

BETWEEN THE GILDED AGES

American Literature of Discontent, 1870-1970

MAJOR COURSE TEXTS

William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*

Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*

Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome*

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*



COURSE DESCRIPTION

In 1873, Mark Twain published *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. While not read as widely today as many of Twain's other works, its legacy is nonetheless indisputable: the title of the book became the term scholars use to describe the post-Civil War period that saw a rapid increase in industrial production, transportation systems, and immigration, but was also marked by growing economic inequality, political corruption, and social unrest.

While scholars identify the Gilded Age as ending around 1900, the issues that plagued the period were far from resolved at the turn of the century. In fact, in *The Way We Never Were*, historian Stephanie Coontz refers to the 1970s as the start of "the second Gilded Age," as it was marked by the political skepticism, self-absorption, and general sense of malaise that also defined the "original" Gilded Age. This class is interested in tracing and complicating the attributes of these two Gilded Ages via the American literature published in the century between them.

Along the way, we'll discuss the emergence of literary modes that were especially well-suited for addressing the social concerns of the time—including realism, naturalism, and modernism—and use our texts to address the pressing issues of the author's time. Some of these topics include the illusion of class mobility (*The Rise of Silas Lapham*), life in the big city—and the city tenements (*Sister Carrie*, *Maggie*), the displacement resulting from the Great Depression (*The Grapes of Wrath*), and the role of domesticity and family legacy in the face of economic uncertainty (*Death of a Salesman*). The course ends with Toni Morrison's debut novel *The Bluest Eye*, which will allow us to consider how issues of class and consumer culture intersect with race and belonging.

In addition to participating in every class discussion, you will also be expected to keep a course notebook in which you will respond to homework and in-class writing prompts. Regular reading quizzes will assess your basic comprehension of the reading. A mid-term paper (4-5 pages) will ask you to perform a close reading of a course text; your final paper (5-6 pages) will ask you to conduct research on a literary movement covered in class in order to put one of our course texts in conversation with another literary work from the period.

GRADING

Final grades will be determined on the University's A-F grade scale, with A as the highest possible grade. Course grades depend mainly on a series of major writing assignments. The rest of your grade depends on engaged and respectful participation and a course presentation.

Final Grade Percentages:

20%	Mid-term Essay
25%	Final Essay
20%	Engaged and respectful daily participation
20%	Notebooks (homework, in-class and short assignments, etc.)
15%	Reading quizzes

Accessing Grades:

Grades for major assignments will be posted on ICON under "Grades" approximately two weeks after the due date. Your participation grades will be posted once at midterm and once at the end of the semester. If you have a question or concern about a grade on a particular assignment, please observe the 24/7 rule: wait 24 hours to contact me about the assignment, but do not contact me 7 days after I returned the assignment with a final grade.

CALENDAR OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS

This is a tentative calendar and is subject to change. Updates will be posted to ICON and/or shared in class. Students are responsible for tracking course activities, readings, and assignments as the semester progresses.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GILDED AGE

Week 1:

M: Introduction to course

W: Mark Twain, excerpts from *The Gilded Age* and "Cannibalism in the Cars" [ICON]

Week 2:

M: William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (Chs. 1-7)

W: William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (Chs. 8-13)

Week 3:

M: William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (Chs. 14-20)

W: William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (Chs. 21-25)

NATURALISM AND REALISM

Week 4:

M: Stephen Crane, "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets" (Chs. 1-11); excerpt from Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* [ICON]

W: Stephen Crane, "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets" (Chs. 12-19)

Week 5:

M: Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Chs. 1-8)

W: Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Chs. 9-16)

Week 6:

M: Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Chs. 17-25)

W: Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Chs. 26-35)

Week 7:

M: Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Chs. 36-47)

W: Essay #1 Workshops [*Final paper due by midnight Friday*]

Week 8:

M: Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome* (Introduction, Chs. I-VI)

W: Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome* (Chs. VII-IX, Conclusion)

THE GREAT WAR & THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Week 9:

M: Ernest Hemingway, "Soldier's Home"; Mary P. Burril, *Aftermath* [ICON]

W: Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*; Langston Hughes, *Don't You Want To Be Free?* [ICON]

Week 10:

M: John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (Chs. 1-6)

W: John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (Chs. 7-12)

Week 11:

M: John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (Chs. 13-18); excerpt from James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* [ICON]

W: John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (Chs. 19-24)

Week 12:

M: John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (Chs. 25-30)

W: *Individual meetings with me to discuss final paper*

RECONSIDERING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Week 13:

M: Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Act 1)

W: Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Act 2 & Requiem)

Week 14:

M: Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*

W: Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (Prologue, Chs. 1-3)

Week 15:

M: Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (Chs. 4-9)

W: Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (Chs. 10-11)

Final paper due Friday of finals week