

History 346  
The Gilded Age  
M-W-F 10:00 - 10:50  
CAS 228  
Roger Williams University  
Spring Semester 2014

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Week of January 22, 2014

**For Wednesday, January 22**

- 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, Bridges 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.

Then we'll take some time to talk about the characters you'll be developing.

**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 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 his/her 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 1876 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 2014 "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.

**For Friday, January 24**

We'll continue with the discussion we began on Wednesday to clean and clear up whatever might be necessary. I would also like to have you do two things:

**First**, browse through the Mark Twain's *The Gilded Age* and estimate how long it will take you to read it, assuming you start tomorrow. I would like everyone to finish it before the general discussion on it begins, and the book may also help some of you decide which of the goings on in this era are of most interest to you personally.

**Second** I want you to click on the link marked [web resources](#) on the web (the real) syllabus. Think of this as a hunt for buried treasure. There are 171 websites on the .pdf file that you'll reach when you do. Look the list over. I don't want you to visit all of them but I'd like to look in two or three which seem to be of special interest to you (I won't complain if you look at four of them). Then browse in those websites for something which draws your attention. Go to it and take a good look at it.