

The image features a minimalist, abstract design composed of solid black and white geometric shapes. On the left side, there is a vertical stack of black rectangular blocks of varying heights and widths. A horizontal black bar extends from the right edge of the middle block to the right side of the page. Below this, a large black triangle points downwards from the top edge of the page. In the bottom right corner, there is a black rectangular block with a white vertical rectangle cut out of its center. The text 'the mastheads reader' is positioned in the white space on the left side, below the top two black blocks.

the
mastheads
reader

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“We must add to our heritage or lose it.” –George Orwell

The Mastheads is a public humanities project in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. We seek to connect residents to the literary history of the Berkshire region, create a forum for thinking about place, and support the production of new creative work.

Founded in 2016 upon the legacy of five American Renaissance authors who wrote in Pittsfield, The Mastheads is at once an urban architectural experiment, a literary research initiative, a writers’ residency, and an educational program.

The Mastheads is run by Tessa Kelly, Chris Parkinson, Sarah Trudgeon, and Jeffrey Lawrence. Portraits in this book are by Megan Craig.

www.themastheads.org

Berkshire Culture of the Gilded Age

Jeffrey Lawrence

The Gilded Age, spanning roughly from the end of the Civil War to the first decades of the twentieth century, is the only period in American history named after a work of literature. It borrows its label from the title of Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's 1873 novel, a social satire set in the early postbellum years. Written at a time when many Americans continued to harbor the belief that a better, more equitable society had emerged in the aftermath of the nation's bloodiest conflict, *The Gilded Age* arrives at a less encouraging conclusion. As the novel roves across the American landscape from East to West (our Midwest), it finds neither public redeemers nor genuine reformers. Instead, it unearths a cast of hucksters and opportunists: land speculators and fortune hunters, corrupt politicians and wannabe aristocrats, crooked financiers and social climbers.

As scholars have long since noted, *The Gilded Age* exaggerated much of its material for comic effect. But its title stuck for a reason. The adjective "gilded" literally refers to something coated in a layer of gold; figuratively, to something brilliant on the outside but rotten at its core. As the nineteenth century came to a close, "gilded" increasingly came to seem like an apt metaphor for America itself. On the surface, the United States appeared to be moving in the right direction. In the span of fifty years, the country had ended slavery, greatly expanded industry and commerce, united its territory through the railroad system, and become a major diplomatic actor on the world stage. Yet a bleaker reality was visible just beneath that surface. African Americans continued to be

effectively deprived of legal and voting rights in the South; accelerated industrialization had led to stark income inequality across the country; the owners of the railroads (and steel mills, and oil refineries) had systematically exploited the labor of those who built and operated them; and a nation that still proudly spoke the language of freedom acquired its first overseas colonies.

As Twain's example suggests, writers played a prominent role in shaping public attitudes during The Gilded Age, and the most enduring literary works of the period frequently depicted the gaps between the nation's ideals and its lived realities. This was especially true in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, as writers from various parts of the country pried the lid off of some of the most unsavory institutions of American life. Stephen Crane took on urban prostitution, Jacob Riis tenement poverty, Charles Chesnutt the politics of racial disenfranchisement, Charlotte Perkins Gilman the medical profession, Frank Norris the railway industry. These "naturalist" writers helped usher in the Progressive Era of the early 1900s, which historians often describe as a (partial and incomplete) corrective to the excesses of the previous age. They also paved the way for some of the best Berkshire literature of and about the Gilded Age. This July The Mastheads will concentrate our programming on five cultural figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: writers Edith Wharton, Henry James, and W.E.B. Du Bois; photographer James Van Der Zee; and Mark Twain himself, who gave the era its title.

When Edith Wharton moved to Lenox in 1901, the Berkshires had already become synonymous with Gilded Age extravagance in the popular imagination. The region was commonly referred to as the "inland Newport," in reference to the lavish seaside city where many New Yorkers and Bostonians possessed second homes (Wharton herself lived there before settling in Lenox). During the 1880s and 1890s, several of the East Coast's most prominent families had erected millionaire "cottages" in Stockbridge and Lenox, and in subsequent

decades, wealthy Northeasterners continued to flock to the area. To a certain degree, Wharton herself fit that mold. Upon first glimpsing the Berkshire landscape in the summer of 1899, she immediately fantasized about turning it into a sumptuous country seat: “I am in love with the place—climate, scenery, life & all—& when I have built a villa on one of the estates I have picked out, & have planted my gardens & laid out paths through my bosco, I doubt if I ever leave here” (Quoted in Lee, 137). The following year Wharton and her husband Teddy bought more than a hundred acres of farmland in Lenox, and two years after that, with the help of architect Ogden Codman, she completed her own Gilded Age mansion, “The Mount.” From 1903 to 1911, when was forced to sell the property due to her husband’s declining mental health, Wharton lived what by all accounts was a luxurious Berkshire lifestyle.

In the fiction she produced in and about the Berkshires, however, Wharton never stopped trying to pierce the surface of her own privileged circumstances. Biographer Hermione Lee has observed that one of Wharton’s great achievements is to have written “with hard, penetrating, analytical realism about a society ‘wholly absorbed in barricading itself against the unpleasant’” (32). Her probing examinations of the American upper class span from *The House of Mirth* (1905), the first novel she wrote in the Berkshires and the one that catapulted her to international fame, to *The Age of Innocence* (1920), a work of historical fiction that looks back to the heyday of Gilded Age New York. It was in her novellas about the Berkshires, however, that Wharton most fully envisioned the lives of those who existed beyond her “barricaded” social world. *Ethan Frome* (1911), published during her final year in Lenox, tells the story of a poor farmer, Ethan, in the fictional town of Starkfield, who falls for his wife’s cousin Mattie, an indigent orphan who stays with the couple because she has nowhere else to go. Recounted to a frame narrator several decades after the frustrated romance has ended, Ethan and Mattie’s tale is a masterful demonstration of how economic hardship permeated every aspect of rural life in the late-nineteenth-century

Berkshires. Wharton would later write that “For years I had wanted to draw life as it really was in the derelict mountain villages of New England, a life even in my time, and a thousandfold more a generation earlier, utterly unlike that seen through the rose-coloured spectacles of my predecessors” (259). In pursuing that end, *Ethan Frome* dramatized a Gilded Age Berkshires where the gilding had never been applied at all.

Wharton’s second Berkshire novella, *Summer* (1917), is set in a slightly later era and presents a more encompassing view of the region, from the sleepy town of North Dormer to the industrial city of Nettleton (based on Pittsfield). Here the region’s social stratifications are even more deeply etched. The young Charity Royall, born in the hardscrabble hinterlands of “The Mountain” and adopted by an older man in the town of North Dormer, falls in love with the New York-based Lucius Harney, an architect who has come for the summer to study the region’s houses. The novella’s plot turns on whether Harney will choose the beautiful and vivacious Charity over the well-to-do bachelorette Annabel Balch, whose primary virtue is her social standing. Its emotional impact, though, derives from how vividly it renders Charity’s situation as a financially dependent woman who can never quite break free from her male benefactor. By the end of the novel, after Charity has lost all illusions and finally fallen back on the only option left to her, we find her standing among the “cross-currents of life as motionless and inert as if she had been one of the tables screwed to the floor” (239). Wharton’s Berkshire fiction carries the reader far from the upper class worlds of *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, yet it shares with those works an obsession with how inexorably the economic logic of the Gilded Age conditioned the lives of its men and women—particularly its women. Wharton herself may have belonged to the leisure class that the “naturalist” writers and social critics of the era so insistently censured. But her acute observations on the destructive power of wealth—both for those who lack it and those who possess it in excess—are in tune with the other great works of the period.

One of the many guests Wharton hosted in her eight years at The Mount was the novelist Henry James. Twenty years her senior and among the most highly regarded American novelists of the period, James had recently returned to the United States from Europe for the first time in two decades. At The Mount, in addition to motoring around the Berkshire hills with Edith and Teddy, James began work on his influential travel narrative *The American Scene*. The opening chapter of *The American Scene* includes a reflection on James's visit to the Berkshires, part of a longer meditation on how New England had changed since the mid-1880s when James had last visited. Writing in his notoriously dense late style, James intimates that the Berkshires are at once an idyllic pastoral landscape—the very “heart of New England”—and a region constantly under threat by the profit motive. In a passage on the Lebanon Shaker village, for example, he can't fully decide whether the austere design of the settlement strikes him as genuinely anti-modern or as a “mortification made to pay” (48). James's suspicion that the entire village might be a tourist trap is in keeping with his broader belief that Gilded Age America had turned even the most authentic expressions of national culture into consumer commodities.

It would be a mistake, however, to identify Gilded Age Berkshires culture only with the affluent Northeasterners who came to Lenox and Stockbridge from the country's metropolitan centers. Two of Berkshire County's most influential turn-of-the-century figures, W.E.B. Du Bois and James Van Der Zee, were born and raised in the region in far more modest circumstances. Both belonged to the small African American community that had long been an important cultural influence in the Berkshires. Du Bois, who was born in 1868 in Great Barrington, could trace his Berkshire roots back to mid-eighteenth century: his great-grandmother by marriage was Elizabeth Freeman, the legendary ex-slave who successfully sued for her freedom in Massachusetts in 1783. Last year, The Mastheads focused its programming on Du Bois's connection to the NAACP (he was a founding member of the association) and his

historical reinterpretations of the role of African Americans during the Civil War and the Reconstruction period. Yet Du Bois was also an attentive observer of late-nineteenth-century Berkshire society itself. In his various autobiographical writings—which include *Darkwater* (1920), *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), and *Autobiography* (1968)—he presents an evolving picture of Gilded Age Great Barrington by way of his own personal history. Du Bois reflects on the development of the Afro-Dutch community in the Berkshires, comments on the class dynamics among the white residents of the town, and offers multiple versions of his gradual awakening to racial prejudice.

At times, Du Bois describes the egalitarian veneer of the Berkshires. In his *Autobiography*, for instance, he claims that the Great Barrington of the 1870s possessed “no idle rich” and “no outstanding ‘society’” (*Berkshire Reader*, 299). At other moments, however, he reveals that “the shadow of wealth was around us” (297). In *Darkwater*, his first extended consideration of the Berkshires, Du Bois composes his own variation on the Gilded Age metaphor. The book famously begins by evoking the natural majesty of in Western Massachusetts: “I was born by a golden river and in the shadow of two great hills.” Only a few pages later, though, Du Bois subtly undercuts that image by alluding to the effects of the textile factories recently established along the Housatonic: “That river of my birth was golden because of the woolen and paper waste that soiled it” (297). He goes on to state that “the gold was theirs, not ours,” before playfully concluding, “but the gleam and glint was for all” (297). Here the very landscape of the Berkshires mimics the “gildedness” of the Gilded Age. The factory owners retain the actual money (“the gold”), while the town’s inhabitants must console themselves with the mere appearance of shared prosperity (the “gleam and glint” of the river) that has been created at their expense and is now poisoning them.

Unlike the other figures discussed here, James Van Der Zee was a visual artist virtually unknown for most of his artistic career. Born to

a working-class black family in Lenox in 1886, he began to experiment with photography at an early age. His first photographs are primarily of the people and places around Lenox, a town he would return to periodically over the course of his life. In 1905, he moved to New York City, and in 1917 he set up a commercial photography studio in Harlem. Over the next few decades, he photographed many of Harlem's biggest cultural icons, from Mamie Smith and Jack Johnson to Marcus Garvey and Adam Clayton Power Jr. At the same time, he produced thousands of photographs of ordinary Harlemites, typically dressed in fashionable attire and set against middle-class domestic backdrops.

In 1969, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art included a selection of his Harlem photographs in its exhibition "Harlem on My Mind," Van Der Zee achieved belated recognition for his work and a modest degree of fame. In her introduction to the 1993 exhibition catalogue "VanDerZee: Photographer 1886-1983," Deborah Willis argues that one reason Van Der Zee's body of work went overlooked for so long is because his subjects projected an aura of independence and dignity at a time when mainstream representations of African Americans consisted of "degrading racial caricatures" (12) and documentary photographers countered by depicting them primarily as "forgotten" members of society (22). Van Der Zee did not belong to either of these camps. As Willis points out, his photography might best be described as the visual analogue to the literary works of the Harlem Renaissance, which tended to emphasize racial empowerment and the self-reliance of modern black Americans.

Van Der Zee's biographer Rodger Birt has proposed that the highly stylized look of his portraiture owes much to his early immersion in the "genteel qualities of Gilded Age Lenox" (26). And it is true that the photographs that Van Der Zee actually took in Lenox offer a sense of elegance and decorum. There is the striking 1909 photograph of his first wife Kate and his daughter Rachel in lustrous white dresses in the middle of the Lenox woods. There is a portrait from the same period of the

Van Der Zee men—James, his father, and his two brothers—dressed to the nines in tuxedos and bow ties. And there is the picture of the austere Mrs. Turner, sitting in an ornate chair with one hand falling lightly on her heavily brocaded black dress. Yet some of the lesser-known photographs from the period reveal more intimate and unexpected scenes of Lenox in the first decade of the twentieth century. One shows Van Der Zee and his brother in snowshoes, gamely tracking through the frozen landscape of Western Massachusetts. Another depicts the modest wood mill behind the the Van Der Zee family home, a simple but graceful counterpoint to the millionaire cottages. Finally, there is the photograph of members of the all-black staff at the Hotel Aspinwall, where Van Der Zee worked briefly as a waiter before leaving for New York. It provides a kind of visual embodiment of the dynamic that plays out in much of Van Der Zee’s oeuvre: the formal attire indicates their status in Lenox’s Gilded Age service industry, but the relaxed nature of their pose in front of the camera hints at a world of black sociality outside of those Gilded Age norms. We thank Donna Van Der Zee for permission to reproduce a group of these photographs in the Folds and in the Reader.

Van Der Zee’s works, along with those of Twain, Wharton, James, and Du Bois, are compelling for the light they shine on a particular historical moment in the Berkshires. But they also speak to problems that continue to plague us today. In the wake of the Great Recession of the late 2000s, many scholars and pundits have begun to refer to the twenty-first century as the “Second Gilded Age.” Rising economic inequality, unprecedented levels of individual debt, and ongoing racial wealth disparities are some of the many characteristics they cite in reclaiming Twain and Warner’s title for the present. These are all issues that appear, in various aspects, in the writings and photographs of 2019 historical figures. We invite you to join us this summer in considering their works and discussing how they relate to our lives in the twenty-first century.

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Excerpts from:

Summer (1917)

Edith Wharton

[First Chapter]

A girl came out of lawyer Royall's house, at the end of the one street of North Dormer, and stood on the doorstep.

It was the beginning of a June afternoon. The springlike transparent sky shed a rain of silver sunshine on the roofs of the village, and on the pastures and larchwoods surrounding it. A little wind moved among the round white clouds on the shoulders of the hills, driving their shadows across the fields and down the grassy road that takes the name of street when it passes through North Dormer. The place lies high and in the open, and lacks the lavish shade of the more protected New England villages. The clump of weeping-willows about the duck pond, and the Norway spruces in front of the Hatchard gate, cast almost the only roadside shadow between lawyer Royall's house and the point where, at the other end of the village, the road rises above the church and skirts the black hemlock wall enclosing the cemetery.

The little June wind, frisking down the street, shook the doleful fringes of the Hatchard spruces, caught the straw hat of a young man just passing under them, and spun it clean across the road into the duck-pond.

As he ran to fish it out the girl on lawyer Royall's doorstep noticed that he was a stranger, that he wore city clothes, and that he was laughing with all his teeth, as the young and careless laugh at such mishaps.

Her heart contracted a little, and the shrinking that sometimes

came over her when she saw people with holiday faces made her draw back into the house and pretend to look for the key that she knew she had already put into her pocket. A narrow greenish mirror with a gilt eagle over it hung on the passage wall, and she looked critically at her reflection, wished for the thousandth time that she had blue eyes like Annabel Balch, the girl who sometimes came from Springfield to spend a week with old Miss Hatchard, straightened the sunburnt hat over her small swarthy face, and turned out again into the sunshine.

“How I hate everything!” she murmured.

The young man had passed through the Hatchard gate, and she had the street to herself. North Dormer is at all times an empty place, and at three o’clock on a June afternoon its few able-bodied men are off in the fields or woods, and the women indoors, engaged in languid household drudgery.

The girl walked along, swinging her key on a finger, and looking about her with the heightened attention produced by the presence of a stranger in a familiar place. What, she wondered, did North Dormer look like to people from other parts of the world? She herself had lived there since the age of five, and had long supposed it to be a place of some importance. But about a year before, Mr. Miles, the new Episcopal clergyman at Hepburn, who drove over every other Sunday—when the roads were not ploughed up by hauling—to hold a service in the North Dormer church, had proposed, in a fit of missionary zeal, to take the young people down to Nettleton to hear an illustrated lecture on the Holy Land; and the dozen girls and boys who represented the future of North Dormer had been piled into a farm-waggon, driven over the hills to Hepburn, put into a way-train and carried to Nettleton.

In the course of that incredible day Charity Royall had, for the first and only time, experienced railway-travel, looked into shops with plate-glass fronts, tasted cocoanut pie, sat in a theatre, and listened to a gentleman saying unintelligible things before pictures that she would have enjoyed looking at if his explanations had not prevented her from

understanding them. This initiation had shown her that North Dormer was a small place, and developed in her a thirst for information that her position as custodian of the village library had previously failed to excite. For a month or two she dipped feverishly and disconnectedly into the dusty volumes of the Hatchard Memorial Library; then the impression of Nettleton began to fade, and she found it easier to take North Dormer as the norm of the universe than to go on reading.

The sight of the stranger once more revived memories of Nettleton, and North Dormer shrank to its real size. As she looked up and down it, from lawyer Royall's faded red house at one end to the white church at the other, she pitilessly took its measure. There it lay, a weather-beaten sunburnt village of the hills, abandoned of men, left apart by railway, trolley, telegraph, and all the forces that link life to life in modern communities. It had no shops, no theatres, no lectures, no "business block"; only a church that was opened every other Sunday if the state of the roads permitted, and a library for which no new books had been bought for twenty years, and where the old ones mouldered undisturbed on the damp shelves. Yet Charity Royall had always been told that she ought to consider it a privilege that her lot had been cast in North Dormer. She knew that, compared to the place she had come from, North Dormer represented all the blessings of the most refined civilization. Everyone in the village had told her so ever since she had been brought there as a child. Even old Miss Hatchard had said to her, on a terrible occasion in her life: "My child, you must never cease to remember that it was Mr. Royall who brought you down from the Mountain."

She had been "brought down from the Mountain"; from the scarred cliff that lifted its sullen wall above the lesser slopes of Eagle Range, making a perpetual background of gloom to the lonely valley. The Mountain was a good fifteen miles away, but it rose so abruptly from the lower hills that it seemed almost to cast its shadow over North Dormer. And it was like a great magnet drawing the clouds and scattering them in storm across the valley. If ever, in the purest summer sky, there

trailed a thread of vapour over North Dormer, it drifted to the Mountain as a ship drifts to a whirlpool, and was caught among the rocks, torn up and multiplied, to sweep back over the village in rain and darkness.

Charity was not very clear about the Mountain; but she knew it was a bad place, and a shame to have come from, and that, whatever befell her in North Dormer, she ought, as Miss Hatchard had once reminded her, to remember that she had been brought down from there, and hold her tongue and be thankful. She looked up at the Mountain, thinking of these things, and tried as usual to be thankful. But the sight of the young man turning in at Miss Hatchard's gate had brought back the vision of the glittering streets of Nettleton, and she felt ashamed of her old sun-hat, and sick of North Dormer, and jealously aware of Annabel Balch of Springfield, opening her blue eyes somewhere far off on glories greater than the glories of Nettleton.

“How I hate everything!” she said again.

Half way down the street she stopped at a weak-hinged gate. Passing through it, she walked down a brick path to a queer little brick temple with white wooden columns supporting a pediment on which was inscribed in tarnished gold letters: “The Honorius Hatchard Memorial Library, 1832.”

Honorius Hatchard had been old Miss Hatchard's great-uncle; though she would undoubtedly have reversed the phrase, and put forward, as her only claim to distinction, the fact that she was his great-niece. For Honorius Hatchard, in the early years of the nineteenth century, had enjoyed a modest celebrity. As the marble tablet in the interior of the library informed its infrequent visitors, he had possessed marked literary gifts, written a series of papers called “The Recluse of Eagle Range,” enjoyed the acquaintance of Washington Irving and Fitz-Greene Halleck, and been cut off in his flower by a fever contracted in Italy. Such had been the sole link between North Dormer and literature, a link piously commemorated by the erection of the monument where Charity Royall, every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, sat at her desk under a freck-

led steel engraving of the deceased author, and wondered if he felt any deader in his grave than she did in his library.

Entering her prison-house with a listless step she took off her hat, hung it on a plaster bust of Minerva, opened the shutters, leaned out to see if there were any eggs in the swallow's nest above one of the windows, and finally, seating herself behind the desk, drew out a roll of cotton lace and a steel crochet hook. She was not an expert workwoman, and it had taken her many weeks to make the half-yard of narrow lace which she kept wound about the buckram back of a disintegrated copy of "The Lamplighter." But there was no other way of getting any lace to trim her summer blouse, and since Ally Hawes, the poorest girl in the village, had shown herself in church with enviable transparencies about the shoulders, Charity's hook had travelled faster. She unrolled the lace, dug the hook into a loop, and bent to the task with furrowed brows.

Suddenly the door opened, and before she had raised her eyes she knew that the young man she had seen going in at the Hatchard gate had entered the library.

Without taking any notice of her he began to move slowly about the long vault-like room, his hands behind his back, his short-sighted eyes peering up and down the rows of rusty bindings. At length he reached the desk and stood before her.

"Have you a card-catalogue?" he asked in a pleasant abrupt voice; and the oddness of the question caused her to drop her work.

"A WHAT?"

"Why, you know—" He broke off, and she became conscious that he was looking at her for the first time, having apparently, on his entrance, included her in his general short-sighted survey as part of the furniture of the library.

The fact that, in discovering her, he lost the thread of his remark, did not escape her attention, and she looked down and smiled. He smiled also.

"No, I don't suppose you do know," he corrected himself. "In

fact, it would be almost a pity—”

She thought she detected a slight condescension in his tone, and asked sharply: “Why?”

“Because it’s so much pleasanter, in a small library like this, to poke about by one’s self—with the help of the librarian.”

He added the last phrase so respectfully that she was mollified, and rejoined with a sigh: “I’m afraid I can’t help you much.”

“Why?” he questioned in his turn; and she replied that there weren’t many books anyhow, and that she’d hardly read any of them. “The worms are getting at them,” she added gloomily.

“Are they? That’s a pity, for I see there are some good ones.” He seemed to have lost interest in their conversation, and strolled away again, apparently forgetting her. His indifference nettled her, and she picked up her work, resolved not to offer him the least assistance. Apparently he did not need it, for he spent a long time with his back to her, lifting down, one after another, the tall cob-webby volumes from a distant shelf.

“Oh, I say!” he exclaimed; and looking up she saw that he had drawn out his handkerchief and was carefully wiping the edges of the book in his hand. The action struck her as an unwarranted criticism on her care of the books, and she said irritably: “It’s not my fault if they’re dirty.”

He turned around and looked at her with reviving interest. “Ah—then you’re not the librarian?”

“Of course I am; but I can’t dust all these books. Besides, nobody ever looks at them, now Miss Hatchard’s too lame to come round.”

“No, I suppose not.” He laid down the book he had been wiping, and stood considering her in silence. She wondered if Miss Hatchard had sent him round to pry into the way the library was looked after, and the suspicion increased her resentment. “I saw you going into her house just now, didn’t I?” she asked, with the New England avoidance of the proper name. She was determined to find out why he was poking about

among her books.

“Miss Hatchard’s house? Yes—she’s my cousin and I’m staying there,” the young man answered; adding, as if to disarm a visible distrust: “My name is Harney—Lucius Harney. She may have spoken of me.”

“No, she hasn’t,” said Charity, wishing she could have said: “Yes, she has.”

“Oh, well—” said Miss Hatchard’s cousin with a laugh; and after another pause, during which it occurred to Charity that her answer had not been encouraging, he remarked: “You don’t seem strong on architecture.”

Her bewilderment was complete: the more she wished to appear to understand him the more unintelligible his remarks became. He reminded her of the gentleman who had “explained” the pictures at Nettleton, and the weight of her ignorance settled down on her again like a pall.

“I mean, I can’t see that you have any books on the old houses about here. I suppose, for that matter, this part of the country hasn’t been much explored. They all go on doing Plymouth and Salem. So stupid. My cousin’s house, now, is remarkable. This place must have had a past—it must have been more of a place once.” He stopped short, with the blush of a shy man who overhears himself, and fears he has been voluble. “I’m an architect, you see, and I’m hunting up old houses in these parts.”

She stared. “Old houses? Everything’s old in North Dormer, isn’t it? The folks are, anyhow.”

He laughed, and wandered away again.

“Haven’t you any kind of a history of the place? I think there was one written about 1840: a book or pamphlet about its first settlement,” he presently said from the farther end of the room.

She pressed her crochet hook against her lip and pondered. There was such a work, she knew: “North Dormer and the Early Townships of Eagle County.” She had a special grudge against it because it was

a limp weakly book that was always either falling off the shelf or slipping back and disappearing if one squeezed it in between sustaining volumes. She remembered, the last time she had picked it up, wondering how any one could have taken the trouble to write a book about North Dormer and its neighbours: Dormer, Hamblin, Creston and Creston River. She knew them all, mere lost clusters of houses in the folds of the desolate ridges: Dormer, where North Dormer went for its apples; Creston River, where there used to be a paper-mill, and its grey walls stood decaying by the stream; and Hamblin, where the first snow always fell. Such were their titles to fame.

She got up and began to move about vaguely before the shelves. But she had no idea where she had last put the book, and something told her that it was going to play her its usual trick and remain invisible. It was not one of her lucky days.

“I guess it’s somewhere,” she said, to prove her zeal; but she spoke without conviction, and felt that her words conveyed none.

“Oh, well—” he said again. She knew he was going, and wished more than ever to find the book.

“It will be for next time,” he added; and picking up the volume he had laid on the desk he handed it to her. “By the way, a little air and sun would do this good; it’s rather valuable.”

He gave her a nod and smile, and passed out.

[Fourth of July at Nettleton]

CHARITY sat before the mirror trying on a hat which Ally Hawes, with much secrecy, had trimmed for her. It was of white straw, with a drooping brim and cherry-coloured lining that made her face glow like the inside of the shell on the parlour mantelpiece.

She propped the square of looking-glass against Mr. Royall’s black leather Bible, steadying it in front with a white stone on which a view of the Brooklyn Bridge was painted; and she sat before her reflec-

tion, bending the brim this way and that, while Ally Hawes's pale face looked over her shoulder like the ghost of wasted opportunities.

"I look awful, don't I?" she said at last with a happy sigh.

Ally smiled and took back the hat. "I'll stitch the roses on right here, so's you can put it away at once."

Charity laughed, and ran her fingers through her rough dark hair. She knew that Harney liked to see its reddish edges ruffled about her forehead and breaking into little rings at the nape. She sat down on her bed and watched Ally stoop over the hat with a careful frown.

"Don't you ever feel like going down to Nettleton for a day?" she asked.

Ally shook her head without looking up. "No, I always remember that awful time I went down with Julia—to that doctor's."

"Oh, Ally—"

"I can't help it. The house is on the corner of Wing Street and Lake Avenue. The trolley from the station goes right by it, and the day the minister took us down to see those pictures I recognized it right off, and couldn't seem to see anything else. There's a big black sign with gold letters all across the front—'Private Consultations.' She came as near as anything to dying...."

"Poor Julia!" Charity sighed from the height of her purity and her security. She had a friend whom she trusted and who respected her. She was going with him to spend the next day—the Fourth of July—at Nettleton. Whose business was it but hers, and what was the harm? The pity of it was that girls like Julia did not know how to choose, and to keep bad fellows at a distance.... Charity slipped down from the bed, and stretched out her hands.

"Is it sewed? Let me try it on again." She put the hat on, and smiled at her image. The thought of Julia had vanished....

The next morning she was up before dawn, and saw the yellow sunrise broaden behind the hills, and the silvery luster preceding a hot day tremble across the sleeping fields.

Her plans had been made with great care. She had announced that she was going down to the Band of Hope picnic at Hepburn, and as no one else from North Dormer intended to venture so far it was not likely that her absence from the festivity would be reported. Besides, if it were she would not greatly care. She was determined to assert her independence, and if she stooped to fib about the Hepburn picnic it was chiefly from the secretive instinct that made her dread the profanation of her happiness. Whenever she was with Lucius Harney she would have liked some impenetrable mountain mist to hide her.

It was arranged that she should walk to a point of the Creston road where Harney was to pick her up and drive her across the hills to Hepburn in time for the nine-thirty train to Nettleton. Harney at first had been rather lukewarm about the trip. He declared himself ready to take her to Nettleton, but urged her not to go on the Fourth of July, on account of the crowds, the probable lateness of the trains, the difficulty of her getting back before night; but her evident disappointment caused him to give way, and even to affect a faint enthusiasm for the adventure. She understood why he was not more eager: he must have seen sights beside which even a Fourth of July at Nettleton would seem tame. But she had never seen anything; and a great longing possessed her to walk the streets of a big town on a holiday, clinging to his arm and jostled by idle crowds in their best clothes. The only cloud on the prospect was the fact that the shops would be closed; but she hoped he would take her back another day, when they were open.

She started out unnoticed in the early sunlight, slipping through the kitchen while Verena bent above the stove. To avoid attracting notice, she carried her new hat carefully wrapped up, and had thrown a long grey veil of Mrs. Royall's over the new white muslin dress which Ally's clever fingers had made for her. All of the ten dollars Mr. Royall had given her, and a part of her own savings as well, had been spent on renewing her wardrobe; and when Harney jumped out of the buggy to meet her she read her reward in his eyes.

The freckled boy who had brought her the note two weeks earlier was to wait with the buggy at Hepburn till their return. He perched at Charity's feet, his legs dangling between the wheels, and they could not say much because of his presence. But it did not greatly matter, for their past was now rich enough to have given them a private language; and with the long day stretching before them like the blue distance beyond the hills there was a delicate pleasure in postponement.

When Charity, in response to Harney's message, had gone to meet him at the Creston pool her heart had been so full of mortification and anger that his first words might easily have estranged her. But it happened that he had found the right word, which was one of simple friendship. His tone had instantly justified her, and put her guardian in the wrong. He had made no allusion to what had passed between Mr. Royall and himself, but had simply let it appear that he had left because means of conveyance were hard to find at North Dormer, and because Creston River was a more convenient centre. He told her that he had hired by the week the buggy of the freckled boy's father, who served as livery-stable keeper to one or two melancholy summer boarding-houses on Creston Lake, and had discovered, within driving distance, a number of houses worthy of his pencil; and he said that he could not, while he was in the neighbourhood, give up the pleasure of seeing her as often as possible.

When they took leave of each other she promised to continue to be his guide; and during the fortnight which followed they roamed the hills in happy comradeship. In most of the village friendships between youths and maidens lack of conversation was made up for by tentative fondling; but Harney, except when he had tried to comfort her in her trouble on their way back from the Hyatts', had never put his arm about her, or sought to betray her into any sudden caress. It seemed to be enough for him to breathe her nearness like a flower's; and since his pleasure at being with her, and his sense of her youth and her grace, perpetually shone in his eyes and softened the inflection of his voice, his reserve did not suggest coldness, but the deference due to a girl of his

own class.

The buggy was drawn by an old trotter who whirled them along so briskly that the pace created a little breeze; but when they reached Hepburn the full heat of the airless morning descended on them. At the railway station the platform was packed with a sweltering throng, and they took refuge in the waiting-room, where there was another throng, already dejected by the heat and the long waiting for retarded trains. Pale mothers were struggling with fretful babies, or trying to keep their older offspring from the fascination of the track; girls and their "fellows" were giggling and shoving, and passing about candy in sticky bags, and older men, collarless and perspiring, were shifting heavy children from one arm to the other, and keeping a haggard eye on the scattered members of their families.

At last the train rumbled in, and engulfed the waiting multitude. Harney swept Charity up on to the first car and they captured a bench for two, and sat in happy isolation while the train swayed and roared along through rich fields and languid tree-clumps. The haze of the morning had become a sort of clear tremor over everything, like the colourless vibration about a flame; and the opulent landscape seemed to droop under it. But to Charity the heat was a stimulant: it enveloped the whole world in the same glow that burned at her heart. Now and then a lurch of the train flung her against Harney, and through her thin muslin she felt the touch of his sleeve. She steadied herself, their eyes met, and the flaming breath of the day seemed to enclose them.

The train roared into the Nettleton station, the descending mob caught them on its tide, and they were swept out into a vague dusty square thronged with seedy "hacks" and long curtained omnibuses drawn by horses with tasselled fly-nets over their withers, who stood swinging their depressed heads drearily from side to side.

A mob of 'bus and hack drivers were shouting "To the Eagle House," "To the Washington House," "This way to the Lake," "Just starting for Greytop;" and through their yells came the popping of fire-

crackers, the explosion of torpedoes, the banging of toy-guns, and the crash of a firemen's band trying to play the Merry Widow while they were being packed into a waggonette streaming with bunting.

The ramshackle wooden hotels about the square were all hung with flags and paper lanterns, and as Harney and Charity turned into the main street, with its brick and granite business blocks crowding out the old low-storied shops, and its towering poles strung with innumerable wires that seemed to tremble and buzz in the heat, they saw the double line of flags and lanterns tapering away gaily to the park at the other end of the perspective. The noise and colour of this holiday vision seemed to transform Nettleton into a metropolis. Charity could not believe that Springfield or even Boston had anything grander to show, and she wondered if, at this very moment, Annabel Balch, on the arm of as brilliant a young man, were threading her way through scenes as resplendent.

"Where shall we go first?" Harney asked; but as she turned her happy eyes on him he guessed the answer and said: "We'll take a look round, shall we?"

The street swarmed with their fellow-travellers, with other excursionists arriving from other directions, with Nettleton's own population, and with the mill-hands trooping in from the factories on the Creston. The shops were closed, but one would scarcely have noticed it, so numerous were the glass doors swinging open on saloons, on restaurants, on drug-stores gushing from every soda-water tap, on fruit and confectionery shops stacked with strawberry-cake, cocoanut drops, trays of glistening molasses candy, boxes of caramels and chewing-gum, baskets of sodden strawberries, and dangling branches of bananas. Outside of some of the doors were trestles with banked-up oranges and apples, spotted pears and dusty raspberries; and the air reeked with the smell of fruit and stale coffee, beer and sarsaparilla and fried potatoes.

Even the shops that were closed offered, through wide expanses of plate-glass, hints of hidden riches. In some, waves of silk and ribbon broke over shores of imitation moss from which ravishing hats rose like

tropical orchids. In others, the pink throats of gramophones opened their giant convolutions in a soundless chorus; or bicycles shining in neat ranks seemed to await the signal of an invisible starter; or tiers of fancy-goods in leatherette and paste and celluloid dangled their insidious graces; and, in one vast bay that seemed to project them into exciting contact with the public, wax ladies in daring dresses chatted elegantly, or, with gestures intimate yet blameless, pointed to their pink corsets and transparent hosiery.

Presently Harney found that his watch had stopped, and turned in at a small jeweller's shop which chanced to still be open. While the watch was being examined Charity leaned over the glass counter where, on a background of dark blue velvet, pins, rings, and brooches glittered like the moon and stars. She had never seen jewelry so near by, and she longed to lift the glass lid and plunge her hand among the shining treasures. But already Harney's watch was repaired, and he laid his hand on her arm and drew her from her dream.

"Which do you like best?" he asked leaning over the counter at her side.

"I don't know...." She pointed to a gold lily-of-the-valley with white flowers.

"Don't you think the blue pin's better?" he suggested, and immediately she saw that the lily of the valley was mere trumpery compared to the small round stone, blue as a mountain lake, with little sparks of light all round it. She coloured at her want of discrimination.

"It's so lovely I guess I was afraid to look at it," she said.

He laughed, and they went out of the shop; but a few steps away he exclaimed: "Oh, by Jove, I forgot something," and turned back and left her in the crowd. She stood staring down a row of pink gramophone throats till he rejoined her and slipped his arm through hers.

"You mustn't be afraid of looking at the blue pin any longer, because it belongs to you," he said; and she felt a little box being pressed into her hand. Her heart gave a leap of joy, but it reached her lips only in

a shy stammer. She remembered other girls whom she had heard planning to extract presents from their fellows, and was seized with a sudden dread lest Harney should have imagined that she had leaned over the pretty things in the glass case in the hope of having one given to her....

A little farther down the street they turned in at a glass doorway opening on a shining hall with a mahogany staircase, and brass cages in its corners. "We must have something to eat," Harney said; and the next moment Charity found herself in a dressing-room all looking-glass and lustrous surfaces, where a party of showy-looking girls were dabbing on powder and straightening immense plumed hats. When they had gone she took courage to bathe her hot face in one of the marble basins, and to straighten her own hat-brim, which the parasols of the crowd had indented. The dresses in the shops had so impressed her that she scarcely dared look at her reflection; but when she did so, the glow of her face under her cherry-coloured hat, and the curve of her young shoulders through the transparent muslin, restored her courage; and when she had taken the blue brooch from its box and pinned it on her bosom she walked toward the restaurant with her head high, as if she had always strolled through tessellated halls beside young men in flannels.

Her spirit sank a little at the sight of the slim-waisted waitresses in black, with bewitching mob-caps on their haughty heads, who were moving disdainfully between the tables. "Not f'r another hour," one of them dropped to Harney in passing; and he stood doubtfully glancing about him.

"Oh, well, we can't stay sweltering here," he decided; "let's try somewhere else—" and with a sense of relief Charity followed him from that scene of inhospitable splendour.

That "somewhere else" turned out—after more hot tramping, and several failures—to be, of all things, a little open-air place in a back street that called itself a French restaurant, and consisted in two or three rickety tables under a scarlet-runner, between a patch of zinnias and petunias and a big elm bending over from the next yard. Here they lunched

on queerly flavoured things, while Harney, leaning back in a crippled rocking-chair, smoked cigarettes between the courses and poured into Charity's glass a pale yellow wine which he said was the very same one drank in just such jolly places in France.

Charity did not think the wine as good as sarsaparilla, but she sipped a mouthful for the pleasure of doing what he did, and of fancying herself alone with him in foreign countries. The illusion was increased by their being served by a deep-bosomed woman with smooth hair and a pleasant laugh, who talked to Harney in unintelligible words, and seemed amazed and overjoyed at his answering her in kind. At the other tables other people sat, mill-hands probably, homely but pleasant looking, who spoke the same shrill jargon, and looked at Harney and Charity with friendly eyes; and between the table-legs a poodle with bald patches and pink eyes nosed about for scraps, and sat up on his hind legs absurdly.

Harney showed no inclination to move, for hot as their corner was, it was at least shaded and quiet; and, from the main thoroughfares came the clanging of trolleys, the incessant popping of torpedoes, the jingle of street-organs, the bawling of megaphone men and the loud murmur of increasing crowds. He leaned back, smoking his cigar, patting the dog, and stirring the coffee that steamed in their chipped cups. "It's the real thing, you know," he explained; and Charity hastily revised her previous conception of the beverage.

They had made no plans for the rest of the day, and when Harney asked her what she wanted to do next she was too bewildered by rich possibilities to find an answer. Finally she confessed that she longed to go to the Lake, where she had not been taken on her former visit, and when he answered, "Oh, there's time for that—it will be pleasanter later," she suggested seeing some pictures like the ones Mr. Miles had taken her to. She thought Harney looked a little disconcerted; but he passed his fine handkerchief over his warm brow, said gaily, "Come along, then," and rose with a last pat for the pink-eyed dog.

Mr. Miles's pictures had been shown in an austere Y.M.C.A.

hall, with white walls and an organ; but Harney led Charity to a glittering place—everything she saw seemed to glitter—where they passed, between immense pictures of yellow-haired beauties stabbing villains in evening dress, into a velvet-curtained auditorium packed with spectators to the last limit of compression. After that, for a while, everything was merged in her brain in swimming circles of heat and blinding alternations of light and darkness. All the world has to show seemed to pass before her in a chaos of palms and minarets, charging cavalry regiments, roaring lions, comic policemen and scowling murderers; and the crowd around her, the hundreds of hot fallow candy-munching faces, young, old, middle-aged, but all kindled with the same contagious excitement, became part of the spectacle, and danced on the screen with the rest.

Presently the thought of the cool trolley-run to the Lake grew irresistible, and they struggled out of the theatre. As they stood on the pavement, Harney pale with the heat, and even Charity a little confused by it, a young man drove by in an electric run-about with a calico band bearing the words: “Ten dollars to take you round the Lake.” Before Charity knew what was happening, Harney had waved a hand, and they were climbing in. “Say, for twenny-five I’ll run you out to see the ball-game and back,” the driver proposed with an insinuating grin; but Charity said quickly: “Oh, I’d rather go rowing on the Lake.” The street was so thronged that progress was slow; but the glory of sitting in the little carriage while it wiggled its way between laden omnibuses and trolleys made the moments seem too short. “Next turn is Lake Avenue,” the young man called out over his shoulder; and as they paused in the wake of a big omnibus groaning with Knights of Pythias in cocked hats and swords, Charity looked up and saw on the corner a brick house with a conspicuous black and gold sign across its front. “Dr. Merkle; Private Consultations at all hours. Lady Attendants,” she read; and suddenly she remembered Ally Hawes’s words: “The house was at the corner of Wing Street and Lake Avenue... there’s a big black sign across the front...” Through all the heat and the rapture a shiver of cold ran over her.

Excerpts from:

The American Scene (1907)

Henry James

[The Berkshires]

There was not flatness, accordingly, though there might be dire dreariness, in some of those impressions gathered, for a climax, in the Berkshire country of Massachusetts, which forced it upon the fancy that here at last, in far, deep mountain valleys, where the winter is fierce and the summer irresponsible, was that heart of New England which makes so pretty a phrase for print and so stern a fact, as yet, for feeling. During the great loops thrown out by the lasso of observation from the wonder-working motor-car that defied the shrinkage of autumn days, this remained constantly the best formula of the impression and even of the emotion; it sat in the vehicle with us, but spreading its wings to the magnificence of movement, and gathering under them indeed most of the meanings of the picture. The heart of New England, at this rate, was an ample, a generous, heart, the largest demands on which, as to extent and variety, seemed not to overstrain its capacity. But it was where the mountain-walls rose straight and made the valleys happiest or saddest one couldn't tell which, as to the felicity of the image, and it didn't much matter that penetration was, for the poetry of it, deepest; just as generalization, for an opposite sort of beauty, was grandest on those several occasions when we perched for a moment on the summit of a "pass," a real little pass, slowly climbed to and keeping its other side, with an art all but Alpine, for a complete revelation, and hung there over the full vertiginous effect of the long and steep descent, the clinging

road, the precipitous fall, the spreading, shimmering land bounded by blue horizons. We liked the very vocabulary, reduced to whatever minimum, of these romanticisms of aspect; again and again the land would do beautifully, if that were all that was wanted, and it deserved, the dear thing, thoroughly, any verbal caress, any tenderness of term, any share in a claim to the grand manner, to which we could responsively treat it. The grand manner was in the winding ascent, the rocky defile, the sudden rest for wonder, and all the splendid reverse of the medal, the world belted afresh as with purple sewn with pearls melting, in other words, into violet hills with vague white towns on their breasts.

That was, at the worst, for October afternoons, the motor helping, our frequent fare; the habit of confidence in which was, perhaps, on no occasion so rewarded as on that of a particular plunge, from one of the highest places, through an ebbing golden light, into the great Lebanon “bowl,” the vast, scooped hollow in one of the hither depths of which (given the quarter of our approach) we found the Shaker settlement once more or less, I believe, known to fame, ever so grimly planted. The grimness, even, was all right, when once we had admiringly dropped down and down and down; it would have done for that of a Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas though more savagely clean and more economically impersonal, we seemed to make out, than the communities of older faiths are apt to show themselves. I remember the mere chill of contiguity, like the breath of the sepulchre, as we skirted, on the wide, hard floor of the valley, the rows of gaunt windows polished for no whitest, stillest, meanest face, even, to look out; so that they resembled the parallelograms of black paint criss-crossed with white lines that represent transparency in Nuremberg dolls’-houses. It wore, the whole settlement, as seen from without, the strangest air of active, operative death; as if the state of extinction were somehow, obscurely, administered and applied the final hush of passions, desires, dangers, converted into a sort of huge stiff brush for sweeping away rubbish, or still more, perhaps, into a monstrous comb for raking in profit. The whole thing had the oddest appearance of mortification made to “pay.” This was really, however,

sounding the heart of New England beyond its depth, for I am not sure that the New York boundary had not been, just there, over-passed; there flowered out of that impression, at any rate, another adventure, the very bravest possible for a shortened day, of which the motive, whether formulated or not, had doubtless virtually been to feel, with a far-stretched arm, for the heart of New York. Had New York, the miscellaneous monster, a heart at all? This inquiry, amid so much encouraged and rewarded curiosity, might have been well on the way to become sincere, and we kept groping, between a prompt start and an extremely retarded return, for any stray sign of an answer.

Excerpt from:

Darkwater: Voices within the Veil (1920)

W.E.B. Du Bois

I was born by a golden river and in the shadow of two great hills, five years after the Emancipation Proclamation. The house was quaint, with clapboards running up and down, neatly trimmed, and there were five rooms, a tiny porch, a rosy front yard, and unbelievably delicious strawberries in the rear. A South Carolinian, lately come to the Berkshire Hills, owned all this—tall, thin, and black, with golden earrings, and given to religious trances. We were his transient tenants for the time.

My own people were part of a great clan. Fully two hundred years before, Tom Burghardt had come through the western pass from the Hudson with his Dutch captor, “Coenraet Burghardt,” sullen in his slavery and achieving his freedom by volunteering for the Revolution at a time of sudden alarm. His wife was a little, black, Bantu woman, who never became reconciled to this strange land; she clasped her knees and rocked and crooned:

“Do bana coba—gene me, gene me! Ben d’nuli, ben d’le—”

Tom died about 1787, but of him came many sons, and one, Jack, who helped in the War of 1812. Of Jack and his wife, Violet, was born a mighty family, splendidly named: Harlow and Ira, Cloë, Lucinda, Maria, and Othello! I dimly remember my grandfather, Othello,—or “Uncle Tallow,”—a brown man, strong-voiced and redolent with tobacco, who sat stiffly in a great high chair because his hip was broken. He was probably a bit lazy and given to wassail. At any rate, grandmother had a shrewish tongue and often berated him. This grandmother was Sarah—“Aunt Sally”—a stern, tall, Dutch-African woman, beak-nosed, but beautiful-eyed and golden-skinned. Ten or more

children were theirs, of whom the youngest was Mary, my mother.

Mother was dark shining bronze, with a tiny ripple in her black hair, black-eyed, with a heavy, kind face. She gave one the impression of infinite patience, but a curious determination was concealed in her softness. The family were small farmers on Egremont Plain, between Great Barrington and Sheffield, Massachusetts. The bits of land were too small to support the great families born on them and we were always poor. I never remember being cold or hungry, but I do remember that shoes and coal, and sometimes flour, caused mother moments of anxious thought in winter, and a new suit was an event!

At about the time of my birth economic pressure was transmuted the family generally from farmers to “hired” help. Some revolted and migrated westward, others went cityward as cooks and barbers. Mother worked for some years at house service in Great Barrington, and after a disappointed love episode with a cousin, who went to California, she met and married Alfred Du Bois and went to town to live by the golden river where I was born.

Alfred, my father, must have seemed a splendid vision in that little valley under the shelter of those mighty hills. He was small and beautiful of face and feature, just tinted with the sun, his curly hair chiefly revealing his kinship to Africa. In nature he was a dreamer,—romantic, indolent, kind, unreliable. He had in him the making of a poet, an adventurer, or a Beloved Vagabond, according to the life that closed round him; and that life gave him all too little. His father, Alexander Du Bois, cloaked under a stern, austere demeanor a passionate revolt against the world. He, too, was small, but squarish. I remember him as I saw him first, in his home in New Bedford,—white hair close-cropped; a seamed, hard face, but high in tone, with a gray eye that could twinkle or glare.

Long years before him Louis XIV drove two Huguenots, Jacques and Louis Du Bois, into wild Ulster County, New York. One of them in the third or fourth generation had a descendant, Dr. James Du Bois, a gay, rich bachelor, who made his money in the Bahamas, where he and the

Gilberts had plantations. There he took a beautiful little mulatto slave as his mistress, and two sons were born: Alexander in 1803 and John, later. They were fine, straight, clear-eyed boys, white enough to “pass.” He brought them to America and put Alexander in the celebrated Cheshire School, in Connecticut. Here he often visited him, but one last time, fell dead. He left no will, and his relations made short shrift of these sons. They gathered in the property, apprenticed grandfather to a shoemaker; then dropped him.

Grandfather took his bitter dose like a thoroughbred. Wild as was his inner revolt against this treatment, he uttered no word against the thieves and made no plea. He tried his fortunes here and in Haiti, where, during his short, restless sojourn, my own father was born. Eventually, grandfather became chief steward on the passenger boat between New York and New Haven; later he was a small merchant in Springfield; and finally he retired and ended his days at New Bedford. Always he held his head high, took no insults, made few friends. He was not a “Negro”; he was a man! Yet the current was too strong even for him. Then even more than now a colored man had colored friends or none at all, lived in a colored world or lived alone. A few fine, strong, black men gained the heart of this silent, bitter man in New York and New Haven. If he had scant sympathy with their social clannishness, he was with them in fighting discrimination. So, when the white Episcopalians of Trinity Parish, New Haven, showed plainly that they no longer wanted black Folks as fellow Christians, he led the revolt which resulted in St. Luke’s Parish, and was for years its senior warden. He lies dead in the Grove Street Cemetery, beside Jehudi Ashmun.

Beneath his sternness was a very human man. Slyly he wrote poetry,—stilted, pleading things from a soul astray. He loved women in his masterful way, marrying three beautiful wives in succession and clinging to each with a certain desperate, even if unsympathetic, affection. As a father he was, naturally, a failure,—hard, domineering, unyielding. His four children reacted characteristically: one was until past middle life a thin spinster, the mental image of her father; one died; one passed over into the white world and her children’s children are now white, with no knowledge of their Negro

blood; the fourth, my father, bent before grandfather, but did not break—better if he had. He yielded and flared back, asked forgiveness and forgot why, became the harshly-held favorite, who ran away and rioted and roamed and loved and married my brown mother.

So with some circumstance having finally gotten myself born, with a flood of Negro blood, a strain of French, a bit of Dutch, but, thank God! no “Anglo-Saxon,” I come to the days of my childhood.

They were very happy. Early we moved back to Grandfather Burghardt’s home,—I barely remember its stone fireplace, big kitchen, and delightful woodshed. Then this house passed to other branches of the clan and we moved to rented quarters in town,—to one delectable place “upstairs,” with a wide yard full of shrubbery, and a brook; to another house abutting a railroad, with infinite interests and astonishing playmates; and finally back to the quiet street on which I was born,—down a long lane and in a homely, cozy cottage, with a living-room, a tiny sitting-room, a pantry, and two attic bedrooms. Here mother and I lived until she died, in 1884, for father early began his restless wanderings. I last remember urgent letters for us to come to New Milford, where he had started a barber shop. Later he became a preacher. But mother no longer trusted his dreams, and he soon faded out of our lives into silence.

From the age of five until I was sixteen I went to a school on the same grounds,—down a lane, into a widened yard, with a big choke-cherry tree and two buildings, wood and brick. Here I got acquainted with my world, and soon had my criterions of judgment.

Wealth had no particular lure. On the other hand, the shadow of wealth was about us. That river of my birth was golden because of the woolen and paper waste that soiled it. The gold was theirs, not ours; but the gleam and glint was for all. To me it was all in order and I took it philosophically. I cordially despised the poor Irish and South Germans, who slaved in the mills, and annexed the rich and well-to-do as my natural companions. Of such is the kingdom of snobs!

Most of our townfolk were, naturally, the well-to-do, shading

downward, but seldom reaching poverty. As playmate of the children I saw the homes of nearly every one, except a few immigrant New Yorkers, of whom none of us approved. The homes I saw impressed me, but did not overwhelm me. Many were bigger than mine, with newer and shinier things, but they did not seem to differ in kind. I think I probably surprised my hosts more than they me, for I was easily at home and perfectly happy and they looked to me just like ordinary people, while my brown face and frizzled hair must have seemed strange to them.

Yet I was very much one of them. I was a center and sometimes the leader of the town gang of boys. We were noisy, but never very bad,—and, indeed, my mother’s quiet influence came in here, as I realize now. She did not try to make me perfect. To her I was already perfect. She simply warned me of a few things, especially saloons. In my town the saloon was the open door to hell. The best families had their drunkards and the worst had little else.

Very gradually,—I cannot now distinguish the steps, though here and there I remember a jump or a jolt—but very gradually I found myself assuming quite placidly that I was different from other children. At first I think I connected the difference with a manifest ability to get my lessons rather better than most and to recite with a certain happy, almost taunting, glibness, which brought frowns here and there. Then, slowly, I realized that some folks, a few, even several, actually considered my brown skin a misfortune; once or twice I became painfully aware that some human beings even thought it a crime. I was not for a moment daunted,—although, of course, there were some days of secret tears—rather I was spurred to tireless effort. If they beat me at anything, I was grimly determined to make them sweat for it! Once I remember challenging a great, hard farmer-boy to battle, when I knew he could whip me; and he did. But ever after, he was polite.

As time flew I felt not so much disowned and rejected as rather drawn up into higher spaces and made part of a mightier mission. At times I almost pitied my pale companions, who were not of the Lord’s anointed and who saw in their dreams no splendid quests of golden fleeces.

Even in the matter of girls my peculiar phantasy asserted itself. Naturally, it was in our town voted bad form for boys of twelve and fourteen to show any evident weakness for girls. We tolerated them loftily, and now and then they played in our games, when I joined in quite as naturally as the rest. It was when strangers came, or summer boarders, or when the oldest girls grew up that my sharp senses noted little hesitancies in public and searchings for possible public opinion. Then I flamed! I lifted my chin and strode off to the mountains, where I viewed the world at my feet and strained my eyes across the shadow of the hills.

I was graduated from high school at sixteen, and I talked of "Wendell Phillips." This was my first sweet taste of the world's applause. There were flowers and upturned faces, music and marching, and there was my mother's smile. She was lame, then, and a bit drawn, but very happy. It was her great day and that very year she lay down with a sigh of content and has not yet awakened. I felt a certain gladness to see her, at last, at peace, for she had worried all her life. Of my own loss I had then little realization. That came only with the after-years. Now it was the choking gladness and solemn feel of wings! At last, I was going beyond the hills and into the world that beckoned steadily.

A Visual Essay of Berkshire and Early Photographs

James Van Der Zee



James Van Der Zee, **James Van Der Zee and Brother Walter Snowshoeing**, Lenox, MA. c. 1900. Silver-toned silver print. *Copyright Donna Mussenden Van Der Zee.*



James Van Der Zee, **The Old Mill**, Lenox, MA. c. 1905. Silver-toned silver print.
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James Van Der Zee, **The Road that Leads from Home**, Lenox, MA. c. 1905. Silver-toned silver print. *Copyright Donna Mussenden Van Der Zee.*



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James Van Der Zee, **Kate and Rachel**, Lenox, MA. c. 1909. Silver-toned silver print. *Copyright Donna Mussenden Van Der Zee.*



James Van Der Zee, **Mrs. Turner**, Lenox, MA. c. 1905. Silver-toned silver print.
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James Van Der Zee, **Self Portrait**. Harlem, NY. c. 1919. Silver-toned silver print.
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Excerpt from:

The Gilded Age (1873)

Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner

[The Three “Aristocracies” of Washington]

Laura soon discovered that there were three distinct aristocracies in Washington. One of these, (nick-named the Antiques,) consisted of cultivated, high-bred old families who looked back with pride upon an ancestry that had been always great in the nation’s councils and its wars from the birth of the republic downward. Into this select circle it was difficult to gain admission. No. 2 was the aristocracy of the middle ground—of which, more anon. No. 3 lay beyond; of it we will say a word here. We will call it the Aristocracy of the Parvenus—as, indeed, the general public did. Official position, no matter how obtained, entitled a man to a place in it, and carried his family with him, no matter whence they sprang. Great wealth gave a man a still higher and nobler place in it than did official position. If this wealth had been acquired by conspicuous ingenuity, with just a pleasant little spice of illegality about it, all the better. This aristocracy was “fast,” and not averse to ostentation.

The aristocracy of the Antiques ignored the aristocracy of the Parvenus; the Parvenus laughed at the Antiques, (and secretly envied them.)

There were certain important “society” customs which one in Laura’s position needed to understand. For instance, when a lady of any prominence comes to one of our cities and takes up her residence, all the ladies of her grade favor her in turn with an initial call, giving their cards to the servant at the door by way of introduction. They come singly, sometimes; sometimes in couples; and always in elaborate full dress. They talk two

minutes and a quarter and then go. If the lady receiving the call desires a further acquaintance, she must return the visit within two weeks; to neglect it beyond that time means “let the matter drop.” But if she does return the visit within two weeks, it then becomes the other party’s privilege to continue the acquaintance or drop it. She signifies her willingness to continue it by calling again any time within twelve-months; after that, if the parties go on calling upon each other once a year, in our large cities, that is sufficient, and the acquaintanceship holds good. The thing goes along smoothly, now. The annual visits are made and returned with peaceful regularity and bland satisfaction, although it is not necessary that the two ladies shall actually see each other oftener than once every few years. Their cards preserve the intimacy and keep the acquaintanceship intact.

For instance, Mrs. A. pays her annual visit, sits in her carriage and sends in her card with the lower right hand corner turned down, which signifies that she has “called in person;” Mrs. B. sends down word that she is “engaged” or “wishes to be excused”—or if she is a Parvenu and low-bred, she perhaps sends word that she is “not at home.” Very good; Mrs. A. drives on happy and content. If Mrs. A.’s daughter marries, or a child is born to the family, Mrs. B. calls, sends in her card with the upper left hand corner turned down, and then goes along about her affairs—for that inverted corner means “Congratulations.” If Mrs. B.’s husband falls downstairs and breaks his neck, Mrs. A. calls, leaves her card with the upper right hand corner turned down, and then takes her departure; this corner means “Condolence.” It is very necessary to get the corners right, else one may unintentionally condole with a friend on a wedding or congratulate her upon a funeral. If either lady is about to leave the city, she goes to the other’s house and leaves her card with “P. P. C.” engraved under the name—which signifies, “Pay Parting Call.” But enough of etiquette. Laura was early instructed in the mysteries of society life by a competent mentor, and thus was preserved from troublesome mistakes...

Thank you!

Aaron Thier	Hotel on North
Allegrone Companies	Housatonic Heritage
Amy and Scott Ganz	Jeffrey Lawrence
Andrew Barsotti	Jeffrey Rose
Berkshire Athenaeum	Joan and Jim Hunter
Berkshire Bank Foundation	Jordan Brower
The Berkshire Eagle	Karen Shepard
Berkshire Historical Society	Kwik Print
Berkshire United Way	Kyle and Lili Chambers
Chris Parkinson	Lenox Historical Society
City of Pittsfield	Main Street Hospitality Group
Cultural Resources Foundation	Mass Humanities
David and Marita Glodt	Megan Craig
Dolores Hayden	The Mount
Donna Mussenden Van Der Zee	National Endowment for the Humanities
Downtown Pittsfield Farmers Market	National Humanities Alliance
Erica Dawson	Pittsfield Public Schools
The Feigenbaum Foundation	RBC Foundation
Frances Jones-Sneed	Sarah Trudgeon
Gabriel Ravel	Tessa Kelly
Guido's Fresh Marketplace	<i>upstreet</i> literary magazine
Hai-Dang Phan	Westside Legends
Hans and Kate Morris	William Havemann

2019 Mastheads Event Calendar

All events are free and open to the public. Refreshments provided.

Monday, July 1: 2019 Kickoff Party

7:00 PM at Hotel On North (297 North St, Pittsfield, MA)

Welcome this year's Mastheads writers-in-residence and hear them read from their work.

Sunday, July 14: Du Bois and Van Der Zee in the Berkshires

2:00 PM at Durant Park (310 Columbus Ave, Pittsfield, MA)

Dr. Frances Jones-Sneed will lead a discussion of W.E.B. Du Bois and James Van Der Zee, followed by live music as part of the Westside Summerfest series.

Saturday, July 20: Edith Wharton's "Summer"

2:00 PM at The Mount (2 Plunkett St, Lenox, MA)

Professor Jeffrey Lawrence will lead a reading discussion of Edith Wharton's "Summer." Stick around after the event for jazz night, free for all Mastheads attendees!

Tuesday, July 30: Summer Finale

7:00 PM at Arrowhead (780 Holmes Rd, Pittsfield, MA)

Come celebrate the summer with us! Our five writers-in-residence will give a reading of the work they produced in The Mastheads studios this season.



2019