Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material.”
--William Dean Howells
Change in literature reflected social changes.

- Pre Civil War
- Agrarian
- Decentralized

- Post War
- Urbanized
- More Centralized

These changes were brought about by the Civil War, the rapid growth of railroads, mass immigration, and rapid industrialization.
The Emergence of American Realism

- In the decades following the Civil War, changes were abundant. Western population grew steadily, railroads began to span the continent, and the American frontier disappeared.
- 1860-1890 – 10,000,000 documented immigrants.
- The Western Indians weakened by war, disease, starvation and the government’s duplicity surrendered to the US Army.
- 1903 – air travel begins.
- 1908 - Model T came into popular usage.
Realism defined

- **Realism** in the visual arts and literature is the depiction of subjects as they appear in everyday life, without embellishment or interpretation.
- The term is also used to describe works which may emphasize the ugly or sordid.
- Often, for the first time, focused on the middle or even lower class.
• Realism was heavily against romanticism
• It came about with the introduction of photography - a new visual source that created a desire for people to produce things that look “objectively real”.
• Realism believed in the ideology of objective reality and revolted against exaggerated emotionalism.
• Truth and accuracy became the goals of many Realists
“But realism was not simply concerned with recording wallpaper patterns, hairstyles, or the subjects of conversations. It sought also to explain why ordinary people behave the way they do.”

“. . . Realistic novelists often relied on the emerging sciences of human behavior – biology, psychology, and sociology. . .”
Increased Communication

- Transportation (trains) and communication (telegraph) increase people’s interests in other parts of the country and the world.
- This brought regionalism and local color to the forefront.
- Twain’s *Innocence Abroad* and *Life on the Mississippi*. 
The Red Badge of Courage

- Our first great novel about the Civil War.
- Stephen Crane published it. He was born in 1871.
- The novel wasn’t published until 1893.
- The style of the day (think *The Last of the Mohicans*) could not describe the horror of the war; it took this long for Realism to develop and for a novel to be created about the war.
Twain’s legacy...

- Writers begin to focus on everyday figures.
- The language and habits of different regions become a new fascination. (Local Color)
- From humorist to satirist.
Naturalism

- Naturalistic writers were influenced by the evolution theory of Charles Darwin.
- They believed that one's heredity and social environment decide one's character.
- Whereas realism seeks only to describe subjects as they really are, naturalism also attempts to determine "scientifically" the underlying forces (i.e. the environment or heredity) influencing these subjects' actions.
- They are both opposed to romanticism, in which subjects may receive highly symbolic, idealistic, or even supernatural treatment.
Jack London

- A good example of the Naturalism sect of Realism.
- An interesting character
  - Oyster Pirate
  - Plagiarism
  - Poor view of Asians
  - Financial success
- *Call of the Wild*
- *White Fang*
- “To Build a Fire”
- “The Law of Life”
"Where romanticists transcend the immediate to find the ideal, and naturalists plumb the actual or superficial to find the scientific laws that control its actions, realists center their attention to a remarkable degree on the immediate, the here and now, the specific action, and the verifiable consequence" (A Handbook to Literature 428).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>American Author</th>
<th>Perceived the individual as...</th>
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Paul Lawrence Dunbar (naturalist poet?)

- "Sympathy" (1899)
- I know what the caged bird feels.
  Ah me, when the sun is bright on the upland slopes,
  when the wind blows soft through the springing grass
  and the river floats like a sheet of glass,
  when the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
  and the faint perfume from its chalice steals.
  I know what the caged bird feels.

- I know why the caged bird beats his wing
till its blood is red on the cruel bars,
for he must fly back to his perch and cling
when he fain would be on the bow aswing.
And the blood still throbs in the old, old scars
and they pulse again with a keener sting.
I know why he beats his wing.

- I know why the caged bird sings.
  Ah, me, when its wings are bruised and its bosom sore.
  It beats its bars and would be free.
  It's not a carol of joy or glee,
  but a prayer that it sends from its heart's deep core,
  a plea that upward to heaven it flings.
  I know why the caged bird sings.
Romantics differed from Realists

- Using plot and character development, a writer stated his or her philosophy about how much control mankind had over his own destiny. For example, romantic writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson celebrated the ability of human will to triumph over adversity.

- But...
American realists believed that humanity's freedom of choice was limited by the power of outside forces.
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Plot and character of Realism

- Character is more important than action and plot; complex ethical choices are often the subject.
- Characters appear in the real complexity of temperament and motive; they are in explicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own past.
- Humans control their destinies; characters act on their environment rather than simply reacting to it.
- Renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. Selective presentation of reality with an emphasis on verisimilitude, even at the expense of a well-made plot.
- Events will usually be plausible. Realistic novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances.
- Class is important; the novel has traditionally served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class.