

# *Hard Times*

or,  
Why the Good Old Days Weren't  
Really That Great.

(Images/Wikimedia Commons)

[Lieder ohne Worte -  
Mendelssohn](#)

[The Life of Charles Dickens - BBC](#)



Portrait by Jeremiah Gurney, ca. 1867-8

# Contemporary England

- 21<sup>st</sup> century pop culture stereotypes 19<sup>th</sup> century England as very conservative and traditional
- It wasn't
  - Industrialization moves many people into cities
  - Families in transition often break apart
    - So many orphans and runaways that even child prostitution (though hated) is normal
  - Because of the Enlightenment and general apathy, church attendance is almost down to zero
    - Anglican clergy sometimes unlock their churches only four times per year!



“Gin Lane.” William Hogarth, 1751.

All anybody  
agrees on:  
Things cannot  
go on in this  
way for too  
much longer



# Pushback

- Journalists, socialists and Torys rage against the gap between rich and poor
  - Journalists such as Dickens expose social injustice with wit and satire
  - Socialists demand radical economic restructuring in the favor of the poor
  - Tories criticize the newly-wealthy for demanding worker loyalty but giving nothing in return



“Dickens at the Blacking Warehouse.”  
Fred Bernard, 1904.

Romantics try to bring back a sense of awe and mystery to a miserable, mechanical world

*Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway. JMW Turner, 1844*







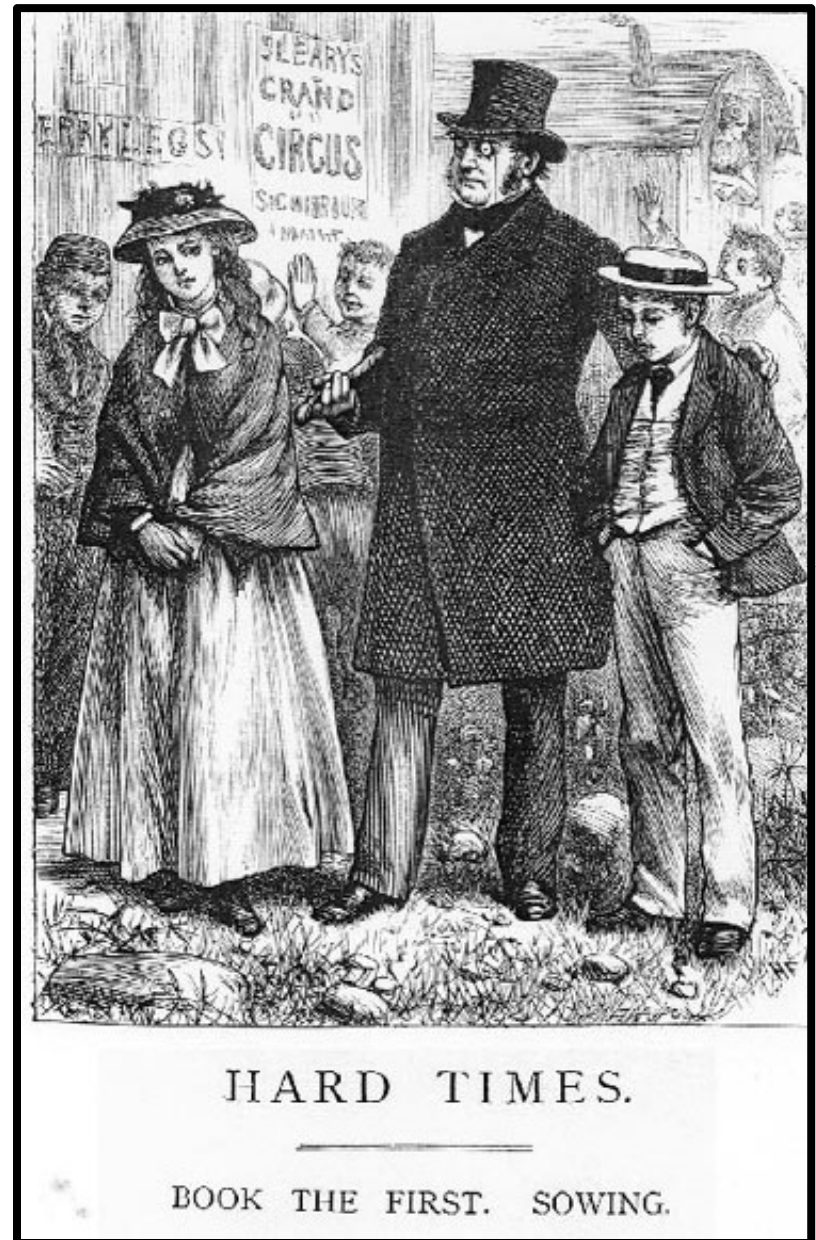
- Oxford Movement encourages Anglican priests to hold daily services
  - They're already obliged to say at least two every day
    - Rule never enforced
  - “Catholic Revival” is a partnership of wealthy philanthropists and radical socialists
    - Construct new churches in poor neighborhoods, contract local builders for the purpose.
    - This one was a flagship location

On right: John Salmon / *St Saviour, Leeds Chancel* / [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

# Hard Times

- 1854
- Shortest Dickens novel
- Originally serialized in *Household Words*, a weekly newspaper (1850-59)
  - Many novels from this time start out this way, though it's no longer common.
- Premise: a young orphan girl tries to find her way in life while attending a school operated by a scammer.

Image: Engraving. Harry French, 1870s.

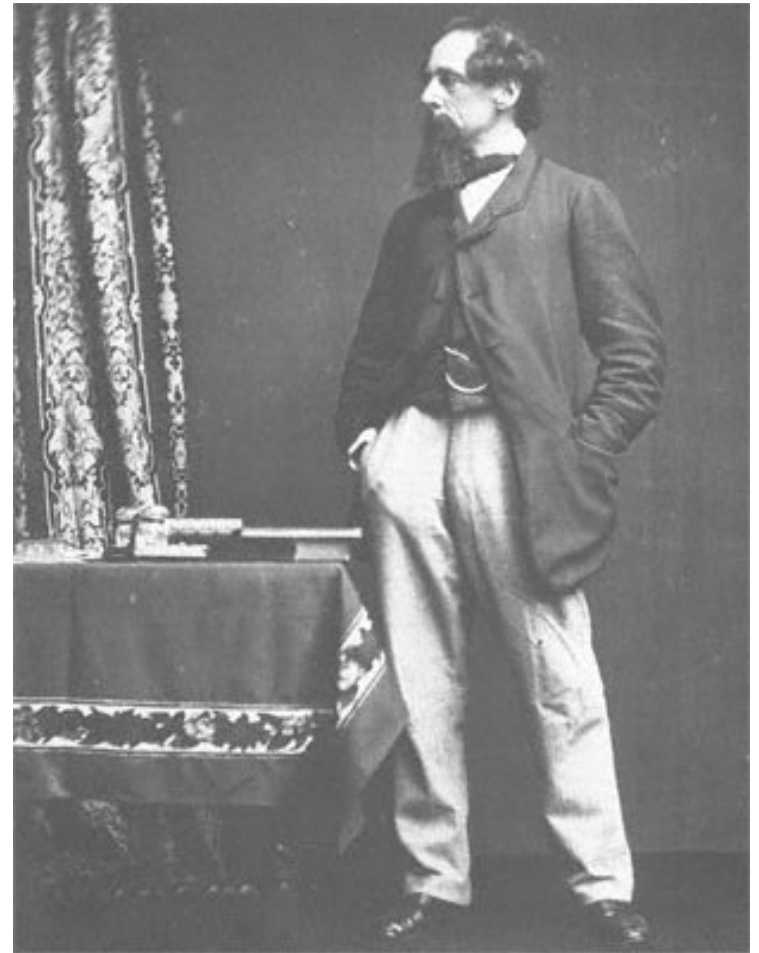




# Context

- Victorian sentimental novels offered mass entertainment, but also promoted human rights
- Over-the-top emotions and characters, along with unrealistic situations, were included to incite sympathy
- Rousseau's concept of natural goodness and pity, along with a Romantic desire for strong emotion, makes this genre popular.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/534911/sentimental-novel>



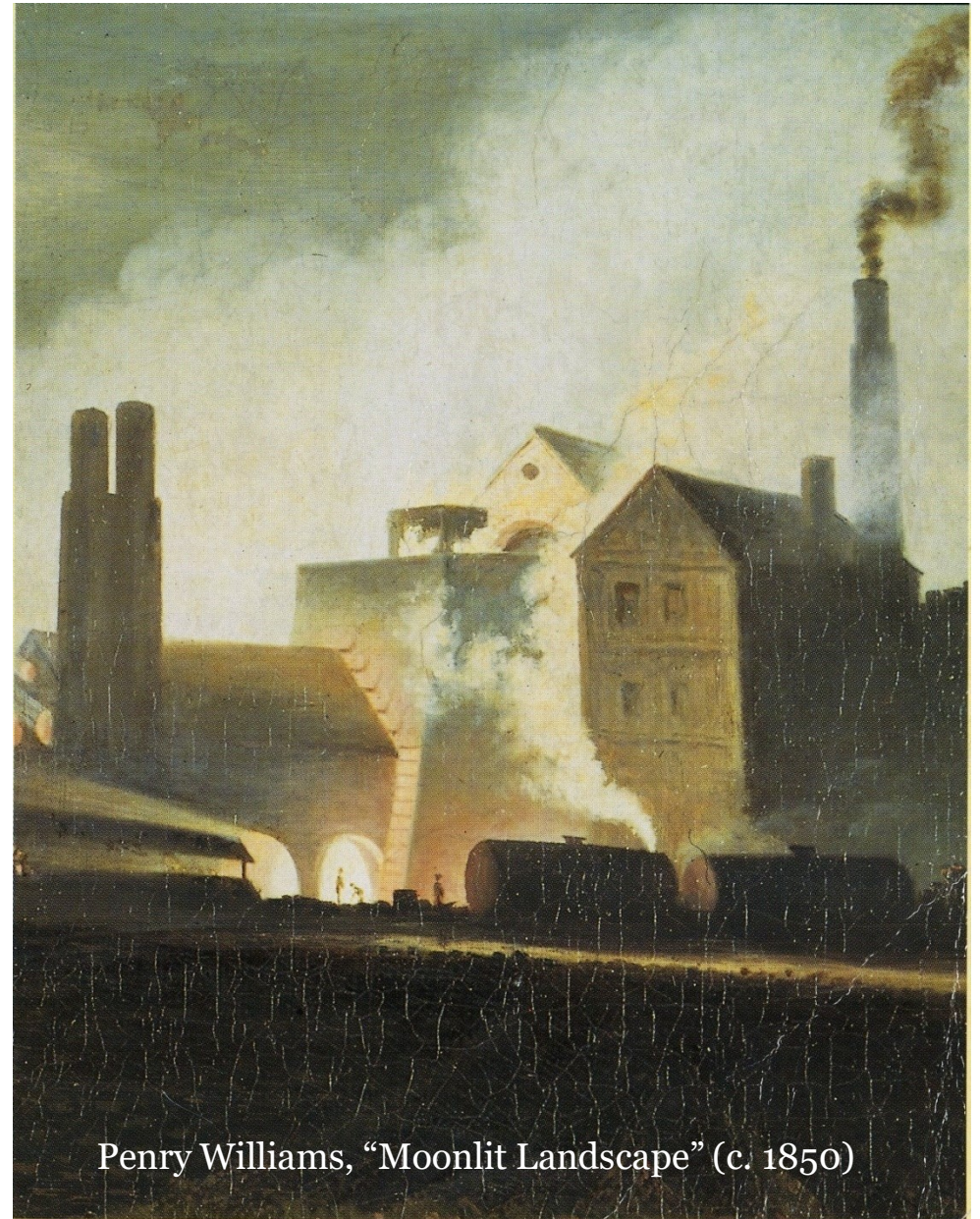
Charles Dickens

- 'NOW, what I want is, **Facts**. Teach these boys and girls **nothing but Facts**. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the **principle** on which I bring up my own children, and this is the **principle** on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!'

- There were five young Gradgrinds, and they were models every one. They had been lectured at, from their tenderest years; coursed, like little hares. Almost as soon as they could run alone, they had been made to run to the lecture-room. The first object... of which they had a remembrance, was a large black board with a dry **Ogre** chalking ghastly white figures on it.



- “You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel... they made it a pious warehouse of red brick... The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. **Fact, fact, fact,** everywhere in the material aspect of the town; **fact, fact, fact,** everywhere in the immaterial.”



Penry Williams, "Moonlit Landscape" (c. 1850)

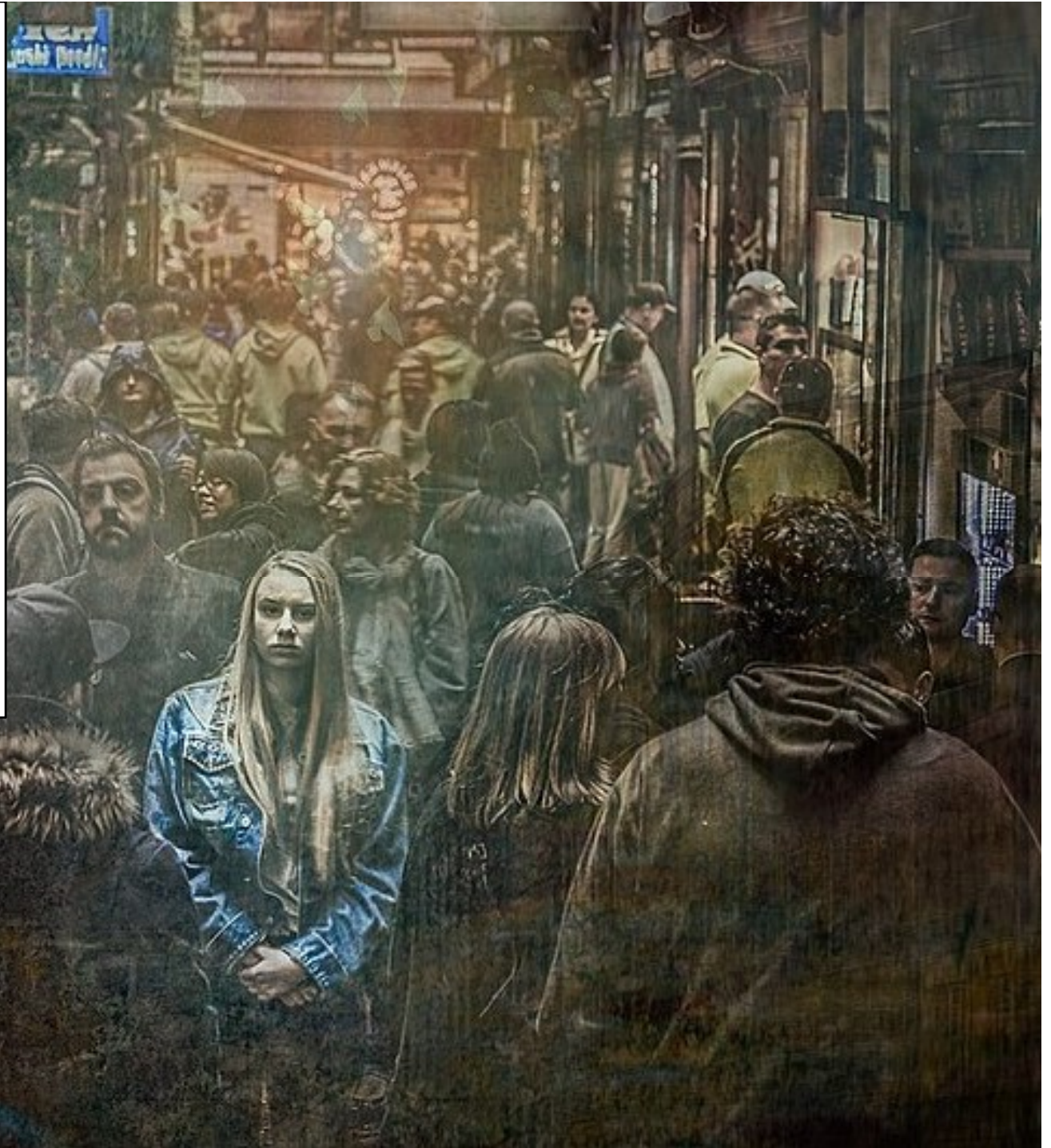


## Themes:

- Child labor
- Alcoholism
- Divorce
- Poverty
- Abuse
- Good people
  - If they die young
- More poverty

Image: Loneliness in a crowd.

Max Pixel, 2017.



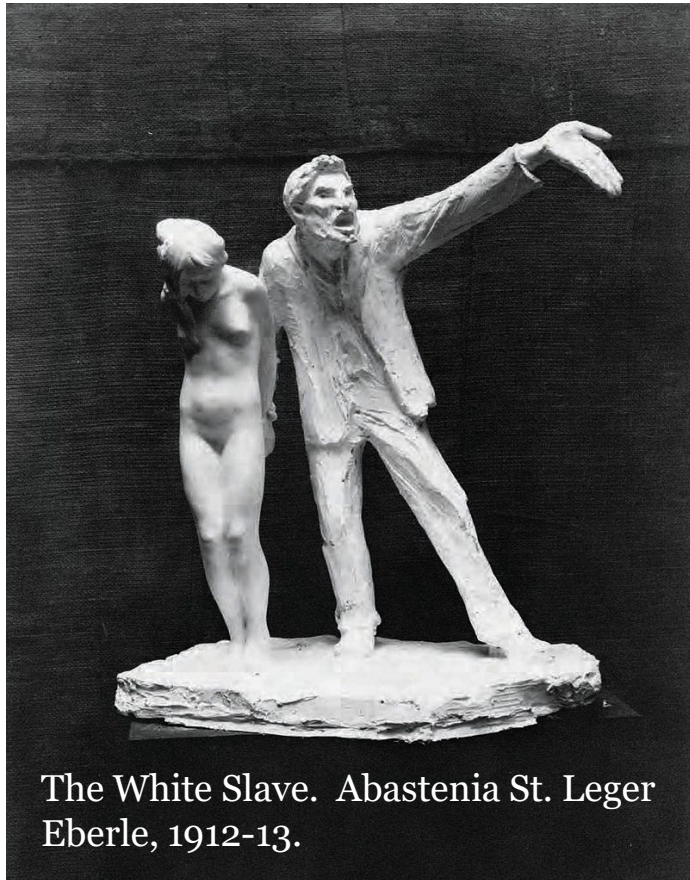
# Contemporary America?

- Social change has ruined farming communities, made the Midwest into the “Rust Belt,” and resulted in the gentrification of places like Downtown Reno
  - And made rent really hard to pay in Washoe County. ‘
  - And everywhere else!
- Child prostitution so prevalent that in 2008, *Taken*, a B-movie, becomes a gigantic success
  - And now, Nevada’s land grant institution, the University of Nevada, has a Students Against Sexual Slavery (SASS) Club

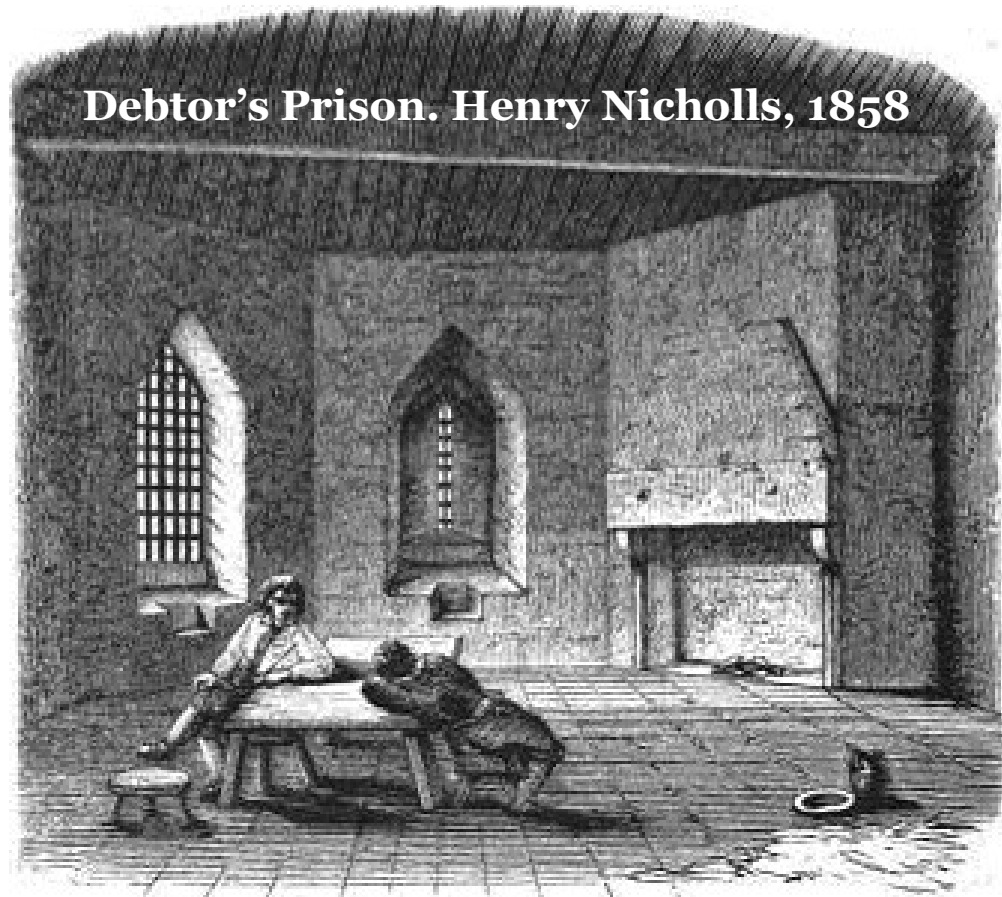


- *Taken*
- Think about it...
- During the Recession, an action film is released
- It isn't expected to do well, but it's a box office smash
  - Two sequels (they weren't great, but still) and a TV show!
- **Premise:** An average American teenager
  - goes on an expensive vacation when she shouldn't
  - is kidnapped by slum-dwelling criminals
  - will disappear into this slum and never be heard from again unless her family (broken because Dad was working too much) calls in favors

# Cool action movie, or sign of the times?



The White Slave. Abastenia St. Leger Eberle, 1912-13.



Debtor's Prison. Henry Nicholls, 1858

**I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU  
ARE**



**BUT I WILL FIND YOU AND I  
WILL KILL YOU**

memegenerator.net