

## Chapter One

# The Father of Social Darwinism

For most of his life Charles Darwin lived as a country gentleman in a spacious home full of books, specimens, children, and domestic animals: a scientist absorbed with the minutiae of experimentation, dissection, and selective breeding, a man seemingly far removed from the class<sup>G</sup> conflict of industrial<sup>G</sup> England and the violence of its colonial<sup>G</sup> wars. Yet it is not his encyclopedic grasp of the facts of biology that made him a household name among people who could not tell a barnacle from a limpet.

### Charles Darwin, Political Economist

The use of evolutionary<sup>G</sup> biology to justify the social order is known today as Social Darwinism,<sup>G</sup> and the conventional wisdom is that it is an aberration of Darwin's theory that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century, trumpeted by the nouveau riche of the Gilded Age.<sup>G</sup> House historians split the historical Charles Darwin into two different people: Charles Darwin the scientist, the brilliant theoretician of evolutionary biology, and his evil twin Herbert Spencer, a discredited social philosopher who taught that evolution is supportive of capitalism.

A prominent historian, Richard Hofstadter, helped to sever Darwin from Social Darwinism by treating the latter without reference to the former, focusing instead on the "general acceptance of unrestrained competition"<sup>G</sup>—as if Darwin did not help