

## HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY – 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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**Overview** Bracketed by industrial revolutions which made possible massive strides in communication, transportation, and production, North America dramatically changed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to trade and economic changes, there were significant social changes that were related to immigration, expanding gender roles, conflict between the United States and Canada (the British Empire), and Mexico (after independence), the end of slavery, and the brutal suppression of Native Americans.

## POLITICAL HISTORY

### GOVERNMENT

**The United States of America:** The early United States of America started with 13 states, but quickly grew as it added states. Unifying the States was often a messy affair due to the vastly different forms of economy and also the core values possessed by the framers of each individual State's constitution. For example, the state of Virginia established itself as the Commonwealth of Virginia, and its legal framework is quite different than that of its neighbor, Maryland. Later, as some of the states prospered with new technologies allowing plantations to thrive, and other states started to become industrial, differences in the idea of labor, labor rights, the abolition of slavery, and competition for manufactured goods became very serious. The states eventually divided into the Union and the Confederacy.

**The Union:** The Union consisted of states above the Mason-Dixon line, and united by the idea of opposing slavery. In addition, Union core values tended to favor entrepreneurship, industrialization, employment for immigrants, and upward mobility.

**The Confederacy:** The southern states seceded from the Union in protest over what they considered to be an abrogation of states' rights, which is to say that the states wished to maintain the ability to follow their own policies and laws over such items as taxation and slavery.

**Communism and Socialism / Utopian Settlements:** Independent communities have often set up their own governments within that of states and the United States as a whole. They have sought to establish their own mores, norms, and even laws. However, many have come in conflict with state and federal laws, usually in the rights of individuals (failure to protect minors, practicing polygamy).

**Indian Nations:** After a series of wars and then treaties, many Indian nations were removed to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), where they were divided into separate nations and given sovereignty. The nations such as the Cherokee went as far as to develop their own constitution written in their native language. Later, as the United States government seized lands or polluted waterways, the nations sued the government for broken treaties and tortious damages to tribal property. Lawsuits stemming from injustices and damages inflicted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been the foundation of some tribes' prosperity.

### Discussion/Questions

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, conflicts over the right that the federal government had to exercise control over a state, community, or group of people led to profound differences and conflicts. The conflicts included those between the North and South states, conflicts with utopian communities, and also with Indian nations. Please select four examples of conflicts and describe the reason for the differences of philosophy, and what the ultimate outcomes were.

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## MILITARY

**War of 1812:** The War of 1812 was between England and the United States, and represented unfinished business with respect to territorial disputes along the border between the U.S. and Canada. It is important because it was a proving ground for the new U.S. Navy, and represented control over the Mississippi River in the Battle of New Orleans. However, most textbooks do not mention that both this war and the Revolutionary War were marked by atrocities committed by both the U.S. and the British troops. They included sexual assault, the burning of civilian property, and theft of civilian property.

**Mexican-American War:** General Santa Anna was considered one of the leaders who most failed the newly independent nation of Mexico. He made critical military mistakes which resulted in strategic defeats with the Texas Revolution (triggered by Santa Anna's repeal of the Mexican Constitution, and increasing taxes on the area now known as Texas, which was part of the nation of Mexico), and then later in battles with the U.S. military (navy and army) from 1846-48. Santa Anna's leadership meant Mexico lost one third of its territory to the U.S. Santa Anna had to flee Mexico after 1848 and live in exile in Cuba.

**Forts and the American West:** The U.S. Army expanded throughout the American West by means of a series of forts that were designed to protect settlers from attacks by Indians. The fort system was innovative because it allowed local solutions for local problems. The forts became important for protection and also as locations for future bases for training and housing of regular troops.

**Civil War (1861-1865):** The American Civil War was a long time in the making, and it had to do with a conflict between those States that accepted federal control, versus states that wanted more autonomy. At the heart of the issue was a moral and economic one: slavery. The industrial North was against slavery, not only on moral grounds, but because of fears of labor price competition. The war was remarkable for its brutality, thanks to the use of new technology such as the Gatling Gun (early machine gun) and new types of mortars and bombs. Further, a new "scorched earth" policy of the North resulted in a wide swath of plantations, homes, and cities burned to the ground. When the South finally surrendered, 640,000 soldiers died. There were many civilian deaths, and several million refugees, who moved to Texas and the American West.

**Spanish-American War (1898):** This war, fought between the United States and Spain for control of far-flung island nations (Cuba, Philippines, Puerto Rico, among others) was unique in that it was the first one to be instigated and fomented by "yellow journalism" – inflammatory, incendiary journalism by a newspaper magnate who had a vested interest in the war. The war had vicious battles in conditions where malaria, yellow fever, dengue and other tropical diseases took their toll. The United States prevailed, which was a very important step in making the United States an empire.

## Discussion/Questions

1. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the leaders of countries like Paraguay believed that isolating their populace from the outside world would strengthen it and make it less likely to be corrupted by outside influences. Import restrictions stimulated the production of import substitutions, such as the hand-tatted "spiderweb lace" (called "ñanduti" in native Guaraní) and other artisan items. However, there were several disadvantages to isolationism. Please describe a few of them.

2. The American Civil War is often described as a war over slavery. But, that's just part of the explanation. Explain how the economic realities of immigration, industrialization, plantation economies, and vertical integration (ownership of the raw materials, the factories, and the distribution) made conflict almost inevitable.

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## **SOCIAL HISTORY**

### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

**Aristocrats:** In theory, America was founded to correct the ills of monarchies and aristocracies. In reality, the wealthy planters, bankers, businessmen, and industrialists were America's aristocracy and they dominated both commerce and the governance.

**Whites of Northern European Descent:** People of European descent occupied the highest class. Within the whites, the social differentiation usually had to do with wealth. Women did not have the right to vote, and they had limited self-determination and financial authority.

**African-American:** There was no question that African Americans were relegated to the class and were essentially disenfranchised for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even after slavery was abolished. To open up opportunities and to combat racism and disenfranchisement, African American leaders established businesses, churches, and universities.

**Creole:** The descendants from the original French settlers who lived in the French-settled territories were in the upper classes. They lived in Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and the Mississippi Valley.

**Indians:** Indians were attacked, persecuted, targeted for extermination, feared and forcibly removed to unwanted territories. They occupied a pariah class.

**Immigrants:** Southern European immigrants settled in New York and along the East Coast. They were subjected to a great deal of prejudice, as were the Irish, principally because they were Catholic and they often arrived in an impoverished financial state.

**Central and Eastern Europeans:** The immigrants who came from Central and Eastern Europe were usually either Jewish or they were farmers seeking refuge from the endless wars. The farmers settled in the Great Plains where they established wheat farms and ranches. They became important entrepreneurs and industrialists with the advent of the railroads.

**Chinese (labor force for railroad construction):** Workers from China came voluntarily or were kidnapped to work in the construction of the railroads in the western states. They were treated quite badly, often because of the vast cultural differences between a European-based culture, as well as challenging language differences. They occupied a level of society that was, at least at first, very low. Later, Chinese became successful entrepreneurs and educators.

**Women:** During the nineteenth century, women were nominally revered and placed on pedestals as mothers and symbols of virtue. However, they had very little political or economic self-determination.

### Discussion/Questions

In the nineteenth century, expansion of the American frontier, the push toward the Pacific, and also the development of technology contributed to opportunities for upward social mobility. Describe the groups that might have benefited most from technology and westward expansion. Identify the groups and classes that might lose standing during that time and explain why.

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### GENDER RELATIONS

**Utopian Communities:** Free love / open marriages. Nashoba, founded by Frances Wright in 1825 in Tennessee was an abolitionist, free-love community. Oneida, by John Noyes, was established in Oneida, New York, in 1848. The Free Lovers ad Davis House, was established by Francis Barry in 1854 in Ohio.

**Westward Expansion:** Men as explorers and artists – solitary travelers. Women supported in towns; Native women were often cultural bridges = Sacajawea (guide for Lewis and Clark). Roles were ambiguous, and accomplishments were admired, especially as they related to survival in the tough frontier, and it made little difference if one were a man or a woman.

**Women in the Frontier: Teachers, farmers, small business owners** The freedom afforded women in the frontier was clear in situations where survival was a key concern, and in situations where women had both financial and physical freedom to participate and contribute as equals. In some situations, the American West was the most gender-equitable place on Planet Earth as individuals had to team together to survive, regardless of their sex. However, when circumstances were not so dire, and there was more discretionary income and potential, then typical gender relations prevailed and men dominated women.

**Women Entrepreneurs:** Necessity is the mother of equality. Where there is a shortage of men, women can thrive. In the nineteenth century, it was possible for women to enter industries, especially when they could serve other women. Dressmakers, milliners, general store owners, even mill and dairy owners thrived, often after husband died (or disappeared after long travel).

**Women Activists:** The temperance movement was led Carrie Nations, who led a movement to strength families and support for women and children. At the same time, the Women's suffrage movement was organized by women who believed in self-determination and more rights and freedom for women, who, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, could not hold political office, and often could not even independently manage their assets if married.

**Cowboy Characters:** Super macho; European and Mexican influences in the culture the equipment, and practices. Roundups, cattle drives, ranching.

**Manufactured Male Identities: Showman, Spectacle, Con Artist:** There were a number of traveling shows / spectacles that featured the "exotic" and captivated small towns. They traveled along the new railroads, and the towns that had train stations were the primary markets. Buffalo Bill Wild West Show; Pawnee Bill Wild West Show; also Barnum & Bailey Circus. Women were often acrobats and sharpshooters; many different nationalities represented. There were also notorious grifter types, many described by Mark Twain (Huckleberry Finn and also Life on the Mississippi), and also by Herman Melville - The Confidence Man.

### Discussion/Questions

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the roles for women and men expanded dramatically, and there were many opportunities for identity self-invention. Describe a few of the possible gendered identities available for both men and women, and discuss their relationship with social mobility (upward mobility).

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## ECONOMIC HISTORY

### INNOVATION

**Raw Materials (Plantation, Mining, Fur, etc.):** Economic progress was made possible in the plantation-dominated South, the gold and mining dominated West, and the factory-dominated Northeast thanks to steam-powered farm equipment (tractors, threshers); steam-powered combustion engines, mining (mills, amalgamation chemical processes for gold, coal mining)

**Industrial Revolution / Manufacturing:** The new American nation went through two episodes of Industrial Revolution. The first included canal systems and steam engines. Tom Thumb was the first to develop steam-powered locomotive. Benjamin Wright designed canals including the Erie Canal which connected the Hudson River (at Albany, NY) with the Great Lakes. The first wave also included steel processes (Bessemer) that allowed the production of steel for railroads. The second Industrial Revolution set the stage for improved communications, illumination (longer work days), factories of all kinds, and transportation. Americans inventions (or significant innovations on existing inventions) included the electromagnet, telegraph, electric light, Bessemer process for steel, sewing machine, typewriter, internal combustion engine, photograph, moving pictures, steam turbine, machine gun, AC motor and transformer, and the automobile.

**Innovative Social Arrangements/ Utopian Settlements:** Innovative social arrangements flourished in the United States, particularly in the western, more unsettled parts of the country. Early Utopian communities included the celibate Shakers who developed new herbal medicines and a distinctive type of furniture, the Mormons who established a complex society in Utah where they focused on agriculture and trade. The Oneida Community, established by John Humphrey Noyes in Putney, Vermont, practiced a complex (and scandalous) kind of open marriage. The expanded and found economic success by developing high-quality silverware and embroidered silks. The overall economic system was socialistic. They eventually fell apart as a community (but lived on as a silverware business) due to sexual jealousy.

**Inventions in Wars (1812, 1848, Indian Wars, Civil War, More Indian Wars, 1898):** There were numerous inventions that accompanies the various wars. The Ironside ship and submarine were developed and improved during the wars of 1812 and the Civil War. The Gatling Gun was developed and implemented with savage efficacy in the Civil War. Navigation and communication innovations took place in the war with Mexico in 1848 and also in the fort system in the Indian wars.

**Medicinal Innovations:** American medical innovations were in tandem with European innovations. They included improving immunizations, and beginning to recognized the need to sterilize equipment and to wear clean (rather than blood-encrusted) clothing. Clara Barton adopted Florence Nightingale's nursing practices and established the American Red Cross and a system of standardized nursing practices. Medicines, especially those containing opium, flourished.

### Discussion/Questions

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a time of westward expansion and also industrial revolution, with the rapid development of canals, railroads, and methods of communication. List the different innovations that contributed to the Westward Expansion and describe to costs and benefits of each.

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## TRADE

**Raw Materials (Plantation, Mining, Fur, etc.):** The plantation system expanded dramatically with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in England and the development of massive factory towns that produced textiles, leather goods, and industrial equipment. Trading the plantation raw materials expanded to New England as well, as factories specializing in textiles, leatherworks, and paper expanded dramatically.

**Industrial Revolution / Trade in Manufacturing:** The invention of the steam engine, the cotton gin, the spinning jenny, and other items enabled factories to thrive, especially those located on rivers that could use hydropower to generate energy for the engines and could dump waste products as effluents into the streams. The materials that were produced were traded along trade routes that included riverways, canals, trails, and railway systems.

**Utopian Settlements:** Many of the utopian experiments of the 19th century in North America depended heavily on trade based on their unique products such as furniture, herbal medicines, and useful household items (the Shakers) and the agricultural products produced on Amish, Mennonite, and even Mormon farms. The Oneida free thinking community became well known for its silverware. Trade tended to be focused between either local communities or with other branches of the same religion or group.

**Wars (1812, 1848, Indian Wars, Civil War, Post Civil War Indian Wars, 1898):** Wars in the 19th century stimulated trade between nations for the inputs needed for the war efforts, and thus blockades and supply chain disruptions were deeply felt in the war effort(s). The regional wars of 1848 and the Indian Wars dramatically increased the demand for guns, provisions, and horses, which were generally obtained from either the manufacturers in the Northeast, who shipped by train, or brought across the border from Mexico.

## Discussion/Questions

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Industrial Revolution changed the scale and scope of trade primarily because of the enormous demand for raw materials. Describe how the hunger for raw materials in the mills and factories of northern England and in the northeast United States changed the nature, size, and type of crop production in the South.

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## CULTURAL HISTORY

### SCIENCE

**First Industrial Revolution:** If we look objectively at the dramatic changes that occurred in North America, we can see that many had as their foundation a few breakthroughs in the understanding of materials, thermodynamics, and electricity, which made it possible to invent the components that went into some of the main mechanical breakthroughs. They were the steam engine, electrical generation, the Bessemer process (steel) and the use of hydropower. With those scientific breakthroughs, the following transformative innovations were possible in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Oliver Evans (automatic flour mill):** Automated the mill process by incorporating bucket elevators, screw conveyors, and a hopper to spread, cools, and dry the ground grain meal.

**Robert Fulton:** The steamboat made transportation of people and products along the large river systems of the U.S., primarily the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers.

**Samuel Morse:** Using electricity, the telegraph (incorporating Morse code), made it possible to communicate rapidly and thus foster new levels of commercial and social engagement.

**Eli Whitney (cotton gin):** Without the cotton gin, the plantation system of the South would not have been profitable because cotton seeds were notoriously difficult to separate from the cotton boll. Whitney's invention, together with steam-powered farm equipment transformed the American South.

**Tabitha Babbitt (circular saw):** First developed for use in a saw mill, Tabitha Babbitt envisioned a round sawblade that would rotate in one place, effectively sawing logs or boards. It made it possible for anyone to saw wood, no matter what their physical characteristic.

**Cyrus McCormick:** One of the steam-powered agricultural equipment inventions, the reaper made it possible to harvest fields without armies of individuals. It made it possible develop a farming economy that did not rely on massive amounts of labor.

**Hiram Moore:** This combine harvester was even more effective because it combined functions in harvesting grains, corn, sorghum, and other crops.

**Elias Moore:** Complementing the cotton gin and the cloth-making textile mills (powered by hydropower), Moore's sewing machine helped create a garment industry in the Northeast and also the South of the United States.

**Second Industrial Revolution:** Characterized by breakthroughs in transportation, communication, medicine, and public health, the Second Industrial Revolution was based on new scientific understanding in the areas of electricity, chemistry, physics, material science, botany, and medicine. The new technology in the area of transportation (the automobile, the bicycle, the airplane, motorcycle, etc.) allowed more mobility than ever. More profoundly, it changed the texture of American life, as infrastructure was designed and constructed, and which actually became the focal point not only of commerce, but also culture.

**Thomas Alva Edison:** Credited for inventing the lightbulb, phonograph, and much more, it is perhaps not fair to give Edison the credit for all the inventions since he actually hired scientists and inventors to work for him, in what was, in essence, a patent farm. He was a brilliant marketer as well as an astute judge of quality.

**Charles Edgar Duryea:** Responsible for the very first combustion engine to be used in a car, Duryea's automobile was an immediate point of fascination and anxiety about the future. His car, which used the internal combustion engine, was very popular, but not mass-produced.

**Nikola Tesla:** Tesla, an immigrant, invented the alternating current (AC), induction motor, polyphase systems for generating electrical power.

#### Discussion Question:

There were two distinct Industrial Revolutions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first one took place in the first part of the century and encompassed a bit of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The second took place toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and spilled into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Please describe each, and then compare and contrast them. How did the scientific discoveries, applied science, and technological innovations transform the country?

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## RELIGION

**Protestantism:** Protestantism continued its rapid growth in the new United States, where it was often the cultural and social glue that held communities together. New types of Protestantism flourished, because it was possible to start a new religious domination very easily, usually by means of a charismatic preacher who would travel a circuit where he would organize tent revivals, which would inspire converts who would then set up their local congregations. It was in that way that the Baptists, Southern Baptists, Methodists, Pentacostals, and many other church denominations flowered and flourished. They were especially important in the frontier areas where the church was often the only social safety net, and also gave people a chance to connect and form a community with shared values, vision, and social goals. In the case of immigrants from Germany, Scandinavia, Greece, Russia and other locations, the church served as a way to preserve cultural identity.

**Catholicism:** All Roman Catholic churches had in common a unifying relationship with the overall structure, which was a clear and rigidly maintained hierarchy, with the Pope at the head of the church, and resources administered through Rome and later through regions, reflecting in many ways the structure of the Roman Empire. Depending on the origins of the community, the local Catholic church would emphasize certain saints over others. For example, in the Desert Southwest, the Virgin of Guadalupe was important, while in the areas predominantly Irish, Saint Patrick figured prominently.

**Utopian Religious Movements:** Despite their insistence that all they really wanted was to be able to interpret the Bible in their own way, sing the songs they wanted to sing, and to live in harmony with each other, what really united most of the utopian religious experiments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was sexual freedom. It is not the kind of "free love" one might expect from a century later (the 1960s), but it sought a way to break away from the rigid behavioral constraints of the Puritans and Protestant groups that soaked up the idea of sexual relations as something to be hidden and punished. The Shakers were nominally celibate, which allowed men and women to freely interact and go into what seem to have been orgiastic sublimations of sexual energy, called "dancing." Humphrey Noyes's Oneida Community tried to implement a system of free love called "complex marriage" where everyone was married to everyone else, and one could have relationships with everyone else, no jealousy allowed. No complaining by women was allowed, either. The patriarchs of the cult got to "teach" or "introduce" young women to sex, and the patriarchs decided which men could have which women. The population of women went into a precipitous decline (women ran away), until Humphrey fled to Canada after being charged with statutory rape and his son, Theodore, an agnostic and unwilling leader, assumed the chief role. The community rejected "complex marriage" and reformed as a joint-stock company and entered into traditional marriage with their true loves. The joint stock company was extremely successful and well known for its Oneida flatware, knives, and other housewares.

**Mormons:** The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints was one of the most colorful of the utopian experiments and cults of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were immediately very compelling for settlers feeling somehow disenfranchised and without opportunity. The Mormons (as they came to be known, as devotees of the Angel Moroni) were extremely well organized as well as entrepreneurial, resulting in the fact that they generally were rather well-heeled and able to afford to move west and to set up agricultural settlements. Because they believed in polygamy and had other "outree" beliefs, traditional communities saw them as destabilizing. Eventually the Mormons made a mass exodus and established communities in what is now Utah. They were also very prominent in Hawaii, where they established an early community in the east side of Oahu.

## Discussion/Questions

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States exploded with utopian experiments, many with religion as their foundation. It was a time of “do it yourself” religion and a tremendous opportunity to express oneself by means of creating a perfect world. Religion was also used to create the social glue to knit together nascent settlements. How were some of those worlds constructed? What made them succeed? Or, what made them collapse?

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## PHILOSOPHY

**Ralph Waldo Emerson:** One of the founders of American Transcendentalism, Emerson's essays, which included “Self-Reliance,” “Circles,” “The Over-Soul,” and “Nature,” were a blend of German Romanticism, Asian mysticism, and American pragmatism. They resulted in a passionate stance toward freedom of expression and human dignity which connected with the abolitionist movement and also the founding of universities.

**Margaret Fuller:** An amazing woman who was a bona fide reporter for a newspaper, Fuller's **Woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century** broke ground in calling for better treatment of women on ethical grounds. She advocated education, the right to own property, and the right to vote.

**Henry David Thoreau:** An advocate of free-thinking and simple living, Thoreau was opposed to slavery and he believed in “civil disobedience” to bring about positive change. He was extremely influential as an apologist for preserving nature and establishing a government that upholds human dignity and allows for social justice and equality.

**William James:** With writings that explored both mysticism and psychology, James's writings explored the inner anxieties and preoccupations of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. His philosophy focused on the relationship

between humanity and God as it related to a development of identity and self, and as “varieties of religious experience” are explorations into beingness, ontology, and a notion of what it means to be human.

### Discussion/Questions

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Industrial Revolution, Westward Expansion, Civil War, and dramatic leaps in literacy and communication resulted in a country hungry for a philosophy that assured the potential transformation of the human being, and the potential to achieve one’s dreams. Explain how Transcendentalist philosophies encouraged the development of the American Dream.

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### ART

**Early Republic:** Portraiture and scenes of early life. Rembrandt Peale, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*, 1801. Myth-making and heroic visual narratives. Thomas Sully, *Passage of the Delaware*, 1819.

**Antebellum Era:** Exploration of American ways of life. George Caleb Bingham, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*, 1845. George Catlin, *An Indian Ball-Play*, 1846 – 1850. Colors are vivid and there is a focus on ethnographic authenticity.

**Hudson River School:** Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander’s Peak*, 1863. Thomas Cole, *Gelyna (View near Ticonderoga)*, 1826-1828. Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Doughty, an Edenic vision of nature, with dramatic use of light and color, with a sense of divine illumination.

**American Barbizon School:** Most of the painters in this school were trained in Europe and influenced by the French Barbizon School artists such as Jean-Francois Millet, and then later by the impressionists. Mary Cassatt was influenced by European Impressionists while Childe Hassam’s landscapes and depictions of wildflowers create a sense of motion and sunlight. Examples include Childe Hassam’s *Celia Thaxter’s Garden* (1890) and Horatio Walker’s *Watching the Turkeys*. Other artists include Winslow Homer, William Morris Hunt, George Inness.

**Photography:** In the last half of the nineteenth century, technical improvements made it possible to take photographs of historical situations, landscapes, and portraits. Mathew B. Brady documented the Civil War and is known as the father of photojournalism. Ansel Easton Adams photographed the American West, and

George Grantham Bain was known for his photography of the Mexican Revolution, celebrities, parades, and more.

**Portraits:** James McNeill Whistler – portraiture; John Singer Sargent – contrasts of colors, light and shadow, brush strokes and texture demonstrate Impressionist influence, and informal poses capture a sense of spontaneity. Some of the painters were untrained such as Ammi Phillips, while others trained in the European tradition, which include Thomas Sully, G. P. A. Healy. The work of Thomas Eakins evokes images from everyday life, and an emphasis on texture. Henry Ossawa Tanner was the first African-American acclaimed portrait painter.

**Realism:** Raphael Peale was well-known for his realistic still-life and trompe-l'oeil. Examples include *Cheese with three crackers* (1813), *Melons and Morning Glories* (1813), and *Venus Rising from the Sea – A Deception* (1822).

### Discussion/Questions

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American artists truly embraced the notion of American identity, American exceptionalism, and utopian visions. They did so not only with their landscapes but also with portraiture and still life. Please describe 5 or more works that exemplify how artists sought to use painting to depict America as a unique place with its own identity.

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### LITERATURE

**Transcendentalism:** The essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson united the “common sense” heritage of Thomas Paine with Asian notions from Buddhism and Hinduism, with German Romanticism. The result encouraged free thinking and creative self-expression, as well as an emphasis on self-determination and action. Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* championed the idea of simplicity, connections to nature, and the abolition of slavery. Walt Whitman’s poetry shocked people with its directness and formal innovations, in which he brought together a kind of Zoroastrian energy of fire and electricity, united with the flesh and blood of humanity. All the authors emphasized the capacity of humanity to transcend and build a new kind of person and a new kind of community.

**Diaries / Non-Fiction:** Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* explored the potential of America in very positive ways. However, Jean de Crevecoeur’s *What Is an American?* Reflected a deep disenchantment. Frederick Douglass was born a slave, and had the blessed fortune to be taught to read and write, despite the extreme risk of such an endeavor. His personal narrative describes how he learned to write and it contains an exploration of the culture of the time and the mindset that allowed the cruel institution of slavery to exist and thrive. Mary Rowlandson’s narrative of being captured by Indians was written much earlier, in 1682, but was popularized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Romanticism:** German Romanticism manifested itself in many ways in American literature, but in the fertile literary imaginations of the Americans, it took a very different direction. Washington Irving incorporated Dutch history and ghost stories in his *Tales of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle*. Nathaniel Hawthorne incorporated haunted houses in *The House of the Seven Gables*, and Puritan dark tragic romance in *The Scarlet Letter*. Edgar Allan Poe's essays explore the idea that there should always be undercurrents that potentially contradict the notions on the surface. His own work clearly reflects that, as the dark explorations of extremes of obsession and twisted psyches manifest themselves in his *Tales*. He was credited as writing the first detective novel in America, and his poetry, although verging on doggerel, is also an exploration into obsession and death.

**West / Frontier:** Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) wrote fiction and essays about the Frontier, starting with the Mississippi River (*Life on the Mississippi*) and going toward the Nevada and California gold fields (*Roughing It*). He even wrote about Hawaii and other areas. His *Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, although politically incorrect today, accurately reflect the social milieu at the time.

**Social Novels and Pioneers:** Henry James wrote novels including *The Golden Bowl* having to do with the class structure and the cultural values of the elite. Similarly, Edith Wharton critiqued the life of the American aristocracy (which she experience first-hand) in novels such as *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. Authors who wrote novels having to do with pioneers included Willa Cather's *My Antonia* and William Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer*.

#### Discussion/Questions

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Romanticism and Transcendentalism took human potential in very different directions. One suggested infinite potential and opportunities for self-actualization and transformation. The other suggested the impossibility of self-transformation or achievement of the American Dream, not only due to economic and class barriers, but also due to dark forces of greed, lust, and secret inability to adhere to strict norms. Discuss some of the works that seem to illustrate such diametrical oppositions and discuss what they suggest about the American experience in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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