a sentence using the two phrases that summarizes their significance.

NAME

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DATE

Critical Thinking Questions

1. How does Carnegie believe unregulated competition will benefit society?

2. Why does Carnegie oppose “almsgiving” (charity) to the poor?

3. What does Carnegie believe is the reason some people gain huge amounts of wealth while others are poor?

Excerpts from *What Is Man?* by Mark Twain

Prejudices . . . must be removed by *outside influences* or not at all. Put that down. . . .

There are gold men, and tin men, and copper men, and leaden men, and steel men, and so on—and each has the limitations of his nature, his heredities, his training, and his environment. You can build engines out of each of these metals, and they will all perform, but you must not require the weak ones to do equal work with the stronger ones. In each case, to get the best results, you must free the metal from its obstructing prejudicial ores by education—smelting, refining, and so forth.

. . . Man the machine—man the impersonal engine. Whatsoever a man is, is due to his make, and to the *influences* brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations. He is moved, directed, commanded, by *exterior influences—solely*. He *originates* nothing, not even a thought.

. . . It is a quite natural opinion—indeed an inevitable opinion—but *you* did not create the materials out of which it is formed. They are odds and ends of thoughts, impressions, feelings, gathered unconsciously from a thousand books, a thousand conversations, and from streams of thought and feeling which have flowed down into your heart and brain out of the hearts and brains of centuries of ancestors. *Personally* you did not create even the smallest microscopic fragment of the materials out of which your opinion is made; and personally you cannot claim even the slender merit of *putting the borrowed materials together*. That was done *automatically*—by your mental machinery, in strict accordance with the law of that machinery's construction. And you not only did not make that machinery yourself, but you have *not even any command over it*.

. . . Then it came from *outside*. Adam is quite big enough; let us not try to make a god of him. *None but gods have ever had a thought which did not come from the outside*. Adam probably had a good head, but it was of no sort of use to him until it was filled up *from the outside*. He was not able to invent the triflingest little thing with it. He had not a shadow of a notion of the difference between good and evil—he had to get the idea *from the outside*. Neither he nor Eve was able to originate the idea that it was immodest to go naked; the knowledge came in with the apple *from the outside*. A man's brain is so constructed that *it can originate nothing whatever*. It can only use material obtained *outside*. It is merely a machine; and it works automatically, not by will-power. *It has no command over itself, its owner has no command over it*.

. . . No. A brave man does not *create* his bravery. He is entitled to no personal credit for possessing it. It is born to him. A baby born with a billion dollars—where is the personal merit in that? A baby born with nothing—where is the personal demerit in that? The one is fawned upon, admired, worshiped, by sycophants, the other is neglected and despised—where is the sense in it?

. . . Sometimes a timid man sets himself the task of conquering his cowardice and becoming brave—and succeeds. What do you say to that?

That it shows the value of *training in right directions over training in wrong ones*. Inestimably valuable is training, influence, education, in right directions—*training one's self-approration to elevate its ideals*.

But as to merit—the personal merit of the victorious coward's project and achievement?

There isn't any. In the world's view he is a worthier man than he was before, but *he* didn't achieve the change—the merit of it is not his.

. . . His *make*, and the influences which wrought upon it from the outside.

Source: Mark Twain, *What Is Man?* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1906)

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Text Analysis: *What Is Man?*

Directions: Read the excerpts from Mark Twain’s *What Is Man?* and complete the following tasks:

Select two (2) important phrases from this essay and briefly explain their significance.

1st phrase

Why is this phrase significant?

2nd phrase

Why is this phrase significant?

Create a sentence using these two phrases (1st and 2nd) that summarizes their significance.

Repeat this process: Select two (2) additional important phrases from this essay and briefly explain their significance.

3rd phrase

Why is this phrase significant?

4th phrase

Why is this phrase significant?

Create a sentence using these two phrases that summarizes their significance.

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Explain Twain's belief about what separates "gold men" from "tin men."

2. What does Twain believe is the biggest influence on the personality and abilities of a person?

3. What does Twain believe is the reason some people gain huge amounts of wealth while others are poor?

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A Debate: Andrew Carnegie and Mark Twain on Social Darwinism

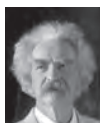
Directions: You will be debating the merits of Social Darwinism and how much the government should try to make society more equal. Andrew Carnegie will begin with a quotation, Mark Twain will respond with a quote. After you have used five quotes from the original texts, switch to your own words and continue the debate, still in your historical figure's point of view.

1.		
	Carnegie	
2.		
	Twain	
3.		
	Carnegie	
4.		
	Twain	
5.		
	Carnegie	

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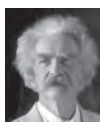
6.

Twain



7.

Carnegie



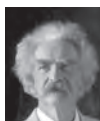
8.

Twain



9.

Carnegie



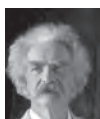
10.

Twain



11.

Carnegie



12.

Twain

NAME	PERIOD	DATE
13.  Carnegie		
14.  Twain		
15.  Carnegie		
16.  Twain		
17.  Carnegie		
18.  Twain		

Social Darwinism

“Social Darwinism is the theory that human groups and races are subject to the same laws of natural selection as Charles Darwin perceived in plants and animals in nature. According to the theory, which was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the weak were diminished and their cultures delimited while the strong grew in power and cultural influence over the weak. Social Darwinists held that the life of humans in society was a struggle for existence ruled by ‘survival of the fittest,’ a phrase proposed by the British philosopher and scientist Herbert Spencer.”

Source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*, britannica.com