

HIST.346.01
The Gilded Age
Roger Williams University
M, TH 3:30 - 4:50
SB 316

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Hours: M, W, F 12:00-1:30
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Introduction

Focusing upon the period from the period from 1876 through 1903, this course will examine the rise of Populism and the precursors of progressivism and a response to unprecedented technological and social change. (Catalog description)

The final decades of the nineteenth century dramatized the hopes and fears of Americans about the course of industrial "progress." The "gay nineties" of popular lore were a time of adventure and excitement. Mustachioed men in derby hats promenaded along tree lined streets with elegant women in high-buttoned shoes, bustles, and flowing lace dresses. In melodious harmony, people crooned the new popular songs like "Daisy" and "The Sidewalks of New York." At the local saloon patrons could still enjoy a free lunch with frosty mugs of beer that cost only a nickel. When the World's Fair opened in Chicago in 1893, people came from all over the country to marvel at the achievements of technology and the evidence of rapid progress demonstrated at the "great white city" erected by the lakefront.

John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change*

The 1890s were a time of disastrous events that evoked deep foreboding among Americans. The year 1893, which marked the opening of the World's Fair, also ushered in the worst depression the country had yet experienced. Some 500 banks and 15,000 businesses failed. Hundreds of thousands of people were thrown out of work without savings or relief. For the first time large numbers of tramps roamed the countryside. In one of the first mass protest marches on the nation's capital, a group of jobless

men, led by Jacob Coxey and calling themselves "Coxey's Army," marched on Washington, vainly urging federal relief. They were arrested....Industrial violence, crime, disease, and extensive urban poverty challenged American ideals of freedom, democracy, and a relatively classless and harmonious society.

John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change*

It would be hard to imagine two paragraphs more different from each other than the two paragraphs with which I begin this introduction. Both paragraphs really are written by the same person. Indeed, they appear within pages of each other. It is the contrast between good times and disastrous times which makes *The Gilded Age* such an interesting period in American history. Change is a constant in American life, but few decades were as conscious of the pace of change as the eighteen nineties were. Consider for a moment the generation most like you... those who were emerging from their teens in 1890 or thereabouts. The civil War was less a part of the distant past than the Viet Nam War is now. Persons born in the United States were likely to have parents or other relatives, neighbors, or friends who had engaged in that conflict. At twenty, young people of the nineties had been raised with the horse and buggy. At forty, these same people (now middle aged) would likely have ridden in a motor car and may even have witnessed a "flying machine". And they would have witnessed flying machines applied to the art of war. At sixty, they may have been up in one themselves... they certainly would have heard radio and phonographs and seen silent films.

Sorting out and coping with all that change must have been a mammoth task back then. Understanding the impact of that change will be our task over the next fourteen weeks. The fulcrum of our story will be the period 1880-1900, but we'll flash back a bit before that to the year of the Centennial (1876) and stretch our necks forward to look at the years immediately before the First World War.

Course Texts:

Chambers, John Whiteclay,

The Tyranny of Change, America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920 New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press (There may be more than one edition in the bookstore.

Riis, Jacob

How the Other Half Lives (Scribners, 1890) Original publication date. Barnes and Noble Bookstore should have the 2010 edition. It is also available on the [Internet Archive](#).

Steffens, Lincoln,

The Shame of the Cities (BiblioBazaar,2009) There may be Other editions in the bookstore)It is also available on the [Internet Archive](#).

Schlereth, Thomas J.,

Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life New York: Harper Perennial Editions, 1992 Also available for in a Kindle edition (Kindle app is free to install on your computer.

To help us with this task we have two textbooks, two books from the era, and I'm going to ask you to delve in some outside materials, as well. Chambers' The Tyranny of Change and Schlereth's Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life work nicely as a pair. I think we are all aware that we partake in two histories: on the one hand there are the major events, movements, and changes which sweep across the nation and which concern the larger society as a whole. These form the focus of Chambers' book. We will read something like the first two hundred pages. On the other hand, we have our private lives to live as well Most of us don't spend every waking moment thinking about politics or economics: when we do think about them, we think about their impact on our lives--what we can do to capitalize on x or how we can avoid the negative impact of y. As the subtitle of Schlereth's book implies, we will become informed of the changes in everyday life through it.

This year I'm adding two universal period resources for us all: one is Jacob Riis' famous *How the Other Half Lives*. One could fairly call this the first major piece of Investigative Journalism. The other is also a piece of investigative Journalism, this time focusing on political corruption and related matters in American Cities. *The Shame of the Cities* covers St. Louis, (two chapters) Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York. As you will see, these first appeared in McClure's Magazine—(available on the internet).

This course relies heavily on the Internet , as well. I will be providing a web syllabus for you, and this will direct your attention to many additional sources which I will expect you to select for your own use. The URL (Universal Resource Locator) is <http://hist346gildedage.homestead.com/>

Work for the course

If you've taken courses from me before you know pretty much how I operate. Classes will be in the form of informal lectures and free-ranging discussions on readings which I will have asked you to prepare in advance. I will provide a set of guidelines for reading and discussion about once a week, usually on Thursdays before class. These will be in the form of an up date to the class website. Consider the Internet version the real weekly syllabus. Paper syllabi are really inadequate for our purposes, though I'll provide a downloadable one for those who like to keep such things in a notebook. I generally assume that the materials in the readings are understood, unless questions are raised in the course of the class. I don't mind being interrupted, so feel free to enter into active participation.

In addition to the reading assignments to prepare you for class discussion, I'm asking you to do three things:

1. I want each of you to read an American novel published between 1874 and 1910. The authors and titles are found through the link called **E-Fiction**. The novels on this list will be, by and large, the kinds of things that literate Americans were reading during those days. Later, some of them came

to be considered "classics". Others disappeared from public consciousness as fads and interests changed. I will ask you to write a short report in which you reflect on what the novel contributes to your understanding of life around the turn of the century. This time around, I've divided the list into books for adults and books for children (or for adults to read to children) When you reflect, I'd like to have you imagine reading the book "back then", and to think a bit about how the book might effect the thoughts of a person living in the Gilded Age. If you wish, you may read both a book for children and one for adults—there will be extra credit for those of you who employ this option.

2. I want each of you to conduct research, using internet sources, on a movement, event, person, art form, leisure activity, fashion, or whatever, as practiced during the Gilded Age. You will report your work in a short project(5 pages or so), which can be either an informal paper (body notes, bibliography) or a web Journal on Bridges, if you prefer. You will find a place to get started on the page entitled E-Non-Fiction on the class website.
3. You will keep a Journal as if you were living through the period under investigation. I want you to invent a character (age, economic background, ethnic background, gender, political and philosophical stances, etc.) and then react to the materials in your texts as if you were that person. Write in this journal every time you do reading or conduct an investigation for this course, and write about a page. Keep this journal in a loose-leaf notebook, and make sure your name is on every page. I will collect these journals at the middle and at the end of the semester. I may also collect them at random times throughout the semester with no prior notice. The best of these may well also include materials discovered in the course of research. In past years students have really let their imaginations loose on

this project. Last time I offered the course I nominated a half dozen for the Academic Showcase. Students had gone so far as to antique the paper upon which they wrote using tea or some other substance. Many, if not all, included pictures, scrapbook form. I'm hoping for similar results this time. From Time to Time I will call for Volunteers to read excerpts from these journals—if I don't get any, I'll designate just who the volunteers are to be. We may mount an exhibition of these journals during Finals week. I haven't quite decided yet. You may write about the things you discover in sections one and two, as well.

The Final Exam will be optional for those who perform to a decent standard on the three elements above.

Grading:

Your grade for the course will be based on the following:

1. Report on the Novel, 20% (Due date will be sometime towards the end of February (If you do two the best will count)
2. Research using non-fiction resources as described above 20%
3. Semester Journal (cumulative) 50%
4. Attendance and participation 10%
5. Final Exam (optional) up to a 1.5 grade level boost.

You may have heard me say "Grading is for eggs and for cuts of meat.". Assigning grades is the least favorite part of my job, and has been for the last 42 years. Depending on how things go, there may be some changes in the list above. It is difficult to create an outline for a course before I've met the students taking it.

Attendance Policy

I try to be as understanding regarding excused absences as I can be. I excuse absences for illness, for family emergencies, and for other school requirements, such as participation in away athletic activities. I do not require proof. I do require notification, preferably in advance, by e-mail : mswanson@rwu.edu

I do not want to waste time calling the roll, once I have all your names more or less straight in my mind. Consequently, I pass around a sign-in sheet on a daily basis. It is your responsibility to get your name on the sheet before the end of class. The class is on the small side, and I may choose to count,,and if everyone's there, not bother with the sign-in sheet. I also want your brain in attendance and alert to what's going on. Bring a lap-top if you want to, it could be useful—as long as you're not twitting or face booking. Cellphones—please turn them off. More than four unexcused absences will negatively impact your grade

Academic Honesty:

The twin supports of academic life are collaboration and independence of thought. In this class, there is no curve. In the largest sense, you're not in competition with each other, and to the degree that you can assist each other in learning you'll win nothing but praise from me. Yet it is equally important that each student exercise his/her own independent judgment, and have confidence in his/her own mind. Plagiarism defeats the whole purpose of the enterprise, and the University will not tolerate this particular form of intellectual theft.

For the university statement on plagiarism, and for a general exposition of standards of Academic Integrity, consult the [Roger Williams University Website](#). You have learned appropriate techniques for incorporating ideas from others with your own in writing classes and elsewhere. When in doubt about something you've written, don't hesitate to show it to me or any other professor and ask for an opinion. The [Roger Williams University Writing Center](#) is very helpful to those who make the effort to use it. It has also posted a number of helpful documents online