

# Comparison contrast essay example

[Government](#), [Capitalism](#)



During the time when the careers of writers like Edith Wharton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were flourishing, unemployment had also been growing and the working-class was getting larger and larger. Thus, the works of both Wharton and Charlotte often featured working-class characters. However, the question is: To what extent was their depiction of the working-class American society in their respective works and how were they different? In her works, Edith Wharton tends to purposely make the lifestyles of the American working classes seem like a fixation so that social inequality is seen as natural and normal. Apparently, she has her own twist on the subject matter. According to Wharton, the working classes are living a life that is extremely happy and peaceful, and better than it appears in reality. She demonstrates this most clearly in the rather emotional ending of novel, “The House of Mirth.” Lily, who is at first a woman of good social standing, is reduced to working in a hat shop, and eventually loses her job due to her clumsiness and ineptness. Lily ends up loses her status as a member of high society and all the luxuries that came with it. On the other hand there is Nettie Struther, a working-class woman who finds Lily walking the streets and assumes that she belongs to the wealthy society that she idealizes (Wharton).

The truth is that Wharton herself is revealing her belief that the working classes lead a better life through Lily. That is why she presents Nettie, her husband and baby as a closely knit, who despite being poor stand by each other and survive, while also carving out some sort of virtuous life outside of their financial problems. In other words, it is not the working-classes but the middle-classes whom Wharton considers to have been victimized by

capitalism. In this and her other works, Wharton makes it apparent that she detests capitalism and consumer culture. However, the way she celebrates the working classes and makes their existence seem natural, she strengthens the very inequalities created by the system of capitalism that she detests. Thus, according to Edith Wharton, the working classes are the idealized future and saviors of the world, not because of their struggle to knock down capitalism, but because she sees them as living extremely happy, peaceful, and virtuous lives.

Although Charlotte Perkins Gilman is among the first wave of feminists to write about work and class, she centered them as key issues for the liberation of working-class women. Unlike Wharton, Gilman tends to be far more concerned about the alienation of working-class women from their species due to isolation in private households where they must perform nonproductive work. Although Gilman does not idealize the working-class as a whole like Wharton, she does seem to be insensitive to the plight of working-class women. In much of her work, Gilman's emphasis is on gender stratification, and she blames economic arrangements for the division of labor on the basis of gender in the American working-class society. In this regard, it seems that both Gilman and Wharton detest the economic arrangements for their own separate reasons.

Gilman's works also make it appear that she views motherhood as restricting the chances of working-class women to achieve economic independence and become equal to men in the public sphere. However, just like Wharton appeared to be on the side of the working classes but idealized them as some saviors, the same way, even though Gilman appears to be on the side

of equality for working-class women, she tends to valorize their differences from men. Perhaps that is why in her utopian novel “ Herland” Gilman creates consisting only of women (Gilman). In this respect, another aspect of similarity that can be found in Wharton’s and Gilman’s works is that Wharton also somewhat normalizes the working-classes, even though exclusively directed at women, based on her suggestion for the economic emancipation of women so that they have opportunities to work for wages in the public sphere.

Thus, the bottom line is that on the surface, Edith Wharton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman seem to have their own separate emphasis for their depictions of the working-class American society in their respective works. However, there are underlying similarities such as the normalization of the working class and valorizing it, but nonetheless, both authors seem to detest the economic arrangement of the American society at that time and appear to be on the side of the working-class Americans.

## **Works Cited**

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland* (Dover Thrift Editions). Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998. Print.

Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth* (Dover Thrift Editions). Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2002. Print.