

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER

BACKGROUND

In the 1870s the English philosopher Herbert Spencer gained popularity in the United States as an advocate of social Darwinism. Applying Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to society, Spencer believed society operated like a jungle in which only the fittest survived. He admitted that survival of the fittest was a cruel process. However, he also believed the process promised long-term benefits. He thought human beings, if left alone, would slowly evolve into citizens of a more perfect society. His ideas gave corporate leaders of the late 1800s a philosophy that justified the acquisition of tremendous wealth without interference from the government.

Spencer's ideas had a tremendous influence on William Graham Sumner (1840-1910). The child of an immigrant working-class family, Sumner studied theology and, for a time, served as an ordained Episcopal minister. In Spencer's writings Sumner found a philosophy that conformed with his view of the world. He decided to quit the ministry and become a teacher of social Darwinism. In 1872 he became a professor at Yale.

A tough-minded man with a sharp tongue, Sumner was a popular professor. In his lectures he denounced government aid to the poor and to the industrialists. His expression, "It's root, hog, or die," became a characteristic description of social Darwinism. A student once asked Sumner, "Suppose some professor of political science came along and took your job away from you. Wouldn't you be sore?" Sumner responded, "Any other professor is welcome to try. If he gets my job, it is my fault. My business is to teach the subject so well that no one can take the job away from me." In this short statement Sumner summed up the essence of social Darwinism and the law of the jungle—only the fittest survive.

Sumner described his personal philosophy through lectures, magazine articles, and his most famous book *Folkways*. He opposed all government intervention in economic affairs. He felt that any attempt to reform society would fail. In short, he did not think society needed any care, supervision, or social engineering.

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER – IN HIS OWN WORDS

“The Forgotten Man,” 1883

Now who is the Forgotten Man? He is the simple, honest laborer, ready to earn his living by productive work. We pass him by because he is independent, self-supporting, and asks no favors. He does not appeal to the emotions or excite the sentiments. He only wants to make a contract and fulfill it, with respect on both sides and favor on neither side. He must get his living out of the capital of the country. The larger the capital is, the better living he can get. Every particle of capital which is wasted on the vicious, the idle, and the shiftless is so much taken from the capital available to reward the independent and productive laborer.

What Social Classes Owe to Each Other, 1883

It is commonly asserted that there are in the United States no classes, and any allusion to classes is resented. On the other hand, we constantly read and hear discussion of social topics in which the existence of social classes is assumed as a simple fact. “The poor,” “the weak,” “the laborers,” are expressions which are used as if they had exact and well-understood definition. Discussions are made to bear upon the assumed rights, wrongs, and misfortunes of certain social classes; and all public speaking and writing consists, in a large measure, of the discussion of general plans for meeting the wishes of classes of people who have not been able to satisfy their own desires. These classes are sometimes discontented, and sometimes not. Sometimes they do not know that anything is amiss with them until the “friends of humanity” come to them with offers of aid. . . . Sometimes they claim that they have a right to everything of which they feel the need for their happiness on earth. . . . They formulate their claims as rights against society—that is, against some other men. In their view they have a right, not only to *pursue* happiness, but to *get* it; and if they fail to get it, they think they have a claim to the aid of other men—that is, to the labor and self-denial of other men—to get it for them. They find orators and poets who tell them that they have grievances, so long as they have unsatisfied desires. . . .

A free man in a free democracy has no duty whatever toward other men of the same rank and standing, except respect, courtesy, and good-will. . . . In a free state every man is held and expected to take care of himself and his family, to make no trouble for his neighbor, and to contribute his full share to public interests and common necessities. If he fails in this he throws burdens on others. He does not thereby acquire rights against the others. On the contrary, he only accumulates obligations toward them; and if he is allowed to make his deficiencies a ground of new claims, he passes over into the position of a privileged or petted person—emancipated from duties, endowed with claims. This is the inevitable result of combining democratic political theories with humanitarian social theories. . . . One result of such inconsistency must surely be to undermine democracy, to increase the power

of wealth in the democracy, and to hasten the subjection of democracy to plutocracy, for a man who accepts any share which he has not earned in another man's capital cannot be an independent citizen. . . .

I never have known a man of ordinary common-sense who did not urge upon his sons, from earliest childhood, doctrines of economy and the practice of accumulation. A good father believes that he does wisely to encourage enterprise, productive skill, prudent self-denial, and the judicious expenditure on the part of his son. The object is to teach the boy to accumulate capital. If, however, the boy should read many of the diatribes against "the rich" which are afloat in our literature; if he should read or hear some of the current discussion about "capital"; and if, with the ingenuousness of youth, he should take these productions at their literal sense, instead of discounting them, as his father does, he would be forced to believe that he was on the path of infamy when he was earning and saving capital. It is worthwhile to consider which we mean or what we mean. Is it wicked to be rich? Is it mean to be a capitalist? If the question is one of degree only, and it is right to be rich up to a certain point and wrong to be richer, how shall we find the point? . . .

The aggregation of large fortunes is not at all a thing to be regretted. On the contrary, it is a necessary condition of many forms of social advance. If we should set a limit to the accumulation of wealth, we should say to our most valuable producers, "We do not want you to do us the services which you best understand how to perform, beyond a certain point." It would be like killing off our generals in war. . . .

I have never seen a defense of the employer. Who dares say that he is not the friend of the poor man? Who dares say that he is the friend of the employer? I will try to say what I think is true. There are bad, harsh, cross employers; there are slovenly, negligent workmen; there are just about as many proportionately of one of these classes as of the other. The employers of the United States—as a class, proper exceptions being understood—have no advantage over their workmen. They could not oppress them if they wanted to do so. The advantage, taking good and bad times together, is with the workmen. The employers wish the welfare of the workmen in all respects, and would give redress for any grievance which was brought to their attention. They are considerate of the circumstances and interests of the laborers. They remember the interests of the workmen when driven to consider the necessity of closing or reducing hours. They go on, and take risk and trouble on themselves in working through bad times, rather than close their works. The whole class of those-who-have are quick in their sympathy for any form of distress or suffering. They are too quick. Their sympathies need regulating, not stimulating. They are more likely to give away capital recklessly than to withhold it stingily when any alleged case of misfortune is before them. . . .

Every man and woman in society has one big duty. That is, to take care of his or her own self. This is a social duty. For, fortunately, the matter stands so that the duty of making the best of one's self individually is not a

separate thing from the duty of filling one's place in society, but the two are one, and the latter is accomplished when the former is done. The common notion, however, seems to be that one has a duty to society, as a special and separate thing, and that this duty consists in considering and deciding what other people ought to do. Now, the man who can do anything for or about anybody else than himself is fit to be head of a family; and when he becomes head of a family he has duties to his wife and his children, in addition to the former big duty. Then, again, any man who can take care of himself and his family is in a very exceptional position, if he does not find in his immediate surroundings people who need his care and have some sort of a personal claim upon him. If, now, he is able to fulfill all this, and to take care of anybody outside his family and his dependents, he must have a surplus of energy, wisdom, and moral virtue beyond what he needs for his own business. No man has this; for a family is a charge which is capable of infinite development, and no man could suffice to the full measure of duty for which a family may draw upon him. Neither can a man give to society so advantageous an employment of his services, whatever they are, in any other way as by spending them on his family. . . .

The danger of minding other people's business is twofold. First, there is the danger that a man may leave his own business unattended to; and second, there is the danger of an impertinent interference with another's affairs. The "friends of humanity" almost always run into both dangers. . . .

The social doctors enjoy the satisfaction of feeling themselves to be more moral or more enlightened than their fellow-men. They are able to see what other men ought to do when the other men do not see it. An examination of the work of the social doctors, however shows that they are only more ignorant and more presumptuous than other people. . . .

Society does not need any care or supervision. If we can acquire a science of society, based on observation of phenomena and study of forces, we may hope to gain some ground slowly toward the elimination of a sound and natural social order. Whatever we gain that way will be by growth, never in the world by any reconstruction of society on the plan of some enthusiastic social architect. The latter is only repeating the old error over again, and postponing all our chances of real improvement. Society needs first of all to be freed from these meddlers—that is, to be let alone. Here we are, then, once more back at the old doctrine—*laissez faire*. Let us translate it into blunt English, and it will read, "Mind your own business." It is nothing but the doctrine of liberty. Let every man be happy in his own way. . . .

The type and formula of most schemes of philanthropy and humanitarianism is this: A and B put their heads together to decide what C shall be made to do for D. The radical vice of all these schemes, from a sociological point of view, is that C is not allowed a voice in the matter, and his position, character, and interests, as well as the ultimate effects on society through C's interests, are entirely overlooked. I call C the Forgotten Man. . . .

. . . Capital is the force by which civilization is maintained and carried

on. The same piece of capital cannot be used in two ways. Every bit of capital, therefore, which is given to a shiftless and inefficient member of society, who makes no return for it, is diverted from a reproductive use; but if it was put to reproductive use, it would have to be granted in wages to an efficient and productive laborer. Hence the real sufferer by that kind of benevolence which consists in an expenditure of capital to protect the good-for-nothing is the industrious laborer. . . . There is an almost invincible prejudice that a man who gives a dollar to a beggar is generous and kind-hearted, but that a man who refuses the beggar and puts the dollar in a savings-bank is stingy and mean. The former is putting capital where it is very sure to be wasted, and where it will be a kind of seed for a long succession of future dollars, which must be wasted to ward off a greater strain on the sympathies than would have been occasioned by a refusal in the first place. . . .

There is a beautiful notion afloat in our literature and in the minds of our people that men are born to certain "natural rights." If that were true, there would be something on earth which was got for nothing, and this world would not be the place it is at all. The fact is, that there is no right whatever inherited by man which has not an equivalent and corresponding duty by the side of it, as the price of it. . . . Something for nothing is not to be found on earth.

If there were such things as natural rights, the question would arise, Against whom are they good? Who has the corresponding obligation to satisfy these rights? There can be no rights against Nature, except to get out of her whatever we can, which is only the fact of the struggle for existence stated over again. The common assertion is, that the rights are good against society; that is; that society is bound to obtain and secure them for the person interested. Society, however, is only the persons interested plus some other person; and as the persons interested have by the hypothesis failed to win the rights, we come to this, that natural rights are the claims which certain persons have by prerogative against some other person. Such is the actual interpretation in practice of natural rights—claims which some people have by prerogative on other people.

This theory is a very far-reaching one, and of course it is adequate to furnish a foundation for a whole social philosophy. In its widest extension it comes to mean that if any man finds himself uncomfortable in this world, it must be somebody else's fault, and that somebody is bound to come and make him comfortable. Now, the people who are most uncomfortable in this world. . . . are those who have neglected their duties, and consequently have failed to get their rights. The people who can be called upon to serve the uncomfortable must be those who have done their duty, as the world goes, tolerably well. Consequently the doctrine which we are discussing turns out to be in practice only a scheme for making injustice prevail in human society by reversing the distribution of rewards and punishments between those who have done their duty and those who have not.

The "Challenge of Facts," 1880s

Private property, which we have seen to be a feature of society organized in accordance with the natural conditions of the struggle for existence, produces inequalities between men. The struggle for existence is aimed against nature. It is from her niggardly hand that we have to wrest the satisfactions for our needs, but our fellow-men are our competitors for the meager supply. Competition, therefore, is a law of nature. Nature is entirely neutral; she submits to him who most energetically and resolutely assails her. She grants her rewards to the fittest, therefore, without regard to other considerations of any kind. If, then, there be liberty, men get from her just in proportion to their works, and their having and enjoying are just in proportion to their being and their doing. Such is the system of nature. If we do not like it, and if we try to amend it, there is only one way in which we can do it. We can take from the better and give to the worse. We can deflect the penalties of those who have done ill and throw them on those who have done better. We can take the rewards from those who have done better and give them to those who have done worse. We shall thus lessen the inequalities. We shall favor the survival of the unfittest, and we shall accomplish this by destroying liberty. Let it be understood that we cannot go outside of this alternative: liberty, inequality, survival of the fittest; not-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society forward and favors all its best members; the latter carries society downwards and favors all its worst members. . . .

. . . The socialist regards misery as the fault of society. He thinks that we can organize society as we like and that an organization can be devised in which poverty and misery shall disappear. He goes even further than this. He assumes that men have artificially organized society as it now exists. Hence, if anything is disagreeable or hard in the present state of society it follows, on that view, that the task of organizing society has been imperfectly and badly performed, and that it needs to be done over again. . . .

The truth is that the social order is fixed by laws of nature precisely analogous to those of the physical order. The most that man can do is by ignorance and self-conceit to mar the operation of social laws. The evils of society are to a great extent the result of the dogmatism and self-interest of statesmen, philosophers, and ecclesiastics who in past time have done just what the socialists now want to do. Instead of studying the natural laws of the social order, they assumed that they could organize society as they chose, they made up their minds what kind of a society they wanted to make, and they planned their little measures for the ends they had resolved upon. It will take centuries of scientific study of the facts of nature to eliminate from human society the mischievous institutions and traditions which the said statesmen, philosophers, and ecclesiastics have introduced into it.

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER - A SIMULATED INTERVIEW

1. Do human beings possess natural rights?

- A. If human beings possessed natural rights, nature would be granting something for nothing. Something for nothing is not found on earth. No person possesses rights unaccompanied by responsibilities.
- B. Nature does not grant rights; nature requires human beings to struggle for survival in a brutal world. The best that human beings can hope for is to soften the brutality of life through knowledge, discipline, and technology.
- C. Some people inaccurately claim they not only have a natural right to *pursue* happiness, they also have a right to *receive* happiness. If they do not achieve happiness they blame other people.

2. Should people with money take care of the disadvantaged?

- A. Each individual has one primary responsibility—to take care of himself. All that an individual owes other people is respect, courtesy, and goodwill.
- B. An individual who is fit to take care of himself *and* to take care of others should restrict himself to caring for a family. No individual has enough energy, wisdom, and moral virtue to provide for more than himself and his family.
- C. A person who tries to take care of someone else's business risks leaving his own business unattended.
- D. Although a person who gives a dollar to a beggar is seen as generous and kind, that person has in fact put his money where it is sure to be wasted. All money given to people who do not take care of themselves is money that could instead reward independent and productive workers.
- E. People who fail to take care of themselves become a burden for others. People who accept money they do not earn are released from the responsibility of having to care for themselves—they are undeservedly placed in a privileged class.
- F. Society should give more credit to the average person who is hard-working, self-supporting, honest, and contributes to society. This person is the Forgotten Man.

3. Are capitalists the enemies of society?

- A. Wealthy capitalists are unjustly portrayed as disgraceful human beings. The accumulation of a large fortune is not disgraceful. The accumulation of wealth is necessary for the improvement of society.
- B. Capitalists are unjustly portrayed as enemies of the workers. Capitalists desire the best for their workers and are concerned for their workers. In fact, a capitalist's sympathy for workers should be regulated rather than encouraged.

C. Capitalists have no advantages over their workers. Capitalists could not oppress their workers if they wanted. Workers have the advantage over capitalists.

4. **Should society be reformed?**

- A. Society does not need care or supervision. All attempts at reform and social engineering should be resisted.
- B. Private property, inequality, and competition are natural to human existence. Human beings are engaged in a never-ending struggle against nature for their very existence. Nature does not provide enough for all human beings. Society cannot be reformed.
- C. Human beings are molded by circumstances beyond their control. Human beings do not possess the power to reform their environment. Reformers should leave society alone and mind their own business. *Laissez faire* is the best policy.
- D. Any attempt to improve society by limiting wealth requires asking wealthy people to stop providing the service they know best. Limiting wealth is similar to killing off generals during wartime.
- E. Reformers who try to fix society's problems feel they are more enlightened than others. In fact, reformers are simply more ignorant and more arrogant.
- F. The only proper role of government is to provide peace, order, and security. Reformers mistakenly believe the role of government should be expanded.

5. **What most threatens progress in society?**

- A. The biggest threat to American society is the tendency of a government chosen by the masses to intervene in economic affairs. Society improves naturally if those who are most fit are allowed to work and invest without restrictions.
- B. Industry and state should be separate in the same manner as church and state. A relationship between government and business would be disastrous. If capitalists used their power for political rather than industrial purposes, society would be in danger.
- C. When democratic reformers successfully use the state to regulate economic conditions they force capitalists to protect themselves with the power of government. Corruption in politics is inevitable when reformers try to regulate capitalists.

6. **What determines the character of society?**

- A. Industrial groups determine the character of society through the use of technology.
- B. Tradition and habit provide society with gradual progress.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Vocabulary

Define the following terms before reading the lesson on Sumner.

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|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. accumulation | 8. dogmatism | 15. petted |
| 2. aggregation | 9. ecclesiastics | 16. plutocracy |
| 3. analogous | 10. grievance | 17. prerogative |
| 4. assertion | 11. inefficient | 18. presumptuous |
| 5. benevolence | 12. judicious | 19. redress |
| 6. diatribe | 13. negligent | 20. shiftless |
| 7. discontented | 14. niggardly | 21. slovenly |

Review

1. What is social Darwinism?
2. In what way did Herbert Spencer believe social Darwinism provided long-term benefits?
3. What did corporate leaders justify with social Darwinism in the late 1800s?
4. What was Sumner's most famous book?
5. Why did Sumner believe people did not possess natural rights?
6. What situation did Sumner believe is thrust upon people by nature?
7. How did Sumner think human beings could soften the world's brutality?
8. According to Sumner, what is each individual's primary responsibility?
9. Why did Sumner think money should not be given to the poor?
10. What did Sumner think happened to people who accepted money they did not earn?
11. Who did Sumner think was the Forgotten Man?
12. In what way did Sumner think capitalists were unjustly portrayed as enemies of the workers?
13. What did Sumner think was the proper role of government?
14. What did Sumner think was the biggest threat to American society?
15. What happens when democratic reformers use the state to regulate economic conditions?
16. Decide whether the following statements are **True** or **False** according to William Graham Sumner.
 - A. Some people inaccurately claim they have a right to happiness.
 - B. All that an individual owes other people is respect, courtesy, and goodwill.
 - C. Wealthy capitalists are disgraceful human beings.
 - D. Workers hold an advantage over capitalists.
 - E. All attempts at social reform should be resisted.
 - F. Nature does not provide enough for all human beings.
 - G. Reformers should quit trying to improve society; *laissez faire* is the best policy.
 - H. Industry and state, like church and state, should be separate.

What do you think?

On a scale of one through five, rate your opinion of the following quotations by Sumner. Write a short statement explaining your rating.

1 – You **strongly agree** with the statement *or* you feel the statement is **admirable** considering the historical circumstances surrounding it.

5 – You **strongly disagree** with the statement *or* you feel the statement is **contemptible** considering the historical circumstances surrounding it.

- A. *Every particle of capital which is wasted on the vicious, the idle, and the shifless is so much taken from the capital available to reward the independent and productive laborer.*
- B. *A free man in a free democracy has no duty whatever toward other men of the same rank and standing, except respect, courtesy, and good-will.*
- C. *In a free society every man is held and expected to take care of himself and his family, to make no trouble for his neighbor, and to contribute his full share to public interests and common necessities.*
- D. *The aggregation of large fortunes is not at all a thing to be regretted. On the contrary, it is a necessary condition of many forms of social advance.*
- E. *The employers wish the welfare of the workmen in all respects, and would give redress for any grievance which was brought to their attention. They are considerate of the circumstances and interests of the workmen.*
- F. *An examination of the social doctors . . . shows that they are . . . more ignorant and more presumptuous than other people.*
- G. *Mind your own business. It is nothing but the doctrine of liberty. Let every man be happy in his own way.*
- H. *There is no right whatever inherited by man which has not an equivalent and corresponding duty by the side of it, as the price of it.*
- I. *The people who are most uncomfortable in this world . . . are those who have neglected their duties, and consequently have failed to get their rights.*
- J. *Competition . . . is a law of nature. Nature is entirely neutral; she submits to him who most energetically and resolutely assails her.*
- K. *The yearning after equality is the offspring of covetousness, and there is no possible plan for satisfying that yearning which can do aught else than rob A to give to B; consequently all such plans nourish some of the meanest vices of human nature, waste capital, and overthrow of civilization.*
- L. *The state, it cannot be too often repeated, does nothing and can give nothing which it does not take from somebody.*

HENRY GEORGE

BACKGROUND

Few American reformers have ever gained as devoted a following as Henry George (1839-1897). George began a reform movement that won the admiration of such well-known men as Sun Yat Sen, Leo Tolstoy, George Bernard Shaw, and Woodrow Wilson. Some people were so committed to George's message that fifty years after his death his daughter witnessed old men crying when her father's name was mentioned.

Throughout his life George worked a variety of jobs. He left home at age thirteen and spent time as a gold prospector, sailor, and typesetter. In his early twenties he endured several years of wretched poverty. Having to beg for money to stay alive gave him a profound understanding of the dark side of the Industrial Revolution.

After gaining employment as a journalist George began writing about people who suffered under the American capitalist system. He brought attention to the abusive power of monopolies, the discrimination against immigrants, and the desperate poverty for many Americans. He was outraged that a nation of great wealth would allow such injustice. A deeply religious man, he shaped his criticisms in moral terms. Writing with great passion, he never came across as an impersonal economist viewing the world in technical terms.

After publishing his masterpiece *Progress and Poverty* he saw his ideas championed by people around the world. The book was a huge bestseller and made his name a household word in both the United States and England. He was even asked to run for mayor of New York in 1886. Although he did not win the three-way mayoral race, he did beat Teddy Roosevelt. He was asked to run again for mayor in 1897, but died before the election. Over 100,000 people attended his funeral.

In spite of the fact his proposals met almost universal rejection by academic economists, he was a powerful symbol of a desire for justice. During the industrial takeoff of the late 1800s he reminded Americans that traditional ideas of equality and republicanism should not be discarded. His importance to the growing desire for the reforms finally instituted in the early 1900s cannot be underestimated.

HENRY GEORGE - IN HIS OWN WORDS***Progress and Poverty, 1879***

The present century has been marked by a prodigious increase in wealth-producing power. The utilization of steam and electricity, the introduction of improved processes and labor-saving machinery, the greater subdivision and grander scale of production, the wonderful facilitation of exchanges, have multiplied enormously the effectiveness of labor.

At the beginning of this marvelous era it was natural to expect, and it was expected, that labor-saving inventions would lighten the toil and improve the condition of the laborer; that the enormous increase in the power of producing wealth would make real poverty a thing of the past. . . .

Out of these bounteous material conditions [we] would have seen arising . . . moral conditions realizing the golden age of which mankind have always dreamed. Youth no longer stunted and starved; age no longer harried by avarice; the child at play with the tiger; the man with the muck-rake drinking in the glory of the stars! Foul things fled, fierce things tame; discord turned to harmony! For how could there be greed where all had enough? How could the vice, the crime, the ignorance, the brutality, that spring from poverty and the fear of poverty, exist where poverty had vanished? Who should crouch where all were freemen; who oppress where all were peers? . . .

Now, however, we are coming into collision with facts which there can be no mistaking. From all parts of the civilized world come complaints of industrial depression; of labor condemned to involuntary idleness; of capital massed and wasting; of pecuniary distress among business men; of want and suffering and anxiety among the working classes. All the dull, deadening pain, all the keen, maddening anguish, that to great masses of men are involved in the words "hard times," afflict the world today. . . .

And, unpleasant as it may be to admit it, it is at last becoming evident that the enormous increase in productive power which has marked the present century and is still going on with accelerating ratio, has no tendency to extirpate poverty or to lighten the burdens of those compelled to toil. . . . The march of invention has clothed mankind with powers of which a century ago the boldest imagination could not have dreamed. But in factories where labor-saving machinery has reached its most wonderful development, little children are at work; wherever the new forces are anything like fully utilized, large classes are maintained by charity or live on the verge of recourse to it; amid the greatest accumulations of wealth, men die of starvation, and puny infants suckle dry breasts; while everywhere the greed of gain, the worship of wealth, shows the force of the fear of want. The promised land flies before us like the mirage. The fruits of the tree of knowledge turn as we grasp them to apples of Sodom that crumble at the touch.

It is true that wealth has been greatly increased, and that the average of comfort, leisure, and refinement has been raised; but these gains are not

general. In them the lowest class do not share. . . .

This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. It is the central fact from which spring industrial, social, and political difficulties that perplex the world, and with which statesmanship and philanthropy and education grapple in vain. From it come the clouds that overhang the future of the most progressive and self-reliant nations. It is the riddle which the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilization, and which not to answer is to be destroyed. So long as all the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes but to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of Have and the House of Want, progress is not real and cannot be permanent. The reaction must come. The tower leans from its foundations, and every new story but hastens the final catastrophe. To educate men who must be condemned to poverty, is but to make them restive; to base on a state of most glaring social inequality political institutions under which men are theoretically equal, is to stand a pyramid on its apex. . . .

Land, labor, and capital are the three factors of production. If we remember that capital is thus a term used in contradistinction to land and labor, we at once see that nothing properly included under either one of these terms can be properly classed as capital. The term land necessarily includes, not merely the surface of the earth as distinguished from the water and the air, but the whole material universe outside of man himself, for it is only by having access to land, from which his very body is drawn, that man can come in contact with or use nature. The term land embraces, in short all natural materials, forces, and opportunities, and, therefore, nothing that is freely supplied by nature can be properly classed as capital. . . . The term labor, in like manner, includes all human exertion, and hence human powers whether natural or acquired can never properly be classed as capital. . . .

We must exclude from the category of capital everything that may be included either as land or labor. Doing so, there remain only things which are neither land nor labor, but which have resulted from the union of these two original factors of production. Nothing can be properly capital that does not consist of these—that is to say, nothing can be capital that is not wealth. . . .

. . . That as land is necessary to the exertion of labor in the production of wealth, to command the land which is necessary to labor, is to command all the fruits of labor save enough to enable labor to exist. . . . This simple truth, in its application to social and political problems, is hid from the great masses of men partly by its very simplicity, and in greater part by widespread fallacies and erroneous habits of thought which lead them to look in every direction but the right one for an explanation of the evils which oppress and threaten the civilized world. . . .

There is but one way to remove an evil—and that is, to remove its cause. Poverty deepens as wealth increases, and wages are forced down while productive power grows, because land, which is the source of all wealth and the field of all labor is monopolized. To extirpate poverty, to make wages

what justice commands they should be, the full earnings of the laborer, we must therefore substitute for the individual ownership of land a common ownership. Nothing else will go to the cause of the evil—in nothing else is there the slightest hope.

This, then, is the remedy for the unjust and unequal distribution of wealth apparent in modern civilization, and for all the evils which flow from it:

We must make land common property. . . .

Whatever may be said for the institution of private property in land, it is therefore plain that it cannot be defended on the score of justice.

The equal right of all men to the use of land is as clear as their equal right to breathe the air—it is a right proclaimed by the fact of their existence. For we cannot suppose that some men have a right to be in this world and others no right. . . .

Our boasted freedom necessarily involves slavery, so long as we recognize property in land. Until that is abolished, Declarations of Independence and Acts of Emancipation are in vain. So long as one man can claim the exclusive ownership of the land from which other men must live, slavery will exist, and as material progress goes on, must grow and deepen! . . .

Now, insomuch as the taxation of rent, or land values, must necessarily be increased just as we abolish other taxes, we may put the proposition into practical form by proposing—

To abolish all taxation save that upon land values.

As we have seen, the value of land is at the beginning of society nothing, but as society develops by the increase of population and the advance of the arts, it becomes greater and greater. In every civilized country, even the newest, the value of the land taken as a whole is sufficient to bear the entire expenses of government. . . .

The tax upon land values is . . . the most just and equal of all taxes. It falls only upon those who receive from society a peculiar and valuable benefit, and upon them in proportion to the benefit they receive. It is the taking by the community, for the use of the community, of that value which is the creation of the community. It is the application of the common property to common uses. When all rent is taken by taxation for the needs of the community, then will the equality ordained by nature be attained. No citizen will have an advantage over any other citizen save as is given by his industry, skill, and intelligence; and each will obtain what he fairly earns. Then, but not till then, will labor get its full reward, and capital its natural return. . . .

To abolish [all] taxes [except on land value] would be to lift the whole enormous weight of taxation from productive industry. The needle of the seamstress and the great manufactory; the cart-horse and the locomotive; the fishing boat and the steamship; the farmer's plow and the merchant's stock, would be alike untaxed. All would be free to make or to save, to buy or to sell, unfinned by taxes, unannoyed by the tax-gatherer. Instead of saying to the producer, as it does now, "The more you add to the general wealth the

more, shall you be taxed!" the state would say to the producer, "Be as industrious, as thrifty, as enterprising as you choose, you shall have your full reward! You shall not be fined for making two blades of grass grow where one grew before; you shall not be taxed for adding to the aggregate wealth."

The evils arising from the unjust and unequal distribution of wealth, which are becoming more and more apparent as modern civilization goes on, are not incidents of progress, but tendencies which must bring progress to a halt; that they will not cure themselves, but, on the contrary, must, unless their cause is removed, grow greater and greater, until they sweep us back into barbarism by the road every previous civilization has trod. But it also shows that these evils are not imposed by natural laws; that they spring solely from social maladjustments which ignore natural laws, and that in removing their cause we shall be giving an enormous impetus to progress.

The poverty which in the midst of abundance pinches and embrates men, and all the manifold evils which flow from it, spring from a denial of justice. In permitting the monopolization of the opportunities which nature freely offers to all, we have ignored the fundamental law of justice—for, so far as we can see, when we view things upon a large scale, justice seems to be the supreme law of the universe. But by sweeping away this injustice and asserting the rights of all men to natural opportunities, we shall conform ourselves to the law—we shall remove the great cause of unnatural inequality in the distribution of wealth and power; we shall abolish poverty; tame the ruthless passions of greed; dry up the springs of vice and misery; light in dark places the lamp of knowledge; give new vigor to invention and a fresh impulse to discovery; substitute political strength for political weakness; and make tyranny and anarchy impossible.

The reform I have proposed accords with all that is politically, socially, or morally desirable. . . . What is it but the carrying out in letter and spirit of the truth enunciated in the Declaration of Independence—the "self-evident" truth that is the heart and soul of the Declaration—*"That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!"*

These rights are denied when the equal right to land—on which and by which men alone can live—is denied. Equality of political rights will not compensate for the denial of the equal right to the bounty of nature. Political liberty, when the equal right to land is denied, becomes, as population increases and invention goes on, merely the liberty to compete for employment at starvation wages. This is the truth that we have ignored. And so there come beggars in our streets and tramps on our roads; and poverty enslaves men whom we boast are political sovereigns; and want breeds ignorance that our schools cannot enlighten; and citizens vote as their masters dictate; and the demagogue usurps the part of the statesman; and gold weighs in the scales of justice; and in high places sit those who do not pay to civic virtue even the compliment of hypocrisy; and the pillars of the

republic that we thought so strong already bend under an increasing strain.

Social Problems, 1883

The terms rich and poor are of course frequently used in a relative sense. . . . Now, we cannot, of course, all be rich in the sense of having more than others; but when people say, as they so often do, that we cannot all be rich, or when they say that we must always have the poor with us, they do not use the words in this comparative sense. They mean by the rich those who have enough, or more than enough wealth to gratify all reasonable wants, and by the poor, those who have not.

Now, using the words in this sense, I join issue with those who say that we cannot all be rich; with those who declare that in human society the poor must always exist. . . . What I mean is, that we all might have leisure, comfort, and abundance, not merely of the necessities but even of what are now esteemed the elegancies and luxuries of life. . . . I do mean to say that we might all have enough wealth to satisfy reasonable desires; that we might all have so much of the material things we now struggle for that no one would want to rob or swindle his neighbor; that no one would worry all day or lie awake at nights fearing he might be brought to poverty or thinking how he might acquire wealth.

Does this seem a utopian dream? What would people of fifty years ago have thought of one who would have told them that it was possible to sow by steam power; to cross the Atlantic in six days or the continent in three; to have a message sent from London at noon delivered in Boston three hours before noon; to hear in New York the voice of a man talking in Chicago. . . .

Who can look about him without seeing that to whatever cause poverty may be due, it is not due to the niggardliness of nature; without seeing that it is blindness or blasphemy to assume that the Creator has condemned the masses of men to hard toil for a bare living? . . .

"The poor ye have always with you." If ever a scripture has been wrested to the devil's service, this is the scripture. How often have these words been distorted from their obvious meaning to soothe conscience into acquiescence in human misery and degradation—to bolster that blasphemy, the very negation and denial of Christ's teaching, that the All-Wise and Most Merciful, the Infinite Father, has decreed that so many of His creatures but be poor in order that others of His creatures to whom He wills the good things of life should enjoy the pleasure and virtue of doling out alms! . . .

It is not necessary that anyone should be condemned to monotonous toil; it is not necessary that anyone should lack the wealth and the leisure which permit the development of the faculties that raise man above the animal. . . . In turning men into machines we are wasting the highest powers.

HENRY GEORGE - A SIMULATED INTERVIEW

1. **How did the Industrial Revolution affect American society?**
 - A. The Industrial Revolution brought about great progress in productive capabilities. The productive power of labor was tremendously multiplied.
 - B. The economic progress of the Industrial Revolution was not accompanied by progress for the lower classes. Too many people are stuck in a life of desperate poverty.

2. **Why must society try to solve the problem of poverty?**
 - A. In a time of enormous economic progress poverty is more visible and less acceptable.
 - B. All human beings have a right to the necessities and comforts of life.
 - C. All people have an equal right to apply their labor to the earth's natural resources.
 - D. The Industrial Revolution allowed people to become wealthy without working; this is morally wrong. Wealth goes primarily to those who own land. Land should belong to all people, and wealth should not come from the mere ownership of land.
 - E. If the problem of poverty is not solved, civilization faces a return to barbarism. An unequal distribution of wealth is dangerous to society. The problems of an unequal distribution of wealth threaten the progress of society.

3. **Is there a solution to the problem of poverty?**
 - A. Nature provides enough resources that no person should have to live a life of poverty.
 - B. The root cause of poverty is the private ownership of land. Land should be made common property.

4. **What are the three factors of production?**
 - A. *Land*: Land includes all material not made by human beings.
 - B. *Labor*: Labor includes all human work.
 - C. *Capital*: Capital includes everything that is not classified as land or labor.

5. **Does the ownership of land involve a financial risk?**
 - A. The value of land increases as society increases in population. Landlords do not have to develop their land or invest capital to increase the value of their land. Owning land involves no financial risk.
 - B. Landlords merely own land. They gain great wealth at no risk and they provide no service to society. This situation is morally wrong and should be corrected.

- 6. How does the monopolization of land affect the capitalist system?**
- A. Land is necessary to both workers and capitalists for the production of wealth. Those who own land control the production of wealth.
 - B. Landlords gain great wealth at the expense of the capitalists and the workers. Private ownership of land leads to slavery for those who do not own land.
 - C. Rent charged by landlords for the use of land robs capitalists and workers of honest profit. Capitalists risk their wealth. Workers give their time and their labor. Landlords offer no services and gain wealth through mere ownership.
 - D. An increase in population creates a higher demand for land. In turn, a higher demand for land creates higher rents demanded by landlords. An increase in rent causes wages and profits to fall.
 - E. Landlords monopolize resources that are granted equally to all human beings by nature. All people should have an equal right to land.
- 7. How can the monopolization of land be abolished?**
- A. Land should be made common property. All human beings have an equal and natural right to use land.
 - B. Landlords should be taxed for the value of their land.
 - C. A single massive tax on the value of land would absorb all rents and end the monopolization of land. The market value of land (known as rent) should be confiscated through taxation.
- 8. How will a single tax on the value of land affect society?**
- A. A tax on the value of land will be the only tax necessary to fund government. All other taxes can be abolished.
 - B. When all taxes are abolished except the land tax, an enormous weight will be lifted from productive industry. People will be free to buy or sell in a market uninhibited by taxes.
 - C. A single tax on the value of land will lead to the abolition of all rent. The abolition of rent will raise wages and profits, abolish poverty, and create full employment.
 - D. The land tax or "single tax" will stimulate economic production and progress.
 - E. Revenue from the land tax can be used to improve society.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Vocabulary

Define the following terms before reading the lesson on George.

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. acquiescence | 8. contradistinction | 15. fallacy |
| 2. aggregate | 9. degradation | 16. maladjustment |
| 3. apex | 10. enigma | 17. niggardly |
| 4. avarice | 11. enunciated | 18. pecuniary |
| 5. barbarism | 12. erroneous | 19. philanthropy |
| 6. blasphemy | 13. extirpate | 20. prodigious |
| 7. bounteous | 14. facilitation | |

Review

1. What well-known men admired George's reform movement?
2. What is George's most important book?
3. What did George think was the positive aspect of the industrial revolution?
4. What did George think was the negative aspect of the industrial revolution?
5. What did George think would happen to society if the problem of poverty was not solved?
6. What did George think was morally wrong with the changes brought about by the industrial revolution?
7. What did George think was the root cause of poverty?
8. What are the three factors of production according to George?
9. According to George, what is land?
10. Why did George think ownership of land involved no financial risk?
11. What did George think was the status of people who did not own land?
12. According to George, what situation creates a higher demand for land?
13. What did George think was the solution to the landlords' monopolization of land?
14. What did George think would happen if all taxes were abolished except the land tax?
15. Decide whether the following statements are **True** or **False** according to Henry George.
 - A. Landlords gain great wealth without providing a service to society.
 - B. People who control capital control the production of wealth.
 - C. Society needs a single massive tax on the value of land.
 - D. All taxes should be abolished except the land tax and an income tax.
 - E. A single tax on the value of land would slow down economic production.
 - F. All people should have an equal right to land.

What do you think?

On a scale of one through five, rate your opinion of the following quotations by George. Write a short statement explaining your rating.

1 – You **strongly agree** with the statement *or* you feel the statement is **admirable** considering the historical circumstances surrounding it.

5 – You **strongly disagree** with the statement *or* you feel the statement is **contemptible** considering the historical circumstances surrounding it.

- A. *It is becoming evident that the enormous increase in productive power which has marked the present century and is still going on with accelerating ratio, has no tendency to extirpate poverty or to lighten the burdens of those compelled to toil.*
- B. *This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. It is the central fact from which spring industrial, social, and political difficulties that perplex the world, and with which statesmanship and philanthropy and education grapple in vain.*
- C. *So long as all the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes but to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of Have and the House of Want, progress is not real and cannot be permanent.*
- D. *We must make land common property.*
- E. *The equal right of all men to the use of land is as clear as their equal right to breathe the air—it is a right proclaimed by the fact of their existence.*
- F. *The evils arising from the unjust and unequal distribution of wealth, which are becoming more and more apparent as modern civilization goes on, are not incidents of progress, but tendencies which must bring progress to a halt.*
- G. *I join issue with those who say that we cannot all be rich; with those who declare that in human society the poor must always exist. . . . We might all have enough wealth to satisfy reasonable desires.*
- H. *It is not necessary that anyone should be condemned to monotonous toil; it is not necessary that anyone should lack the wealth and the leisure which permit the development of the faculties that raise man above the animal.*
- I. *There is danger in reckless change; but greater danger in blind conservatism.*
- J. *There are three ways by which an individual can get wealthy—by work, by gift, and by theft. And, clearly, the reason why the workers get so little is that the beggars and thieves get so much.*
- K. *How can a man be said to have a country when he has not right to a square inch of it?*
- L. *Property in land is as indefensible as property in man.*