

INTIMATE APPAREL
DRAMATURGY SOURCEBOOK

Calvin Kosak

note: an asterisk indicates that the material was originally compiled by ChatGPT or a similar AI source, then manually cross-checked by me.

Lynn Nottage

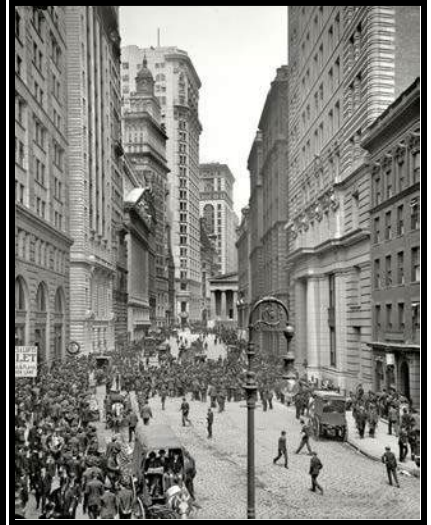


Lynn Nottage is a playwright from Brooklyn, whose work often features working-class Black characters and highlights working-class struggles. She has won Pulitzers for her work *Sweat* and *Ruined*. She currently works at Columbia University as an associate professor of playwriting as well as being an artist-in-residence at the Park Avenue Armory.

Education:

LaGuardia High School, Brown University (AB), Yale School of Drama (MFA)

Manhattan in 1905



8980 A CHILLY DAY ON FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK



Ragtime (7) - The most popular style of music from 1899 to 1917. It typically consisted of a beat in 2/4 or 4/4 time, which was complimented by a "fast, bouncingly syncopated" melody. "Maple Leaf Rag" was a popular early rag.

African American Women in 1905* (7) -

Residential Segregation: African American women in 1905 Manhattan often lived in segregated neighborhoods, such as Harlem, due to racial discrimination and housing restrictions.

Limited Employment Opportunities: Job opportunities for African American women were often limited to domestic work, laundries, or low-paying factory jobs. Discrimination in the workplace was common.

Family and Community: Strong ties within the African American community provided support and a sense of belonging. Church played a central role in community life.

Education Challenges: Educational opportunities were limited, with segregated schools offering fewer resources and lower-quality education compared to white schools.

Jim Crow Laws: Even in the North, racial segregation and discrimination were enforced through informal practices and sometimes formal Jim Crow laws.

Limited Voting Rights: African American women, like many women of that era, had limited voting rights. The 19th Amendment granting suffrage to women would be ratified in 1920.

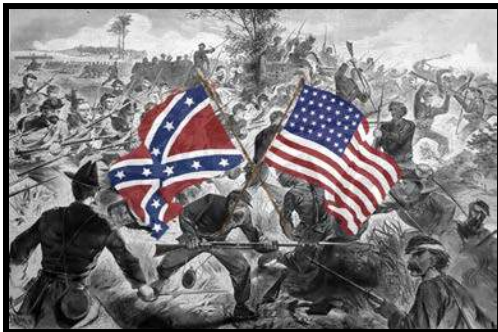
Social Clubs and Organizations: Women often participated in social clubs and organizations that provided mutual support, networking opportunities, and a platform for activism.

Limited Healthcare Access: Healthcare access was limited, and disparities in medical treatment existed, reflecting broader racial inequalities.

Sewing Machine Table (7) -



Camisole (7) - sleeveless undershirt typically worn by women, extending to the waist. The camisole is usually made of satin, nylon, silk, or cotton.



"The war" / The Civil War* (7) - The American Civil War, (1861 to 1865) was a devastating conflict between the Northern states (the Union) and the Southern states (the Confederacy) in the United States. It was primarily fought over issues related to slavery, states' rights, and regional economic differences. The war culminated in the defeat of the Confederacy and the abolition of slavery with the passage of the 13th Amendment.

"easier to haul silk than cotton" (8) -
Silk, as a material, is lighter than cotton. Additionally, silk

is more costly than cotton. Dickson is making a commentary on Mr. Charles's wealth.

Cashmere (8) - fiber obtained from cashmere goats, pashmina goats, and some other breeds of goat.

Tonic (8) - carbonated water with a bitter taste that can be drunk on its own or added to alcoholic drinks

Saperstein's (8) - a department store selling basic items.



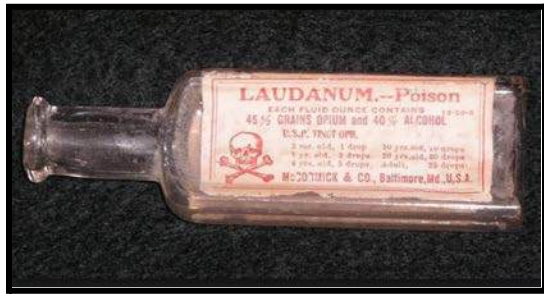
Weddings in the 1900's* (8) -

- highly formal, following established etiquette and social norms, often held in religious institutions or the bride's family home.
- brides typically wore long, white dresses, and grooms donning dark suits. Modesty and decorum were highly valued.
- relied on handwritten invitations, horse-drawn carriages for transportation, and live music provided by musicians or small orchestras.
- were often smaller, intimate affairs with close family and friends. Guests would typically enjoy a formal meal and dancing as part of the festivities.

Rooming House (9) - a "dwelling with multiple rooms rented out individually", in which the tenants share kitchen and often bathroom facilities. Usually for low-income individuals.



Carolina Orchard (9) - simply an orchard in either of the Carolinas.



Opiates (9) - substance derived from opium. Often used recreationally. The Civil War set off an opiate epidemic in the U.S., soldiers commonly coming home from war addicted.

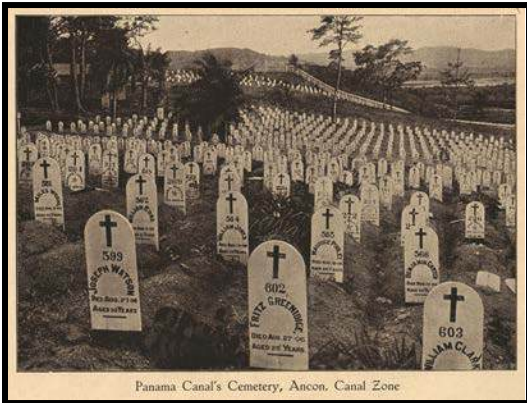
Panama in 1905* (10) -

- **Construction of the Panama Canal:** The construction of the Panama Canal was in full swing. The project was a major driver of economic activity in the region, attracting workers and engineers from around the world. The labor force faced challenging working conditions, including tropical diseases.
- **American Presence:** The United States played a significant role in Panama due to canal construction, impacting governance, education, and culture.



- **Cultural Diversity:** The workforce's mix of backgrounds, including Afro-Panamanians, indigenous people, and immigrants, enriched Panama's culture and traditions.

Barbadian accent (11) - the accent of someone from Barbados, commonly referred to as "Bajan". [Example link 1](#) / [Example link 2](#)

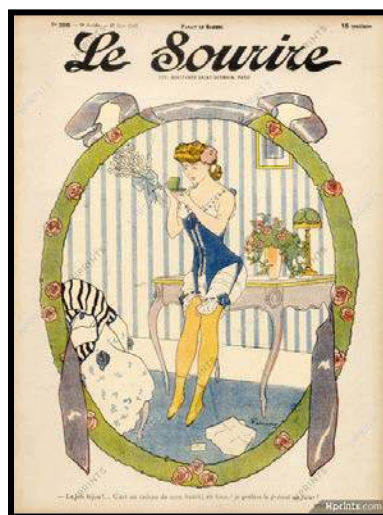


Mosquitoes / Fever / Death (11) - During the construction of the Panama Canal, mosquitoes spread malaria and yellow fever. Additionally, the equipment was often unstable and working conditions were poor. The death rate for Canal laborers (for all conditions, not just mosquito-related disease) in the early years was between 4-5% per year.

Boudoir (11) - a woman's dressing room, bedroom, or private sitting room.



Lingerie in the 1900's (11) -



Southern accent (11) -  Southern Accent

"The columns" (12) - a piece of writing in a newspaper or magazine, usually on a particular subject, that is always written by the same person and appears regularly.

"I feel like a tart from the Tenderloin" (12) - A tart is synonymous with "prostitute". The Tenderloin was a red light district of New York City, run from 24th Street to 42nd Street and from Fifth Avenue to Seventh Avenue.

French women in 1905* (12) - French women in the 1900's were known for their impeccable sense of style and fashion. They often donned elegant, tailored clothing with intricate details, reflecting the influence of Paris as a fashion capital.



Suffragette(s) (13) - a female advocate of the right of women to vote.



"snifter of brandy" (13) - A snifter (also called brandy snifter, brandy glass, brandy bowl, or a cognac glass) is a type of glass mostly used to serve aged brown liquors such as bourbon, brandy, and whisky.

"Talk and a nickel will buy you five cents worth of trouble."*
(13) - I actually have no idea what this means. No amount of

research got me a reliable answer. The all-knowing and totally-definitely-credible ChatGPT suggests: "The statement 'Talk and a nickel will buy you five cents worth of trouble' is a way of cautioning someone about the potential consequences of speaking too much or saying things without careful consideration." This phrase is **not common slang of the time**.



Bodice (13) - an article of clothing for women, **covering the torso** from the neck to the waist.



Beaded trim (13) -

Gardenia (13) - Any of various tropical evergreen small trees or shrubs, of the genus Gardenia, having **glossy leaves and white flowers**.



New York City Trolley (16) - a popular form of **transportation**.
Video of a trolley ride:

[Trolley Ride Through New York...](#)

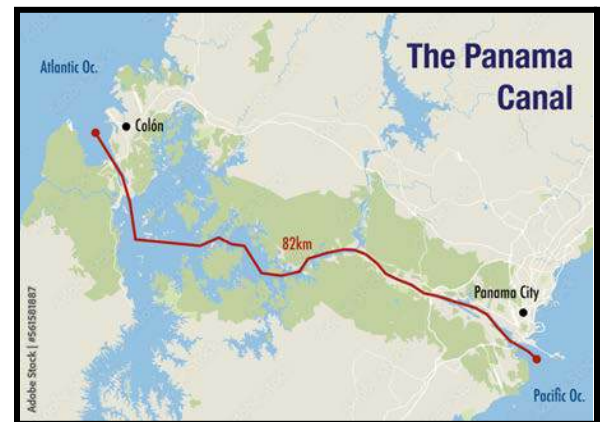




Orchard St. (16) - street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It consists mostly of tenement buildings.

The Panama Canal* (17) -

- The Panama Canal is a vital artificial waterway connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans via Panama.
- Initially led by the French, construction began in the late 19th century but faced major health and terrain challenges.
- The United States took over construction in 1904, using innovative engineering.
- It officially opened in 1914, transforming global trade by shortening sea routes between the Atlantic and Pacific.



Giant flamboyant (17) - commonly referred to as a "flamboyant tree", it is a species of flowering plant with fern-like leaves and, in summer, orange-red flowers.

Bedroll (18) - bedding that rolls up for portability and is used especially for sleeping outdoors. Can be synonymous with "sleeping bag."



Japanese silk (18) - luxurious silk. Imported silk is usually associated with the ruling class. (could not find any actual source so my source on this is my FIT fashion design friend)



Fifth Avenue (18) - major part of Manhattan, home to "Millionaire's Row"

Smoking Jacket (18) - a men's jacket designed for smoking.



"The Orient" (19) - literally just Asia. Usage of the term peaked in the 20's, then rapidly declined.

Gabardine, wool, nainsook (19) -

Gabardine - a type of fabric common in suits and overcoats; strong and firm (see picture 1 below)

Wool - a fiber made from sheep's fleece (see picture 2 below)

Nainsook - soft, fine, lightweight form of muslin (see picture 3 below)



"turn back sheets" (19) - being a hotel maid



Cinarti, Romanian Sausage (19)

- simply a type of Romanian sausage. "Cinarti" means "dinner" in Romanian.

"Rabbinical Law" (20) - Likely in reference to Halakhah, the religious laws Jews must follow. "Negiah" (which translates literally to "touch" in Hebrew) "forbids or restricts sensual physical contact with a member of the opposite sex except for one's spouse, outside the niddah period, and certain close relatives to whom one is presumed not to have sexual attraction."

Arranged marriages in Judaism (20) - Arranged marriages in some communities can be arranged by one's parents, via a professional matchmaker (or "shadchan").

Carpetbag (20) - a traveler's bag made of carpet, widely used in the U.S. in the 19th century



"twelve lashes with a switch" (21) - ??

A parlor in 1905 (21) -



Syncopated beat (21) - a rhythm that sounds "off" or unexpected.

📺 Syncopation Example

Moonshine (21) - high alcohol content liquor that is illegally distributed.



Satin foulard (21) - Satin with a certain print on it, usually associated with upper class.

Example of a book of illustrations of styles in the 1900s (24) -



Cost of a ride "uptown and back" (24) - ~5 cents (\$1.62 in today's economy)

Bert Williams (25) - popular Bahamian vaudeville entertainer/comedian. The first Black man to have the lead role in a film.





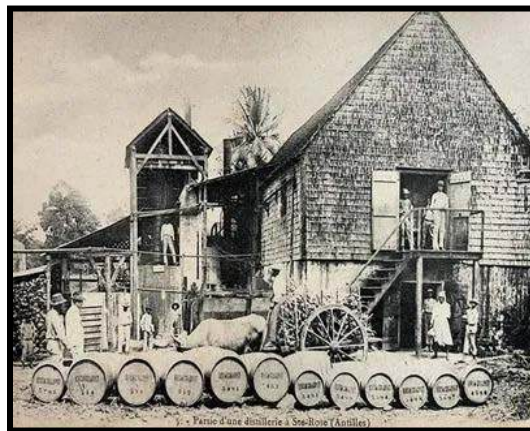
Cambric walking suit (25) - "cambric" refers to "a thin, plain cotton or linen fabric of fine close weave, usually white." A walking suit is simply a top shirt and matching pants.

Heliotrope (25) - a pale purple color (like that of heliotrope flowers)



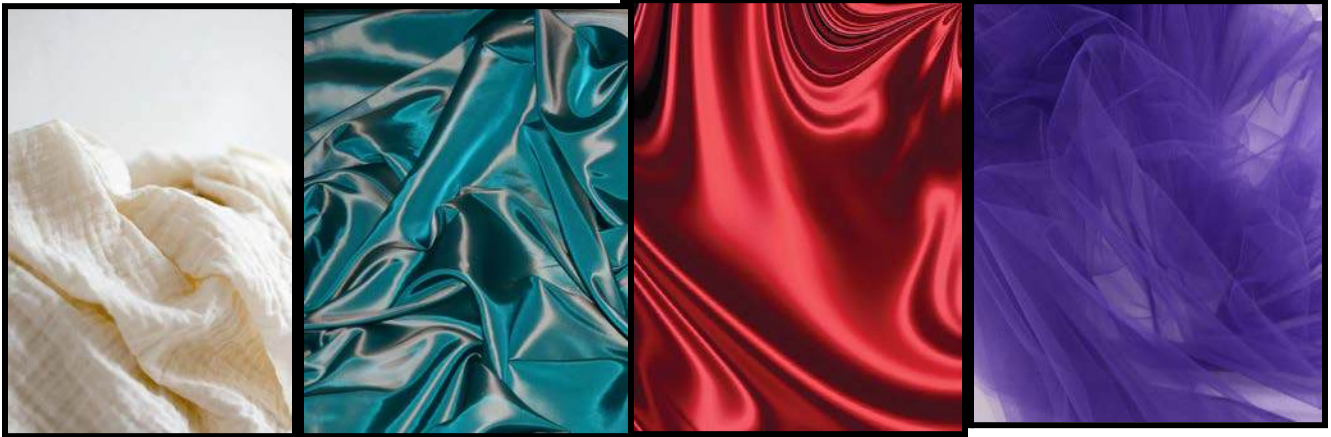
"The white season" (25) - ???

Rum shop (25)

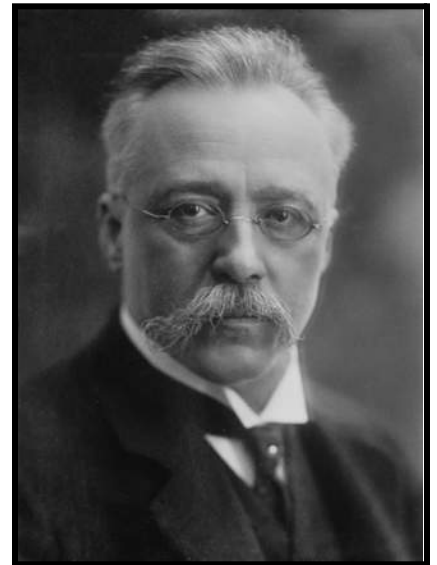


"Paper" (29) - presumably, someone hollow and unworthy. Interestingly, this is not common slang of the time.

Muslin, Taffeta, Satin, Tulle (29) -



Max Fiedler (31) - famed German conductor and composer. Primely known for his interpretations of Brahms.



Don Juan (31) - a tone poem written by Richard Strauss in 1888. (Note: it is very long!)

📺 Strauss - Don Juan Op. 20 (Score)

The electrical show at Madison Square Garden (31) - an event in 1905 in order to show off electrical gadgets. Highlights include an electric elevator, telegraphone (a device to record audio), and an electric clock system where one clock controls every clock in a large building.



Bohemian (32) - a person who is interested in artistic and unusual things, for example art, music, or literature, and lives in an informal way.



Spirituals (32) - a religious song usually of a deeply emotional character that was developed especially among Black people in the southern U.S.

Mangroves (34) - a type of tropical plant that resides submerged in salt water.



Morticians in the 1900s (36) - in the early 1900s, what were previously referred to as "undertakers" became "morticians" and began to be respected as a profession. Parlors slowly became "living rooms" because they weren't used to display the dead anymore (though we still see the use of "parlor" in this play, so we can assume the transition in respect has either just begun, or is upcoming.)

An example of a Social (36) -



Five whole dollars (38) - \$174.45 in today's money

Washerwoman (39) - a now antiquated term for a woman who takes in laundry as a job. Considered to be of low social status.

Witch hazel (39) - a plant used to make medicine. Applied to skin to treat inflammation and itching.



Ports of Havana, Cuba in 1905 (39) -



Cholera (40) - an infection of the small intestine by bacteria. Typically affects those in low-income, low-resource countries. Primary symptoms include diarrhea (resembling rice water) and vomiting clear fluid. This can result in extreme dehydration, which can lead to death.

Stress tonic (40) - medicine to soothe the nervous system

thirty cents a yard (42) - \$10.47 in today's money. Esther then attempts to negotiate down to twenty cents/yd, which is the equivalent of \$6.98. For reference, common fabrics today typically cost anywhere between \$7 and \$20 per yard.

Wedding gowns of the era (45) -



Basin (46) - a container to hold water for washing

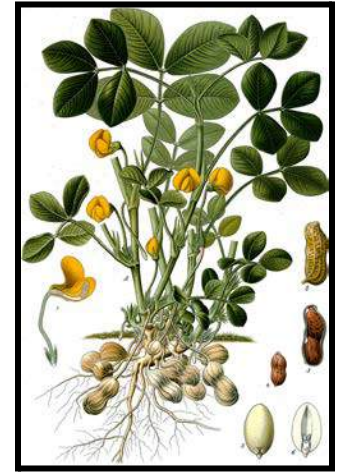


Influenza (48) - The Flu! Symptoms range from mild to deadly (muscle pain to pneumonia). Transmitted through talking,

breathing, coughing and sneezing. Death occurs in a median period of 10 days.

Chattel (48) - synonymous with "slave." Usage of this term plummeted in the mid-30's.

Ground nuts (49) - this could be in reference to nuts that have been ground, but likely refer to the seeds of the nut plants themselves (as in, ground nut = nuts in the ground)



"Song of cicadas at dusk" (50) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rylZDeainrI> (Warning: Views the cicadas up close. Yes, they look kind of gross.)

Smell of mango trees (50) - "a musky smell, slightly of rotten eggs, but sweet at the same time."

Two dollars (50) - \$69.78 in today's money.

St. Lucy (51) - the northernmost part of Barbados, resembling a peninsula. Not densely populated at all.



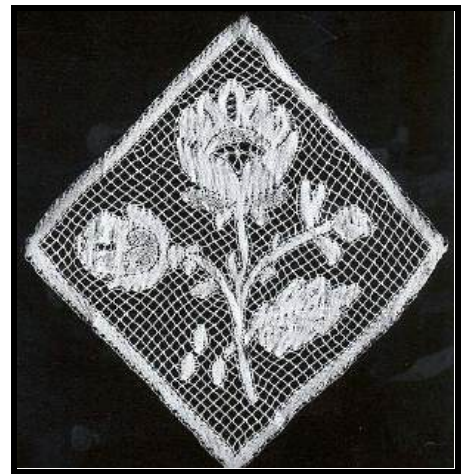
Tamarind trees (51) - a type of tree that bears fruit. It is indigenous to tropical Africa. Maximum height of these trees is about 80 ft.



Draft horse (53) - a big horse bred to be a working animal for farm labor. At the time of *Intimate Apparel*, draft horses were starting to be replaced by combustion engines.

a Romanian song that Marks could have been listening to (55) -
▶ George Enescu - Romanian Rhapsody No. 1, Op. 11 (1901) A prominent (and, according to some sources, the most prominent) Romanian composer, Enescu wrote many pieces in the time period of the play.

Valenciennes lace (56) - a type of bobbin lace that originated in Valenciennes. Originally made by hand but by the 1800's, it could be made by machine.



Lenox (57) - a suburban town in western Massachusetts.

Chemise (57) - a dress-like undergarment for women, used to protect clothing from sweat and body oils. Fell out of fashion in the early 20's.



Iceman (61) - someone who sells or delivers ice from a cart, door to door, on daily rounds. Ice was commonly harvested from bodies of water, stored in ice houses and then transported to cities to be delivered by the icemen.



Kerosene (67) - a combustible liquid used as fuel. Has a pungent, oily smell.

The smell of burnt sugar (67) - Like cookies you've left in the oven too long. Unpleasant.

"mulatto" (67) - a dated and now offensive term to describe someone of mixed African and European ancestry. Was used as an official U.S. census racial category until 1930.

"Duppy" (71) - A ghost or spirit, often appearing in the form of a dog barking or howling through the night. The word is of Jamaican origin.

Laundry basket of the time (73) -



Sepia-tone photography (74) - A treatment applied to photos used to preserve them. "Contrary to what many people think, those nostalgic old photos that look brown didn't turn that color as they aged. The pictures look just as they did when the photographer first admired his handiwork."



The American Civil War - its effects

Intimate Apparel takes place fifty or so years after the Civil War, so the effects are still prevalent in society. Mrs. Dickson makes a direct reference to "the war" early into the play, so it is clear this was still fairly recent and a big event for these characters' lives.

The effects of the Civil War:

- Emancipation Proclamation - no more slavery!
- the North was more affluent than the South
- 3 percent of the population died

New York in the Civil War

The majority of characters in *Intimate Apparel* live in New York, so they wouldn't have been as affected by the Civil War in comparison to people of the South. However, they still were involved in their own unique ways.

New York was:

- helping the war effort with the industrialists who lived there
- suffering from draft riots, where primarily Irish-American civilians rioted against the draft
- in control of much of the country's press
- littered with Confederacy secret agents/terrorists in November 1864, setting fire to hotels and landmarks



The building of the Panama Canal

The building of the Panama Canal is central to *Intimate Apparel* because it is what George does for work in the first act. His descriptions of life building it are key glimpses into his character and background.

- Originally led by the French, the US took control of the territory needed to build the Panama Canal in 1904, as well as the project itself.
- It cost the US \$500 million in total (\$14.6bn in today's money)
- It opened in 1914.

How did this affect workers like George?

- Tropical diseases were rampant & health was a problem.
- 25,000 deaths



How did they solve it?

- Colonel William Crawford Gorgas was appointed head of hospitals and sanitation in 1904, when major changes were put in place.
- Gorgas had inspectors search houses regularly for mosquito larvae and places where they could hatch
- Domestic water systems were put in place & swamps where mosquitoes could thrive in were drained

II - Related media

Mary Poppins

I found visualizing the 1910's to be difficult, and there is astoundingly little media that takes place in the 1910's. However, Mary Poppins does! We can see the fabrics and garments of the time that Esther utilizes in this movie/musical.

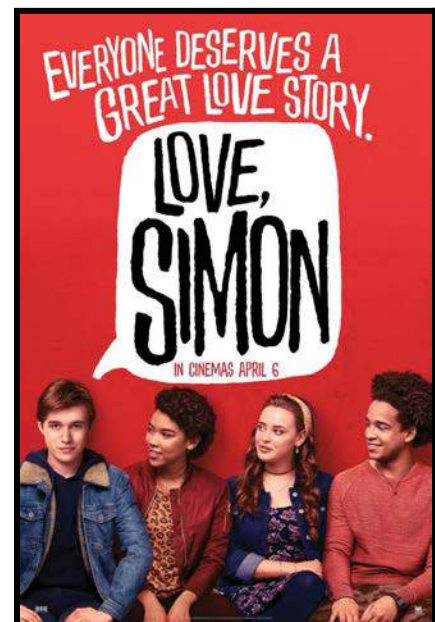


Pigeons (1910) by John Sloan

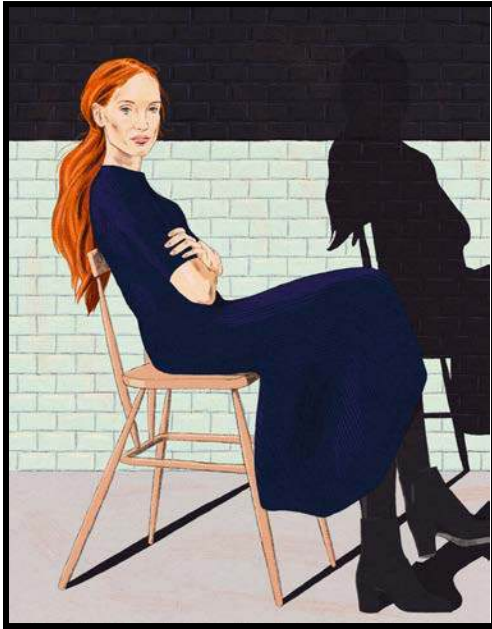
A painting depicting New York city, we can see the urban setting of *Intimate Apparel* and what the architecture would have looked like as well as how people interacted with it.

(strangely) Love Simon -

The plot of *Love, Simon* centers around a boy who develops feelings for another boy over email. Although *Intimate Apparel* is not queer, there are parallels that can be drawn to Esther's journey of her relationship with George, as they only communicate through written letters. Both pieces of media tackle romantic relationships that are built on "pen pal" communication.



A Doll's House / Barbie -



A key plot of *Intimate Apparel* is how horrendous of a partner George is. This reminded me of *A Doll's House*, where I desperately wanted Nora to leave her annoying abusive husband. George and Thorvald reminded me of one another in many ways, and let's be honest, they were both able to get away with being horrible partners because of the patriarchal structures that were ever-present at the time.



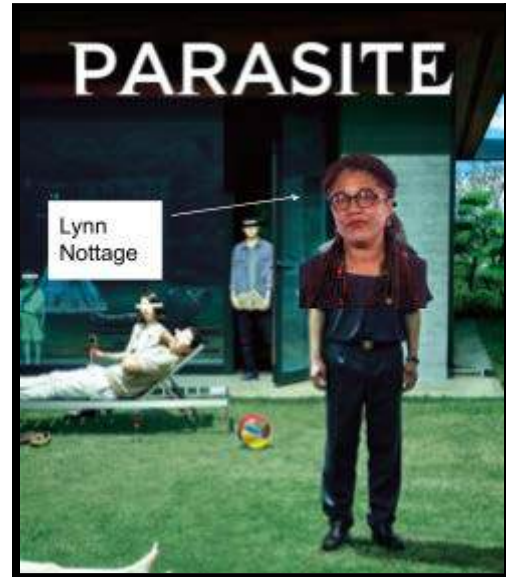
This brings me to *Barbie*, which directly tackles this patriarchy-fueled entitlement head-on. Although we don't get to see this in *Intimate Apparel*, I found myself wishing Esther had seen the Barbie movie and feel inspired to leave George—similar to Nora and Thorvald.

Sourcebook III - Themes

Theme 1: Class / Van Buren

Class is a huge theme in *Intimate Apparel*. Most of the people mentioned are lower-class or marginalized in some way.

Mrs. Van Buren is an example of one of the figures who are upper-class. We get to see how she interacts with Esther, almost as entertainment. She writes the love letters to George for Esther eagerly as if for personal fun. We also see the contrast in education here, as the only reason Van Buren writes the letters instead of Esther is because Esther is uneducated and cannot write.



Van Buren also sees Esther as a friend-for-hire in a way, but Esther is always disconnected to this because Van Buren doesn't realize their differences. Van Buren never seems to grasp that she is Esther's client, not her friend.

Theme 2: Desire for Love/Rushing into Relationships

In *Intimate Apparel*, we also explore Esther's desire for love and a relationship. Esther is quick to mention how she feels she is too old to find someone.

When George comes along, Esther is quick to latch on to him. They get married fairly quickly-so quick that Dickson expresses disapproval-which later turns out to be correct.

George eventually turns out to be a terrible partner, uninterested in Esther other than for money and even going as far as to cheat on her. This struggle could have been avoided had Esther not latched onto him. Being desperate for love and feeling like it's "too late" is a massive takeaway from *Intimate Apparel* and one of the main lessons Lynn Nottage tries to convey.

