



The Gilded Age Mark Twain & Charles Dudley Warner

*The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* is an 1873 novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner that satirizes greed and political corruption in post-Civil War America. The term *gilded age*, commonly given to the era, comes from the title of this book. Twain and Warner got the name from Shakespeare's *King John* (1595): "To gild refined gold, to paint the lily... is wasteful and ridiculous excess." Gilding a lily, which is already beautiful and not in need of further adornment, is excessive and wasteful, characteristics of the age Twain and Warner wrote about in their novel. Another interpretation of the title, of course, is the contrast between an ideal "Golden Age," and a less worthy "Gilded Age," as gilding is only a thin layer of gold over baser metal, so the title now takes on a pejorative meaning as to the novel's time, events and people.

Although not one of Twain's more well-known works, it has appeared in more than 100 editions since its original publication in 1873. Twain and Warner originally had planned to issue the novel with illustrations by Thomas Nast. The book is remarkable for two reasons--it is the only novel Twain wrote with a collaborator, and its title very quickly became synonymous with graft, materialism, and corruption in public life. (Description by Wikipedia)

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