

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

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For **Monday, October 1,**

Housing

READ, in *Schlereth*,
Chapter 3: *Housing* pp. 87- 139

in *Fink*,

- 4.3. *A Visiting Rudyard Kipling Returns, Unimpressed, from Chicago 1899* pp. 121 - 122
4.4. *Poet Carl Sandburg Extols the City of the Big Shoulders, 1916* pp. 122-123.

Today and Wednesday, we focus on the American House of the 1890s. Owning a home of one's own has long been a central part of the American Dream, and in the 1890s there were some interesting changes in the technology of housing and transportation which made this dream accessible to more people than before. There were also changes in the financial structure which made their own contributions. Schlereth will shed light on these.

Most of city building stock is residential, regardless of the size of the city. We will return to look at cities later in the semester, if all goes according to plan, but I thought it would be a good idea to get an impression of what they were like at this point. Kipling is English, and views the rawness of Chicago with disdain. Sandburg makes a virtue of necessity and applauds what he sees. The rawness is a product of the rapid growth, as much as anything.

For **Wednesday, October 3**

Housing: the bottom and the top.

Download and Read:

From *How the other Half Lives*, (Jacob Riis)
Chapter I. *The Genesis of the Tenement* Available at
<http://www.cis.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/riis/chap1.html>
Chapter II. *The Awakening* Available at
<http://www.cis.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/riis/chap2.html>

From *Century Magazine*
City Dwellings I. Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer: Available at
<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABP2287-0031-124>
City Dwellings II. Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer: Available at
<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABP2287-0031-154>

Not all Americans were in a position to capitalize on these, of course. Reading the first two chapters of *Jacob Riis'* classic expose of tenement life will give shed light on one side of Urban life. Recognize that the tenement of the 1890s represented a reform of conditions deemed worse.

Mrs. van Rensselaer was in no danger of being forced into tenement living. Her essay presents the other side of the coin. The observations of Riis and van Rensselaer were widely available. Your individual characters had both dreams and realities concerning housing. (Some may have lived in one or the other). Try to look at these readings from your contemporary perspective and the perspectives of your characters at the turn of the century, as well.

A house is a stage upon which the dramas of families are enacted. There is, of course, some coherence between the "set" and the "play". As the American family changed around the turn of the century, so did the ordering and design of interior spaces. We'll want to take note of those changes. Be sure that you recognize that full-blown spaces can be symbolized in simple articles of furniture by persons of more modest means: For example, if one cannot have a library, perhaps one can have a book case or a shelf of books. No space for a family chapel? Well, a religious lithograph on the wall can serve as well

For **Friday, October 5**

The Consumer Society

Read, in *Schlereth,*

Chapter 4. "Consuming," pp. 140-157 (to *Channeling Wishes*)

in *Fink,*

11.1. *Theodore Dreiser's Carrie Discovers the Department Store* pp. 326 - 327

11.2. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman Seeks to Extricate Women from the Trap of Consumerism*
pp. 327 - 328

From the Internet:

Visit [The Founders of Sears, Roebuck And Company](http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/sears/sears.html), which you will find at <http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/sears/sears.html> This is a student project produced at the American Culture Studies program at Bowling Green States University. Follow the links and get some sense of the importance of this merchandising giant in the 1890s. Imagine your alter ego's encounter with Sears.

This class period we'll look at changes in American patterns of consumption, which include the creation of a new shopping environment, the Department Store, and a perfected merchandising tool made possible by improvements in mail delivery and in the railroads, the mail order catalog.

The new emphasis on spend, spend, spend, and have, have, have was not without its critics. We'll see this in the two pieces in Fink

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE LITERATURE REQUIREMENT

The Class Website for this week has a button on it which will take you to a [list of links to novels](#) published between roughly 1880 and 1910. Any of these are acceptable for your literature requirement. Obviously you don't have to use the electronic version for your source. I simply thought it might be useful for you to be able to sample them at your computer if you so wish. Note that I've put a requirement of *TWO* if you choose to read books from *OZ or Horatio Alger* series.

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