

## American Capitalism and Its Discontents

### Prof. David Zimmerman

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Haymarket Strike, *Harper's Weekly* 15 May 18

### A. REQUIRED TEXTS

Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789)

Caroline Kirkland, *Home as I Found It. Who'll Follow?* (1839)

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)

Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig* (1859)

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Silent Partner* (1871)

Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* (1873)

William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885)

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905)

Frank Norris, *McTeague* (1901)

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Penguin edition, [1981, 1900])

Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (1907)

### B. SEMINAR DESCRIPTION

This seminar studies how U.S. writers across the nineteenth century confronted the promise and problems associated with the development of American capitalism. We will discuss how writers responded to such phenomena as the antebellum market revolution, slavery, theories of contract and labor value, corporate gigantism, economic catastrophe, and the emergence of mass culture. We will see how writers struggled to conceptualize economic modernity—a modernity Americans saw as cause and corollary of other forms of social transformation—and test their conceptualizations in narrative form. We will also see how market developments shaped writers' aesthetic practice and philosophy. Throughout, we will attend to the ways economic literary discourse shapes and is shaped by discourses of gender, nation, class, and race.

### C. SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS

#### Writing:

- One critical or research essay (10-15 pages), due by the end of the term.
- Four analytical "keyword" writings (1-2 pages, single-spaced), each exploring a problem or critical question raised by one of the assigned texts. Each is due when we discuss the text under consideration.
- One "framing" paper (1-2 pages, single-spaced, plus bibliography) that sets up and poses a set of critical questions that advance current critical, historical, and/or theoretical understandings of a topic or problem relevant to the course.

*Presenting and Leading Discussion:*

- Each of you will give a brief (6-8 minute) presentation on a critical, historical, or theoretical essay relevant to one of the major works we're reading.
- Each of you will be responsible for leading (or at least initiating) two discussions. To do this, you will prepare "keyword" discussion questions and email or post them by 5 pm the evening before the discussion. The class email address is **english949-1-s09@lists.wisc.edu**

D. ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is mandatory. Your active participation is crucial. **Please let me know if you are unable to make it to class** so that I can plan accordingly.

E. COURSE READERS, RECOMMENDED READING, AND EDITIONS:

Our course reader is available electronically through Learn@UW (login at <https://learnuw.wisc.edu>). All reading is required, unless noted as "recommended" on the syllabus. I recommend that you purchase the editions I've ordered, but if you have other editions, that's fine – except for Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (please use the Penguin edition).

## SYLLABUS

**Note:** You can find all course reader materials by clicking on the "Content" tab at the top-left of our learn@UW course homepage. (Many of the articles are also available using JSTOR.) Print out all course reader materials. Unless otherwise noted, all reading is required and due the day listed.

1. W 1/21 Welcome and Course Introduction  
Zelizer, "Beyond the Polemics on the Market:"  
Hirschman, "Rival Views of Market Society"  
Haskell and Teichgraeber, "Introduction: The Culture of the Market"  
Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility" parts  
1 and 2  
*Recommended:* Zimmerman, "Novels of Business, Industry, and  
Consumerism"
2. M 1/26 Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of  
Olaudah Equiano*  
Background: Gould, from *Barbaric Traffic*  
W. 1/28 *The Interesting Narrative*, contd.  
Festa, "Tales Told by Things"  
*Recommended:* Kazanjian, "Race, Nation, Equality"
3. M 2/2 Caroline Kirkland, *A New Home, Who'll Follow?*  
Background:  
Stokes and Conway, Introduction, *The Market Revolution in  
America*  
Gates, "The Role of the Land Speculator in Western Development"  
*Recommended:* Friend, "Liberty is Pioneering"
- W 2/4 *A New Home, Who'll Follow?*, contd.

*Recommended:* Templin, "Panic Fiction: Women's Responses to Antebellum Economic Crisis"

4. M 2/9 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*  
W 2/11 *Walden*, contd.  
Teichgraeber, "'A Yankee Diogenes': Thoreau on the Market"  
*Recommended:*  
Steinberg, "A World of Commodities"  
Sandage, "The War for Ambition"
5. M 2/16 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*  
W 2/18 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, contd.  
Stanley, "Home Life and the Morality of the Market"
6. M 2/23 Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig*  
W 2/25 *Our Nig*, contd.  
Lovell, "By Dint of Labor and Economy"  
background: Fitzhugh, Cannibals, All! Or Slaves Without Masters [1857],  
ch. 1,
7. M 3/2 Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Silent Partner*  
W 3/4 *The Silent Partner*, contd.  
background: Hapke, "Labor's Ladies: Work Fiction and True Women"
8. M 3/9 Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age*  
W 3/11 *The Gilded Age*, contd.
- Spring Break
9. M 3/23 William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*  
W 3/25 *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, contd.  
*Recommended:* Thomas, "*The Rise of Silas Lapham* and the Hazards of Realistic Development"
10. M 3/30 Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*  
W 4/1 *The House of Mirth*, contd.  
Dimock, "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth"
11. M 4/6 Frank Norris, *McTeague*  
W 4/8 *McTeague*, contd.  
Michaels, "The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism"  
*Recommended:* Zayani, Intro + Ch. 1, *Reading the Symptom*

12. M 4/13 Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Penn. Ed.)  
revised ending of Sister Carrie [1900], first published edition  
Background: Leach, Intro., *The Land of Desire and the Culture of Consumer Capitalism*
- W 4/15 *Sister Carrie*, contd.  
Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution*, chapter 6  
*Recommended*: Fleissner, *Women, Compulsion, Modernity*, chapter 4 + notes
13. M 4/20 Jack London, *The Iron Heel*  
background: London, "How I Became a Socialist" + "What Life Means to Me."  
*Recommended*: Portelli, "Jack London's Missing Revolution: Notes on The Iron Heel."
- W 4/22 *The Iron Heel*, contd.  
Wegner, "The Occluded Future."
14. M 4/27 TBA
- W 4/29 TBA
15. M 5/4 TBA
- W 5/6 TBA