

History 346  
The Gilded Age  
T - TH 11:00 - 12:20  
GHH 108  
Roger Williams University  
Fall Semester 2011

Michael R. H. Swanson, Ph. D  
Office: GHH 215  
Hours: M, W, F, 11:00 - 12:00 T: 2-30 - 4:00  
and by appointment  
e-mail: [hist346gildedage@gmail.com](mailto:hist346gildedage@gmail.com)  
Phone: 254 3230

Week of September 1

For **Thursday, September 1.**

I will begin to familiarize myself with your names and call the roll.

I will introduce the books and requirements for the course and hand out the semester's syllabus.

I will introduce the class website, the class maildrop address, and procedures related to it.

I will show examples of student journals from previous classes, and explain the journal requirement.

I will pass out this sheet.

We'll take some time at the beginning of the class to talk about the characters we're developing. Some basic things to consider as you develop your character:

- A. Age: Your character should be at least twenty in 1890 (born no later than 1870). This would mean your character was at least in his/her early thirties in 1900. I would recommend that you make your character older than this, simply so your character can experience a level of personal autonomy greater than teenagers have. Your character should also be active as late as 1910, and I would take that to be seventy-five. This means your character should be born no earlier than 1835 and no later than 1870.
- B. Gender: male or female, but not necessarily your own gender.
- C. Economic status. Your character has to either earn a living or be provided for by someone who earns a living. Your character can have a particular trade or skill, but doesn't necessarily have to be a member of the professional or managerial class. He/she will be affected by changes in the economic life of the country and will react to those changes according to their life position.
- D. Education. Your character should be literate. This will allow him/her to experience a wider range of events, movements, ideas, etc. than he/she would necessarily experience first hand. Beyond literacy, you can set a level of education as you choose. By the 1890s

women and men, black and white, have college accessible to them.

- E. Region of the Country. Where does your character live? Is he/she rural or urban, north/south/west?
- F. Religion or philosophy. What are the person's guiding beliefs?

The character you create will experience the period between 1890 and 1900 (and some before and some after) based on the characteristics you give him or her. Put together a character which is interesting, certainly. Don't make him/her Rip Van Winkle, sleeping throughout the era. Also put together a character which is *possible*, and at least mainstream enough so you won't have difficulties giving that person a chance to react to his/her times (Lizzie Borden would *not* make a good character for this project).

You're going to have opportunities to modify these, and of course, people do change across time. Perhaps your character will migrate from one region to another or perhaps your person will marry into a different social class, become converted, get into trouble, who knows, at this stage. The important thing is to begin the process of splitting your thinking into a 2010 "you" and an 1890s alter-ego "you".

My classes get more internet-involved every year because the internet becomes a more interesting place every year. You're going to be doing a lot of focused browsing as you work on your journal and other projects. I hope you enjoy that sort of thing.