Canadian urban historian Nicholas Kenney recently asked "how cities, in their density, diversity, and movement, constitute a setting around which emotions coalesce in particular way." I want to pursue this idea, by looking at the influence of capitalized industrial cities on a specific historical emotion, suicidal ideation, and to try link it to another emotional specificity—neurasthenia, in modern cities at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1912, the Toronto Local Council of Women, Associated Charities of Toronto, and Daughters of the Empire urged the Board of Hospital trustees of the new Toronto General Hospital to create a ward for the treatment of neurasthenia in the new College Street expansion. For years the old Gerrard Street hospital had maintained a ward for "nervous patients," but because the Trustees had determined recently (1911) that space was needed to train nurses for the new hospital (Clarke 1913, 76), the nervous were slighted. Most of us have no idea what "neurasthenia" is or was, yet the term was common by the 1890s. Indeed, a 1907 *New York Times* report on neurasthenia suggested Americans in great number were suffering from mental and physical exhaustion, ranging from ennui and insomnia to head- and stomach ache. It was stress. Cortisol, the hormone that spurs the body's instinctual "fight or flight" response, produces long-term ill-health, decreases immune system effectiveness and increases chronic disease risks.

Circa 1900, most doctors and urbanites knew no such thing. When overworked, underpaid, hurried, malnourished, but often sedentary city people experienced stress, it was nervous exhaustion or prostration, in a word: *neurasthenia***.** Many went undiagnosed. They consumed elixirs and pills advertised in newspapers, to soothe their insomnia, nervous indigestion, depression of spirits, and heart palpitations—all, I argue, reflecting the traumas of 19th Century capitalism. Neurasthenia, I think, was the corporeal corollary of capitalized modernity, with its urban spatial pathologies, its disjunctions, dislocations, and disorientations, a repercussion of capitalism's evil use

of the body. Neurasthenia burgeoned in the capitalist city when worry [wa]s added to overwork, for all workers. Thus, recursive seasons of excessive anxiety or seasons of stress debilitated city people under industrial capitalism's abuses of labour, ***and*** its liberal democratic failings before the welfare state. So, is the emergence of neurasthenia attributable to the physical conditions of the modern city, itself *a logical outcome of the predations of laissez-faire capitalism*?

Literature on the modern city depicts an unjust dystopia: inhumane housing, work, and wages, and insufficient physical and social infrastructure and public institutions. These worsened under intolerable climatic circumstances: particulate air pollution from coal-overuse, and smell generated by the agricultural-industrial exploitation of urban animals, and an almost domestic geography of meat production. And all this occurred because an insouciant laissez-faire capitalism organized the wealth, comfort, and security of the few at the expense of the many. Did the dystopian capitalist city cause mental ill-health?

Slide 14 The Modern City Victorians and Edwardians were indentured to an indifferent capitalism circulating through all facets of city life. This created radical urban spatial and social inequities. Industrial capitalism created conflict and dislocation, operated wastefully, and distributed its copious fruits unjustly. And, every city possessed two dystopian cities. Dystopian poverty, desperation, and squalor extruded from—and were the fuels feeding—dystopian opulence and wealth. Novelist/journalist Theodore Dreiser confirmed this in 1896, writing:

> These streets and boulevards, these splendid mansions and gorgeous hotels, these vast structures about which thousands surge and toward which luxurious carriages roll, are the fair flowers of a rugged stalk … [yet] down in the alleys and byways, in the shop and small dark chambers are the roots of this luxurious high life, starving and toiling the year through, that carriages may roll and great palaces stand with brilliant ornaments. These **endless**

> streets … are the gay covering which conceals the sorrow and want and ceaseless toil upon which all this is built. They hide the hands and hearts, the groups of ill-clad workers the chambers stifling with the fumes of midnight oil consumed over ceaseless tasks, the pallets of the poor and sick, the bare tables of the hopeless slaves who work for bread. Endless are the rows of shadowy chambers, countless the miseries which these great walls hide … forever moaning and crying "for shame"

Because, as Henry George noted, progress and poverty were the Victorian **marks of modern civilization**, laissez-faire capitalism fashioned one city of daylight and another of darkness, one of sunshine another of shadow. For example, New York's Millionaire's Row on Fifth Avenue for Vanderbilts, Astors, Rockefellers, and Fricks, topped the squalid—and often fatal—Five Points to the south and so-called Hell's Kitchen to the west. The Prairie Avenue grandeur of Chicago's Fields, Armours, and Pullmans, posed awful counterpoint to the agony of the near-north side tenements, it supposed "alley cribs" and its raucous saloons. Toronto's elite, such as financier Sir Henry Pellat, swanned about in Gothic Revival mansions or Arts and Crafts cottages, such tonalist painters George Agnew Reid and Mary Hiester Reid—both homes in Wychwood; or in Rosedale, people such Chief Justice of Ontario and founder of Workers Compensation in Ontario, Sir William Meredith. S**lide 20** Alternatively, the city's impoverished languished in under-serviced neighbourhoods like "Shacktown" (Earlscourt), "the Ward," King St East, King West and Niagara Streets, and Queen St East, or Lombard Street and Lavin's Lane, all roiling with struggle, hunger, and sorrow.

In places such as these, the average one-worker family earned approximately $1.50 a day (about $40 now), *if they worked*—because in Shacktown, only two of seven men were employed. Working women in Toronto earned roughly 25-50% of men's wages, single women earning as little as $2 a week— in part because as the *Daily Mail and Empire* quoted one local garment

manufacturer: I don't treat the men bad, but I even up by taking advantage of the women. I have a girl who can do as much work, and as good, as a man; she gets $5 a week. The man who is standing next to her gets $11. The girls however average $3.50 a week, and some are as low as $2." In fact, $1 a week was not unusual among women garment workers, and which, by the way, was roughly $26 now (a circumstance that urged suicidal ideation). **Slide 25** And then there were the children—"Haggling over prices, straining at heavy lifts, up early and down late, cuffed for their blunders, buffeted for their delays, cursed, crushed, dwarfed, [and] morally misdirected"—who were paid even less.

We can imagine, then, that Western cities generated and maintained social and economic disparities that created not only persistent nutritional, but also epidemiological, public health, and environmental crises, especially for workers. And all seem to have affected mental health. Is it plausible that, when we imagine the Gilded Age with its robber barons, privately dependent welfare system, and painfully visible public misery, we should also imagine the threats to mental health in this bifurcated and inequitable world?

Laissez Faire, Neurasthenia, and Suicide Social critics from Carlyle to Dreiser rebuked the Victorian political economy for its inhumanity. The oppressive conditions of workers, the feudal element of nineteenth-century labour, are well-documented. On both sides of the Atlantic, the industrial era simmered with callous companies, bullying bosses, apathetic governments, underpaid workers, unsafe workplace. Men, women and children were subject to long days, malnourishment…