



# **Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America (America and the Long 19th Century)**

*James B. Salazar*

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From the patricians of the early republic to post-Reconstruction racial scientists, from fin de siècle progressivist social reformers to post-war sociologists, character, that curiously formable yet equally formidable 'stuff' has had a long and checkered history giving shape to the American national identity. *Bodies of Reform* reconceives this pivotal category of nineteenth-century literature and culture by charting the development of the concept of 'character' in the fictional genres, social reform movements, and political cultures of the United States from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century. By reading novelists such as Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Pauline Hopkins, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman alongside a diverse collection of texts concerned with the mission of building character, including child-rearing guides, muscle-building magazines, libel and naturalization law, Scout handbooks, and success manuals, James B. Salazar uncovers how the cultural practices of representing character operated in tandem with the character-building strategies of social reformers. His innovative reading of this archive offers a radical revision of this defining category in U.S. literature and culture, arguing that character was the keystone of a cultural politics of embodiment, a politics that played a critical role in determining-and contesting-the social mobility, political authority, and cultural meaning of the raced and gendered body.

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