



Combating Injustice

The Naturalism of Frank Norris, Jack London, and John Steinbeck

JON FALSARELLA DAWSON

Praise for *Combating Injustice*:

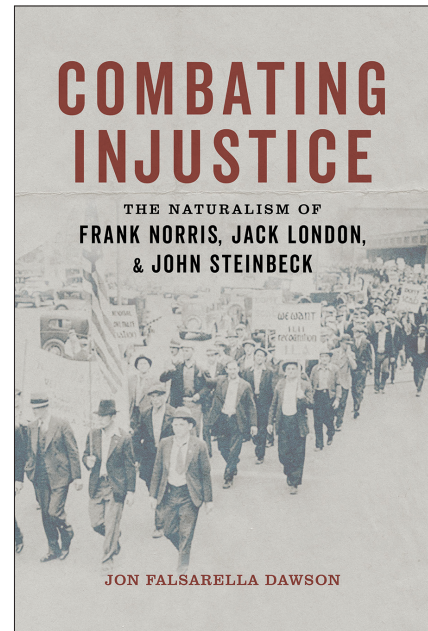
“Dawson’s work displays an expert fusion of close reading and insightful interpretation based upon assiduous research. This book is a major contribution to American literary scholarship.”—Earle Labor, author of *Jack London: An American Life*

In *Combating Injustice*, Jon Falsarella Dawson approaches American literary naturalism as a means of social criticism, exploring the powerful economic arguments and commentaries on labor struggles presented in novels by Frank Norris, Jack London, and John Steinbeck. Making use of extensive archival research, Dawson considers many of the original periodical sources that fueled books from *McTeague* to *The Grapes of Wrath*, as Norris, London, and Steinbeck transformed contemporary materials into illustrations of the socioeconomic forces that shape American life. By depicting the operations of powerful individuals and institutions, these naturalist writers offered audiences a greater awareness of the plight of labor so that readers might find the inspiration to become agents of change.

Works such as *The Octopus*, *The Iron Heel*, *Martin Eden*, and *In Dubious Battle* illuminate many of the central economic issues at play in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the rise of commodity culture, labor disputes involving industrial and agricultural workers, widespread poverty, extreme inequality, and the concentration of resources and land ownership. Norris, London, and Steinbeck highlighted the dangers of these developments by charting their impact on central characters whose fates result from the predatory tactics of corporate monopolies, wealthy individuals, and large financial establishments. Dawson’s lucid analysis shows how all three writers, drawing on contemporary events, accentuated the need for reform and stressed the potential for change by human action. Each author took inspiration from notable events in California, ranging from the Mussel Slough tragedy of 1880 to the agricultural strikes in the Central Valley during the 1930s, presenting the state as a microcosm for conditions throughout the nation during a period of tremendous upheaval.

Combating Injustice: The Naturalism of Frank Norris, Jack London, and John Steinbeck provides carefully contextualized readings of three major writers whose works express both the necessity for and the possibility of creating a more egalitarian society.

JON FALSARELLA DAWSON is a lecturer in English at the University of North Georgia, where he teaches courses in literature and composition. Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, he currently resides in Athens, Georgia, with his wife and daughter.



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