



James Dorson

The Aesthetics of Mastery:

American Literary Naturalism and the  
Cultural Foundations of Bureaucracy

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James Dorson

### Abstract

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This paper aims to examine the cultural foundations of the modern bureaucratic order around the turn of the twentieth century in the United States. In response to both the breakup of Victorian norms and the social crisis precipitated by the rapid expansion of free market industrial capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century, American naturalist writers experimented with new ways to represent and make sense of the social and cultural turmoil of their times. Rejecting a normative order based on Victorian morality as unable to address the problems of economic inequality and exploitation, this paper will explore how their art promoted a vision of rational management that ultimately helped to reorientate their culture toward the dawning bureaucratic ethos of the Progressive Era.

### About the Author

James Dorson completed his doctoral dissertation in 2011 at the Graduate School of North American Studies (FU Berlin). He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the John F. Kennedy Institute of North American Studies, working on the relationship between American literary naturalism and the emergence of managerialism at the turn of the twentieth century.

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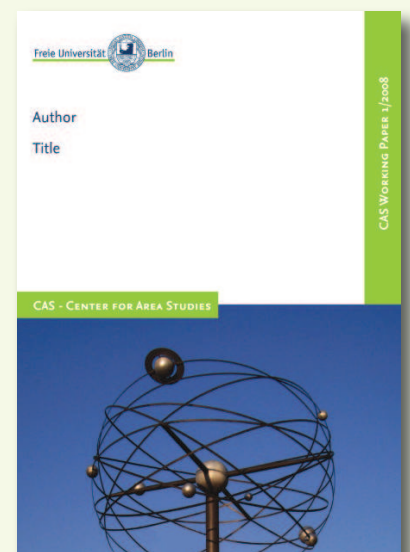
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