Preface

The American poet Wallace Stevens once observed that a poem is the "cry of its occasion." The same might be said for all sorts of imaginative expression—novels, short stories, speeches, sermons, histories, plays, biographies and autobiographies; all are in some measure bulletins stemming from a deep-seated set of interests and convictions. The "cry" of such literary works is inevitably unique and inimitable, for it emanates from a single vantage point. Literary expression may be muted or gaudy, severe or antic, impassioned or ironic, but the "occasion" of the literary act, which is to say its context, is always in some measure historical. The purpose of these volumes is to present history and literature in tandem, to emphasize rather than to ignore the fact that, different as they may be, the two disciplines are natural allies. *American History through Literature, 1870–1920* is meant to address several kinds of readers at once—the high school or college student who wishes to acquire introductory information about a certain subject; library patrons who, out of desire to fill in some gap in their understanding, wish to peruse these volumes without premeditated purpose; the teacher of American literature, American history, or American studies who may consult these volumes in order to enrich his or her classes; the researcher who wishes to read an authoritative analysis or overview of a given subject and to be directed to other reliable sources of pertinent information on the subject; and finally, the so-called common reader, who, out of simple curiosity perhaps, wishes to learn more about the cultural ethos of America as it is reflected in history and literature. Each of these readers desires accurate, comprehensible, and readable essays on a great variety of subjects. We trust that this work answers those needs.

The study of literature and the study of history have always been mutually complementary endeavors, each discipline casting (to adapt a phrase of Herman Melville's) interesting "cross-lights" one upon the other. The fiction writer Edward Eggleston was one of the first presidents of the American Historical Association, after all, and the novelist and memoirist Henry Adams taught in the history department at Harvard. Literary works can make large and sometimes impersonal historical, political, and social forces vivid and palpable. History can make the small and otherwise incidental dramas of individual lives representative and comprehensible. Is such a novel as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* a literary text or a historical document? Or is an autobiographical account such as Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* or Ulysses S. Grant's

Memoirs to be read only for "the story," what it tells us about an individual life, or for the broad sweeps of history it silhouettes? In all of these cases the literary significance of the works cannot be unraveled from their historical importance; they may consist of different weaves, but they form the same fabric. History is a movement, of course. Many in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth were disposed to see that movement as "progressive," whether it was or not; others, local colorists and regionalist writers, for example, recorded the incursions of the modern upon the customs and language of the home place. History is a temporal movement, but it is also a texture, the crosshatched result of imaginative affirmations, displacements, counter-statements, resistances, even weary concessions to events. Other reference works offer an ample and authoritative charting of historical movements, but *American History through Literature, 1870–1920* is distinctive both in its emphasis upon the productive relations between historical and literary study and in its desire to render the texture of life as it was lived in this country during a half-century of turbulent and often bewildering change.

In order to convey the richness and diversity of American life during this period, the editors have cast a wide net. Over two hundred highly qualified literary scholars and historians have contributed to this effort. These volumes contain 247 essays (ranging in length from 1,500 to 6,000 words), many accompanied by sidebar items, each including a bibliography and cross-references to related topics. The articles are supplemented by over 200 illustrations, including some tables and maps. Broadly speaking, the articles are of several kinds:

Works. This category comprises analyses of individual titles, both literary and nonliterary, that are revealing of the age. Where possible, each essay on a work describes the compositional history and reception of the work. Where appropriate, the essay also connects the text to the event or circumstances that may have motivated it, as for example the Wilmington, North Carolina, race riots of 1898 and Charles W. Chesnutt's 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition.* If the work's publication produced, perhaps accidentally, responses or social by-products, as with Sinclair's *The Jungle,* for example, those elements are part of the essay as well. The selection of individual titles is certainly a debatable issue, but our choices were not altogether arbitrary. We wished to give a comprehensive, not an exhaustive, sense of the era and the diverse artistic sensibilities that flourished, if only for a time, in the midst of eruptive and often perplexing cultural changes. Individual readers may be surprised that there is no entry on, say, Henry James's *The Bostonians;* others may be just as startled to find essays on Sidney Lanier's "The Marshes of Glynn" and Paul Laurence Dunbar's *Lyrics of Lowly Life.* There is no satisfactory answer to this imagined complaint. It is not enough to say that Lanier was reckoned among the finest poets of his day and that he rendered a finely cadenced view of the vanquished southerner, or to say that the African American Dunbar gave public readings of his vernacular poems that had as much to do with race relations as they did with poetic innovation. Nevertheless, both statements are true. More to the point, individual works were selected not only on the basis of artistic merit but also on their ability to contribute to the tissue of cross-connections these volumes seek to establish. Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* may or may not be as fine a work as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer;* certainly it is less familiar. But Frederic's novel sheds intelligent light upon anti-Catholic feeling existing at the time and upon many other things as well, in ways that Twain's novel does not even attempt. We are pleased that Louis J. Budd of Duke University, the foremost Twain scholar for the past two generations and a former editor of *American Literature,* has contributed the entry on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

Ideas. Many essays describe the circulation and effects of certain ideas, such as anarchism or Darwinism, for example, and summarize the salient features of those ideas and the responses, both favorable and unfavorable, that they engendered. As with

most of the essays, there are typically included some literary examples that both vivify and clarify how those ideas inspired or influenced imaginative literary treatment. The literary works cited may affirm those ideas (as in, say, Hamlin Garland's endorsement of Henry George's "single tax" economic theories in "Under the Lion's Paw") or contest them (as in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's treatment of S. Weir Mitchell's "rest-cure" for neurasthenic women in "The Yellow Wall-Paper"). We are delighted that the leading Gilman scholar in the world, Denise D. Knight, has contributed the entry on Gilman's story.

Genre or Genres. Essays that treat a genre (e.g., satire, burlesque, and parody; humor) usually enumerate the distinctive features of the genre, identify, where appropriate, the literary antecedents for the form, and describe the popularity of the genre. The social or cultural factors that prompted the creation and/or popularity of the genre are also described. Some of these genres, literary impressionism, for example, owe allegiances to the visual arts, particularly painting; others, such as photography and motion pictures, were the beneficiaries of developments in science and technology. The essays on realism and naturalism are particularly significant because they address and define the most comprehensive and important literary movements of the era. We are particularly pleased that Donald Pizer of Tulane University, the foremost scholar on American literary naturalism, has contributed the entry on this topic.

Aesthetics. Essays that deal with aesthetic movements or subjects (e.g., the arts and crafts movement or imagism) identify the principal characteristics of the subject; name persons, events, or titles that contributed to its formation or direction; and state the social or philosophic impulses that motivated it. In some instances it is as important to explain what the movement was reacting against (e.g., an anti-modernist or anti-industrial character) as to enumerate the artistic or social objectives of the aesthetic movement itself, and our contributors have succinctly addressed these dimensions with clarity and breadth.

Institutions or Events. Essays dealing with certain institutions (e.g., publishing or education) or particular events (the 1876 Centennial) trace, insofar as it is possible, the genesis and evolution of the subject matter and its social or political objectives or consequences (e.g., preparing students for citizenship or celebrating a national event). Often the contributor at least touches upon circumstantial elements that shaped the institution or the historical or symbolic significance of an event in the popular mind. Andrew Carnegie's endowment of public libraries, for example, is one sort of event; the Indian massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 is quite another. Essays on these and other institutions and events tell us much about the national ethos.

Places. Essays dealing with particular places (e.g., New Orleans, Chicago, or New York) or whole regions (the New South) emphasize the literary life of the locale in terms that are both practical (e.g., as the site of major publishing houses) and cultural (e.g., as congenial to certain literary "schools" or groups). These essays are catholic in approach, identifying, for example, foreign-language newspapers and magazines, establishment of ethnic neighborhoods, significance of museums and libraries, or other cultural institutions or movements.

Society, Values, Culture, and/or Ethnicity. Essays that fall into one of these categories emphasize cultural, social, and perhaps political and legal elements, but they also may attempt to briefly define the atmospheric effects or the cultural ethos that a given subject (lynching, for example, or immigration) reflects or perhaps helps to engender. As with nearly all the entries in these volumes, there is typically some analysis of literary effects—how, for instance, the prevailing idea of success is dramatized in, say, an Edith Wharton or William Dean Howells or Horatio Alger novel, or how questions of acculturation are imaginatively rendered in Sui Sin Far or Abraham Cahan. We are pleased that Sanford E. Marovitz of Kent State University, one of the leading scholars in the field of Jewish American literature, has contributed the entry on

Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky,* and that Kenneth W. Warren of the University of Chicago, the leading scholar in the field of American realism and race, has contributed the entry on "race novels."

Publishing. Essays dealing with publishing include certain important journals or periodicals, publishers, editors, journalists, and so on. Depending on the particular subject, these essays identify the circulation or influence of the publishing institution, the effects individuals or periodicals had on shaping opinion or taste, the intended audience or readership, and the means of production and promotion. Special aspects or concerns of magazines or editors may also be emphasized. The *Century Magazine* ran an extended series on Civil War battles and leaders; for good or ill, *McClure's* was known for its muckraking journalism.

We wish to acknowledge the help and encouragement of all those involved in this project: Stephen Wasserstein, whose brainchild this project is; Alja Collar, who daily and dutifully, but always with good judgment and good cheer, kept the effort going; our editorial board (William L. Andrews, Louis J. Budd, Lawrence J. Buell, Susan K. Harris, Denise D. Knight, and William J. Scheick), who provided guidance and help all along the way; and the editors of the companion volumes, *American History through Literature, 1820–1870,* Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer, with whom we conferred often. Tom Quirk wishes to acknowledge the genial influence of his children: the older ones, without knowing it, reminded him to think historically; the younger one reminded him to think alphabetically. Gary Scharnhorst wishes to acknowledge his children, too: the older one reminded him to be pragmatic; the younger one reminded him to dream.

Tom Quirk
Gary Scharnhorst