I. “Gilded Age”: U.S. and two socially constructed “worlds” (1880s-1920s)

1. Workers

1. work conditions

a. wage dependent labor

i. long hours, 12-16 hour days, six days a week

ii. below subsistence wages

iii. unhealthful and dangerous

b. all ages work

2. social conditions

a. extensive poverty and disease

b. squalid urban slums

c. prostitution, drugs, and crime

d. homeless children

1. “Robber Barons”: immense fortunes

1. immense fortunes build on: fraud, bribery, violence, monopoly, immigrant labor and “wealthfare”

2. Rockefeller (oil), Carnegie (steel) Morgan: railroads

1. Conspicuous consumption
   1. Palace-like homes: “Millionaires Row”

2. Resorts: homes and hotels like castles

3. Yachts

4. Clothes, decor, exotic dinners

5. Ocean liner vacations

D. Culture

1. Acres of Diamonds

2. Horatio Alger, Jr. “rags to riches”

3. Gospel of Wealth

II. Social theory: justification of the two “worlds” on the basis of “survival of the fittest”

A. Social Darwinism

1. William Graham Sumner

“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.

2. Combination of ideas

a. evolution

b. free market

c. biological determinism

d. Calvinism

3. Thesis: Society is progressing (social evolutionism) through competition between individuals, racial groups, and nations

4. evolution and social Darwinism: Sumner and Spencer

a. humans “struggle for existence”

i. society, economic system, is site of struggle, not nature

ii. each individual, each group and each country is engaged in this struggle for survival

iii. this struggle is reflected in economic competition

iv. success and failure are the results

v. rich: “superior ability, foresight and adaptability”

b. successful person is the “survival of the fittest”

c. successful business “survival of the fittest”

d. survival of the fittest guarantees social evolution

i. social progress

ii. strongest individuals

iii. racial superiority

iv. wealth of a nation and therefore superiority

e. poverty is failure in struggle for survival

f. government policy to help poor undermines evolution

5. free market

a. capitalism is best economic system

b. creates the conditions for competition

c. success and failure/strong and weak

i. rich are fittest

ii. poor are unfit for survival

d. government intervention

i. distorts the natural competitive environment of capitalism

ii. allows the weak to survive

ii. weakens the species

iii. undermines natural evolutionary process

6. biological determinism and the individual

A. “discovery” of unitary intelligence

b. single entity that can be measured by IQ test

c. U.S. leads the way

i. soldiers in WWI

ii. immigrants

d. intelligence justifies social location