

History 340
Critical Periods in American History the 1890s
Roger Williams University
CAS 228
M, W, F, 12:00 - 12:50
Fall Semester, 2007

Michael R. H. Swanson, Ph. D.
Office CAS 110
Hours: T, Th, 9:30 - 11:00
M, W, F, 1:00 - 2:00
Phone: 254 3230
e-mail: Swanson1890s@msn.com

Week of August 27, 2007

For *Wednesday, August 27, 2007*

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.

I think that's about it, unless I think of some other housekeeping chore.

For *Friday, August 29, 2007*

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 *thirteen* in 1890 (born no later than 1877). This would mean your character was *at least* in his/her early twenties 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 1877.
- 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 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.

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 2007 "you" and an 1890s alter-ego "you"

We're going to be very much involved with the internet in this course, and there are all sorts of neat new things one can do with "blackboard". Soon I'll create an area where everyone can post information about his/her alter ego. If I have finished this chore (I need to consult with our wonderful IT blackboard administrator and learn a few things first), I may have this ready for this class session. We'll see.

Read,

in *Chambers*,

Chapter I, *Crisis of the 1890s*,

pp. 1- 24

The first chapter in Chambers provides an overview of the economic changes which swept across America. The Civil War was provided a great stimulus to industrialize, starting a process which accelerated in the 1880s and became overwhelming in the 1890s. No matter who one was, industrialization effected his or her life, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. You should think about what the effect of all this might have been on your 1890s persona was effected. In what ways did you gain? In what ways lose? Perhaps the new Industrial America provided you with your reason for being here in the first place.

Always remember to consider how your 1890s alter-ego would react to the events, persons, and ideas described