



Sunday, June 30, 2019

BERKSHIRE CULTURE OF THE GILDED AGE

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 Chesnut 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—and 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 in the fictional town of Starkfield, Ethan, 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,

continued on page 4 >

THE MASTHEADS x The Berkshire Eagle fold #8

iMastheads Year Three!

I am preparing this Fold from the Ronald McDonald House in Springfield, camped out next to Baystate Hospital where our second daughter, Ray, was born at 33 weeks this past Wednesday.

It has struck me over the past week, with gratitude and joy, that the Mastheads, as a project and as a team of people, has become solid enough to propel itself as I retreat for a few weeks. Thank you to Sarah Trudgeon, Jeffrey Lawrence, and Chris Parkinson - the most brilliant collaborators and friends - for your dedication and care.

To our left, Jeff discusses the theme for 2019: "Berkshire Culture of the Gilded Age." This Fold also introduces the season's writers-in-residence, who will be working in the Mastheads studios this month alongside Onota Lake! They are, from left to right above: Sam Max, James Davis, Rachael Uwada Clifford, Toni Judnitch, and S. Erin Batiste.

All visual art in this Fold is by Megan Craig (@waterstreetprojects).

Below is a list of our upcoming events, which are always free, open to the public, and with refreshments. Hoping Ray and I can join in before it's all over!

Warmest,
Tessa Kelly, Director of The Mastheads

Monday, July 1: 2019 Kickoff Party
7:00 PM at Hotel On North
(297 North St, Pittsfield)

Welcome this year's writers-in-residence and hear them read from their work. Pick up a free copy of the 2019 Mastheads Reader!

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

2:00 PM at Durant Park
(310 Columbus Ave, Pittsfield)
Dr. Frances Jones-Sneed will lead a discussion of Du Bois and Van Der Zee, followed by live music as part of the Westside Summerfest series.

Saturday, July 2: Wharton's *Summer*
2:00 PM at The Mount
(2 Plunkett St, Lenox)

A reading discussion of Edith Wharton's novella *Summer*, led by Professor Jeffrey Lawrence. Stick around for jazz night, free to all Mastheads attendees!

Tuesday, July 30: Summer Finale
7:00 PM at Arrowhead
(780 Holmes Rd, Pittsfield)

The writers-in-residence will share the work they produced in the Mastheads studios this season. Come celebrate!

SAM MAX

Peter and the Wolf (excerpt)

Chapter I: Peter at the Gate

*Outside sounds become music:
A motif about the place.*

*Peter stands still at a waist-level metal gate.
Behind, Peter's Son (played by a grown
man) speaks from his attic bedroom, two
stories above street level. Peter's Son is
making a pair of costume bird wings and an
aviator cap and goggles. There is snow.*

PETER'S SON

Once upon a time, late one evening, Peter opened the gate and went out into the big city.

A model of the city, now lit.

The city was so grey, dusty, and caked with snow that from the eye of a flying bird, it looked indecipherable from its paper model version: a whitish labyrinth, at once a monument and a blueprint.

The gate's black metal, wet with city snow, pushed against Peter's bare palm. The resistance of the gate, the wet wind, and the immediate towering claustrophobia of the ashen city tried to keep Peter inside.

My father's mind flickered for a moment and his hand remained on the gate, paralyzed.

Music.

PETER

I'm off to meet a man named Wolf. He's big, strong, and hairy.

PETER'S SON

Behind Peter, from the highest attic window of his home, appeared the worried face of Peter's son. "All is quiet," I chirped, gaily. It was the evening before my eighth birthday.

PETER

Go to sleep.

PETER'S SON

My father replied. He wanted to be alone. He said:

PETER

I'll be back by morning. The sooner you sleep, the sooner you can wake up and eat birthday cakes. Your mother's been hard at work all day. Sifting flour and placing raspberries. It's all for you, my bird.

PETER'S SON

For me?

PETER

And if you go to sleep, you'll dream of cakes. Birds made of cakes. The house made of cakes. You'll wake up licking your pillow thinking it's made of honey.

PETER'S SON

I shut my attic window against the paper city. I retreated into our salt block of a house, which melted infinite floating flakes around it.

A room of the house unfolds below.

In the kitchen two floors below, I heard my mother open and close the oven, then move toward the kitchen table. The house was very quiet. It was so quiet; you could have heard the laundered sheets my mother was folding. You could have heard each sheet meet the air and fold on itself.

Peter's Wife's bed sheet suspended, floating.

As the sound of linen floated up through my bedroom floorboards, I imagined the sheets as ghosts, floating in the middle of a great big solid room: imperceptible as ice shifting in an abandoned glass of water as it melts.

I could not fall asleep.



JAMES DAVIS

Ab

"an abdominal muscle"
—*The Official SCRABBLE Players Dictionary*

I'd like just one—the upper left, why not, indented there like the first cookie cut into the sheet of dough—to show off in becomingly posed glossies.

Picture me in profile, reclining poolside, my lower gut hidden under *Ulysses*, my one dense knot glistening with Coppertone.

Picture me in *Vogue Hommes* modeling my chum Giorgio's white silk chemise with its single cutout you know where.

Up yours, ex-lover! Up yours, ennui! I exude core power, very specific core power, you don't know what you're missing,

do you? Who doesn't? Touch my tummy right there, yes, there, lick my little nested egg, ignore the rest, it's none of your concern,

the ho-hum chest, the wispy fur ringing the nipples, the good old penis. I didn't suffer this long for you not to touch me where it counts.

Ba

"the eternal soul, in Egyptian mythology"
—*The Official SCRABBLE Players Dictionary*

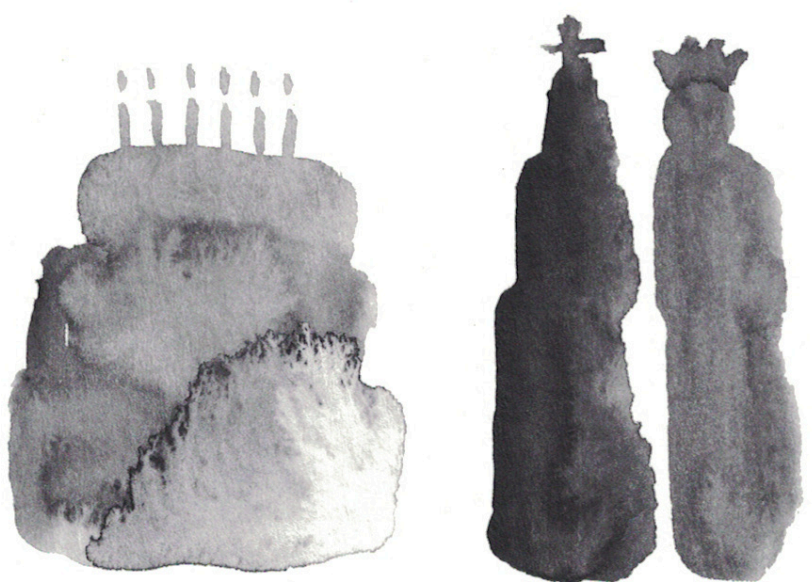
I copulate and my ba copulates. When my ba copulates with the men who dwell on the Island of Flame, I copulate with the goddesses.

I am come, shining and ba-full, having swallowed all their magic. I pervade all heavens and make happy the egg which created me.

My ba shall not be driven out by the falcons. My ba shall not be grabbed by the pigs. My ba shall pass by them in silence.

I have created my ba about me to make it know what I knew. For the sake of my corpse, my ba shall not burn, shall not be held up by the bodyguard of Osiris.

My heart is in my body; my corpse is in the earth. I do not weep over it. I will not be kept from drinking water from the stream.



S. ERIN BATISTE

A Record of Everything I've Outlived

dedicated to my thirty-seven years

1. the volcano bellowing my birth announcement;
ash rained days after, across state lines
survivors shadowed my maternity halls
2. the house lost to a fireplace one winter evening;
the family fable it became
3. my first memory: soft arms flinging me
between the teeth of an escalator
second: my mother grinning silently from the top
4. the gentle blue VW which carried me through the
desert
5. the hanged aunt who'd shared my face
6. my two classmates stolen from our first-grade
restroom stalls
7. my mother's tornadoes that tore everyone apart
8. my father spending rent on Disneyland
9. my mother awarded primary custody
10. the toy aisle the stranger plucked me from
11. the ill-wired electric fan which charred away the
roof and Christmas
12. my mother's fourth husband;
the eight hours he'd held a rifle on us
13. the fistfuls of pills which swallowed me and made
my teenage life livable
14. the Safeway plastics I'd packed rushing to leave
my mother's for good
15. the repeat offender boyfriend;
who'd made me drug traffic;
who'd tried to traffic me;
who'd first noticed my morning sickness
16. the aspiration D&C;
the bipolar friend who signed as my mom
17. the exhaust filled Circle K lot where I'd met my
father;
lending him money for coke
he didn't know I knew about
18. the one-way ticket to New York City
19. returning to the showy suburbs
and neon beaches which blanketed
the city my father believed held heaven
20. my father laid three days dead;
his lease still fresh on
his Seattle apartment
21. the late trimester termination;
belated birthday gift to myself
after my second boyfriend finally made up his mind
22. the other unmarried aunt claimed by her heart
a martyr and thermometer for the unrequited
23. 13-23
24. the stalker who illegally entered my apartment
for weeks;
the laughing cops who joked *maybe he followed you
home from a bar*
25. the months of dockets and testimonies:
v. the careless apartment complex
v. the bankruptcy court
v. the third battering ex
26. Christopher
27. Christopher
28. Christopher
29. Christopher
30. the poet: doll-like wife who followed herself into
the dull light
31. my mother's mother;
who mothered me as much as she could;
who left me heavy with her stories and
Southernness;
who left behind so much silence
32. the jellyfish which embraced me in the warm sea
33. pneumonia
34. discovering masses of sadness had ravaged my
sister
35. the lovers who'd used my grief for their erections
36. the driver who sped eighty miles opposite my
hotel
37. the skies threaded with ferocious stars raring to
remake all I've known

(previously published in Peach Mag, June 2018)

TONI JUDNITCH

Crown (excerpt)

I. Pearl

I was close to gone when my brother robbed the beat-up motel attached to The Ponderosa Bar, where I worked handing out keys to drunks and their dates. No more truckers or confused tourists, no more people I had known for years already, people I could label by their type of drunk, coming in, leaning over the desk, asking me for the best room until I wanted to say, they're all shit and you know it you come here every Friday, Dipshit. Nothing better to do in Crown, with its one gas station and one bar and everywhere else trees and nothing. But no, you're supposed to smile. A girl can get real good at smiling and checking out keys and saying, enjoy your stay, in her best weathergirl voice, the calm kind, like sunny weather for days, and then waiting. It was all about waiting, and I was good at that.

It was a shit job. The kind where you see people you went to high school with every other day, and they hand you thirty bucks for a room, and if they're the right kind of drunk they'll ask, How's Jake doing anyway? Ever see your pop? This is where they'll pause. They'll lean in. They'll clear their throats, and then ask it, what they really want to know: What about Auggie? And it's easy to think in those moments that a different version of myself, the younger version, who was friendly with these people still, would tell them the truth: Fuck those people, and fuck you too. I could feel the words forming in the back of my throat. Fuck you. But you can't say that when you're a front desk worker. You smile. Hand over keys. Enjoy your stay.

But sometimes I did see Auggie. He never came into the front office, never bought a room for an hour like some of the other guys in town. But sometimes I could see him, stepping out of his truck and moving slowly toward the bar, never once looking in my direction, even if I wanted him to, willed it with my whole body. Even if a big part of me wanted nothing more than for him to see me sitting there, middle-finger raised or whatever struck me in the moment. I didn't know. I just wanted him to look, but he never did. It was better that way, anyway, with me sweating my ass off in that tiny shack, flies landing in my hair and on my cheeks. Better.

It's hard to feel good in ninety degrees, but if I concentrated just right on the way the fan was blowing on me, if I got my face real close to it so my voice sounded like a robot, and I could only hear that buzz, then waiting became something else. You can stop thinking for a second, and when you're not thinking, you're not in a front office in a motel in clothes that all used to belong to him, to Auggie—stretched out black t-shirts and sweatpants—and everyone knows you're still wearing those clothes years later. Everyone has seen you, walking to work. Five miles to get there, but it's easy if you're used to it. Walking is just waiting anyway.

And soon I would walk out of Crown. Years of shoving change and dollars into an old coffee can in the back of my closet. I would get out, the first one in our family, drive north and north and north until the ground is frozen nine months out of the year and you can't see straight it's so cold. And I would think of that, time passing, waiting, and then soon I would be able to leave, hit the road, disappear, take a new name. Be someone else.



RACHAEL UWADA CLIFFORD

What The Year Will Swallow (excerpt)

My sister is a preserver of ordinary things. She saves the tiny, stiffened bodies of moths and flies that trap themselves and starve in the space between our window and the screen. She saves the long dark strands of hair that wind themselves in our mother's boar bristle brush, and the cough drop wrappers that collect in our father's glove compartment. She saves apple seeds and plum pits and she saves the little piles of dry orange leaves that come through the front door with our shoes in October. She keeps everything in a big black shoebox under her bed.

The box really is not supposed to be opened, unless Chika is putting something inside it, and even then only very quickly. But sometimes I can't help it, and need to remember certain days. Like when we are in hot, dry June and I am wishing for rain, I open the box and breathe in a whiff of cool, damp air. I think it is from a rock Chika found at the bottom of the creek one afternoon. Or when Aunty goes away to clear her head and I miss her, I open the box and breathe in old perfume and cigarettes. This is from a tiny square Chika cut off the old coat Aunty threw out.

I am doing my homework and Chika is standing in front of me, hugging the box to her chest. I know something is wrong because the box never leaves the space beneath her bed. Her face is solemn. She is like our father. She does not get angry, only solemn. It is worse.

"Did you open the box?" she says.

"No." She knows I'm lying. "I'm sorry."

She sighs. "How long did you leave it open?"

"Not that long."

"How long?"

"Maybe...thirty seconds."

"You left the box open for *thirty* seconds?"

I stare at my feet. I feel awful. "How did you know?"

"I was putting something in and noticed it seemed different."

"What do you mean?"

"Like...there weren't as many smells. Or they're weaker."

"*What?*"

"You left it open too long. Some escaped." She gestures around her. I must look like I don't believe her, because she starts to open the box. "Here. See for yourself."

"No!" I push the lid shut again. "They'll keep escaping."

She nods. Then she tells me how she opened the box and tried to remember going into the city to buy fish with our father every Wednesday. The box has a complete set of tilapia vertebrae and a pigeon feather, but the smell was very faint, barely there. The next time she opens the box it probably won't be there at all. She doesn't know what other smells are missing, because she got worried and closed the box, but she believes there are more. A lump starts to form in my throat.

"We're going to the fish market tomorrow," I say. "We can—"

"No," says Chika firmly. "You can't put the same thing in the box twice."

"Why?"

"You just can't."

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU

The following people, foundations, businesses, and institutions have supported The Mastheads in the past year, allowing us to deliver our third season of public programming in 2019. To help keep us rolling, reach out at: info@themastheads.org.

OUR BACKBONE:

National Endowment for the Humanities
The Feigenbaum Foundation
Joan and Jim Hunter
Hans and Kate Morris
David and Marita Glott
Housatonic Heritage
Berkshire Bank Foundation
Mass Humanities

AND DEAR FRIENDS:

Aaron Thier
Allegrone Companies
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Jeffrey Lawrence
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Kwik Print
Kyle and Lili Chambers
Lenox Historical Society
Main Street Hospitality Group
Megan Craig
The Mount
National Humanities Alliance
Pittsfield Public Schools
RBC Foundation
Sarah Trudgeon
Tessa Kelly
upstreet literary magazine
Westside Legends
William Havemann



Megan Craig, **Mark Twain**, 2019, work in progress, 39 1/2" x 64," hand-stitched felt, silk, satin ribbon, bias tape, thread

Visit the Onota Building storefront on North Street during July to see the complete set of fabric portraits of this year's historic figures: Du Bois, James, Twain, Van Der Zee, and Wharton.

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 two 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 structure that housed the Van Der Zee family, 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.

-JEFFREY LAWRENCE, Director of Research for The Mastheads

THE MASTHEADS x The Berkshire Eagle: FOLD 8