

English 265-02: American Fiction of the Gilded Age

CRN 13131

Professor J. Brady
Palmer 305 (office)
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Fall, 2012
MWF 10:00-10:50
in Palmer 211

Required Texts:

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*
Edith Wharton, *Three Novels of New York*
Theodore Dreiser, *Jennie Gerhardt*
Theodore Dreiser, *The Financier*
Frank Norris, *The Pit*
Frederick Townsend Martin, *The Passing of the Idle Rich* (excerpts)
Joan Didion, "The Seacoast of Despair" in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

Office Hours:

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 11:00-11:30
Tuesday, Thursday: 9:30-10:30, or by appointment throughout the week

Course Description:

This course focuses on the rich body of literature produced in and about the Gilded Age, a period of intensive industrialization and urbanization that became celebrated for vast disparities in income and in living conditions. The famous phrases, 'keeping up with the Joneses' and 'how the other half lives' and 'conspicuous consumption' are all markers of this era. The class will read representative fiction by Edith Wharton, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser. We begin with Thorstein Veblen's trenchant critique of the excesses of predatory American capitalism in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*. In this course, we consider such topics as the rise of the luxury hotel in large American cities, the modern city itself as protagonist, the often stark representation of the lives of the urban poor, the rise of the entrepreneurial American financier, and the volatility of the American stock market in the period. We will also focus on gender relations and the separate gendered spheres of work and home, as well as the ambiguous representation of the lives of leisure class women in these novels. Finally, we will discuss the didactic and the documentary investments of the realist and naturalist work of America's first Gilded Age.

This course carries both F2 (Writing Intensive) and F4 (Literary Texts) credit. It includes a workshop of selected essays over the course of the semester.

Attendance Policy:

Late arrivals to class will be counted as an absence and any student who misses or comes late to class more than **four** times in the semester will receive a zero in the 20% of the grade reflecting class participation and attendance and may be asked to withdraw from the course.

Schedule:

Anatomy of the Leisure Class: Veblen and Wharton

August 22	Introductory remarks
August 24	Veblen, chapters 1, 2, and 5
August 27, 29, 31	<i>The House of Mirth</i> , Book One
September 3	Labor Day Recess
September 5, 7	<i>The House of Mirth</i> , Book Two
September 10, 12	Veblen, chapters 4, 5, and 6
September 14	<i>The Passing of the Idle Rich</i> (excerpts)
September 17, 19, 21	<i>The Custom of the Country</i>
September 24, 26	<i>The Custom of the Country</i>
September 28	First essay due

American Naturalism: Theodore Dreiser

October 1, 3	<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i>
October 5	No class, away at conference
October 8	<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i>

October 10, 12	Workshops of first essay
October 15, 16	Fall Break
October 17, 19	<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i>
October 22, 24, 26	<i>The Financier</i>
October 29, 31	<i>The Financier</i>
November 2	Second essay due

Capitalism and the Rise of the American City

December 5, 7, 9	<i>The Pit</i>
November 12, 14	Workshops of second essay
November 16, 19	<i>The Pit</i>
November 21-23	Thanksgiving Recess

The Gilded Age, in Retrospect

November 26, 28, 30	<i>The Age of Innocence</i>
December 3	“The Seacoast of Despair”
December 5	Final class
December 7	Third essay due

Method of Evaluation:

First essay (4-5 pages)	20%
Second essay (4-5 pages)	20%
Third essay (7 pages)	30%
In-class question*	10%
In-class grade	20%

* Each student will pose one formal question to the class during the semester, speaking from notes only. Your question should be focused, given a context, and its potential significance made clear to your classmates. The question should explore a fresh aspect of the text that you think important to our understanding of the work. Having posed your question, you will then guide class discussion.

** All late essays will be penalized by at least a letter grade, and may not be rewritten.