The Jungle’s Effect on the American Food Industry and Investigative Journalism

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Process Paper

I began my project by choosing an era to research. The Progressive Era stood out to me because it pushed frontiers in activism and reform, so I investigated its major events and people. After much thought, I decided to research *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. Sinclair’s novel was historically significant because it spearheaded journalistic activism and created the basis for modern food regulation. The novel’s descriptions of unclean meat packing houses incited public outrage at a time when progressives were fighting for reform in American society. Following the book’s publication, Congress passed the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Bill. *The Jungle* also pushed the frontier for journalistic investigation.

After choosing my topic, I started my research by finding secondary sources on Cengage Learning, an online research database. I used Noodletools to thoroughly notecard these sources. To expand my perspective, I also read my source’s bibliographies, which led me to speeches, political cartoons, and letters from the Progressive Era. The final step of my research was to notecard my primary sources.

After finishing my research, I began to write my thesis. I argued that *The Jungle* created food industry regulation and pioneered journalistic activism. With this thesis in mind, I outlined my research notecards. The sections of my outline were timeline, historical context, main events, immediate impact, and long term impact. After outlining, I tied together my notecards to write my first draft. Then, I revised my paper multiple times until it read smoothly without any grammatical errors. I finished my project by writing my process paper and annotating my biography.
In 1905, Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle* to advocate for socialism. The novel’s descriptions of meat industry corruption and packinghouse conditions incited public outrage. At the time of the book’s publication, activists were fighting against corruption in many aspects of American society, including the food industry. Because of *The Jungle*, the government passed important regulations, like the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Bill. Furthermore, Sinclair pioneered journalistic oversight of companies.

**Historical Context**

In the early 1900's, reformers fought against corporate and government corruption brought about by rapid economic growth. The Second Industrial Revolution from 1870 to 1914 was defined by advances in manufacturing and technology that drove rapid industrialization. Industrialists like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller used America’s significant resources to create corporate empires. Several of these companies were able to eliminate their competition, allowing them to charge unfair prices and influence government policies.¹

During the late 1800s, railroads, refrigerated train cars, and assembly lines radically changed the meatpacking industry. These innovations meant that cattle could be quickly shipped from farms and processed in a central location. By the beginning of the 20th century, Chicago had become the center of America’s meatpacking industry because of its easy access to rail networks. Additionally, three companies took control of the nation’s meat industry: Armour

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Foods, Swift Packing Company, and Morris & Company. Together, these companies could decide both the price of cattle and the price of meat products.²

The Second Industrial Revolution also drove massive urbanization as new factory jobs attracted rural Americans and immigrants to cities. Most urban areas did not have the infrastructure to accommodate this population influx, and many people had to live in urban slums, where pollution, high population density, unsanitary conditions, and a lack of social safety nets became massive societal issues. In addition, corruption in local governments was common.³

The meatpacking industry was not exempt from the excesses and corruption of the time. In 1899, Thomas F. Dolan, a former superintendent for Armour Foods, described how packinghouses circumvented government-hired meat inspectors in an affidavit. He claimed, “There were so many ways of getting around the inspectors — so many, in fact, that not more than two or three cattle out of one thousand were condemned.”⁴ At the time, the extant meatpacking legislation only regulated foreign commerce.⁵

In the wake of the Second Industrial Revolution, activists endeavored to reform American society by promoting better education, safer workplaces, and the elimination of corruption. These activists, also known as progressives, believed that government regulation

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was the best way to improve society. Many movements fell under the progressive umbrella, including food industry regulation.

During the early 1900’s, the chemist and food industry pioneer Harvey Wiley lobbied for the Pure Food and Drug Act, which would make it illegal to sell adulterated foods. Thanks to his activism, it passed the Senate on February 12, 1906. The bill would go to the House of Representatives for a battle between progressive pioneers and food industry lobbyists. Chief among these “progressives” were journalists (“muckrakers”) like Upton Sinclair, a socialist and journalist whose landmark novel, *The Jungle*, was published only two weeks after the Pure Food Act passed the Senate.7

**Main Events: Sinclair Publishes the Jungle**

In 1905, Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle* to promote socialism, a political and economic system in which the means of production are owned by the public. When *Appeal to Reason*, a weekly newspaper, sent Sinclair to investigate the Chicago meatpacking industry, he chose to use the industry as an example of how companies abuse workers. The result of Sinclair’s investigation was *The Jungle*, a novel about a Lithuanian immigrant’s life in the United States.8 In the beginning of the book, a young Lithuanian immigrant, Jurgis Rudkus, marries his fiancée Ona Lukoszaite. Jurgus is hopeful that he will succeed in America. However, his family finds it hard to pay for a house, and Jurgis loses his job after breaking his ankle and

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8 "Upton Sinclair," Gale in Context, https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Biographies&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&hitCount=7&searchType=BasicSearchForm%c2%atPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CEJ2108102105&docType=Biography&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXBK-MOD1&prodId=SUC&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ2108102105&searchId=R3&userGroupName=dove10524&inPS=true.
missing work for two weeks. To make things worse, Ona dies in childbirth, and her son Anastas drowns in the muddy streets of Chicago. Jurgis descends into a life of crime, but finds redemption after attending a socialist rally, vindicating Sinclair’s socialist stance.9

*The Jungle* is set against the filthy backdrop of Chicago’s Packingtown. In his novel, Sinclair described unimaginably unhealthy meat packinghouse conditions. On page 141 of *The Jungle*, he wrote:

> There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms, and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it and thousands of rats would race about it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep handfuls of the dried excrement of rats. These rats were a nuisance, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die and then rats, bread and meat would go into the hoppers together.10

Sinclair also wrote of ineffective government inspection. Sinclair wrote on page 101 of *The Jungle*:

> These 163 inspectors had been appointed at the request of the packers, and… were paid by the United States government to certify that all the diseased meat was kept in the state. They had no authority beyond that, for the inspection of meat to be sold in the city and state and the whole force in Packingtown consisted of three henchmen of the local political machine.11

*The Jungle* brought stories of unclean packinghouses, unsafe meat products, and ineffective government inspection to the public. Sinclair hoped that describing the horrors of the meatpacking industry would attract attention to wage manipulation of workers and advance

socialism. While Sinclair did not achieve his goals, The Jungle incited vociferous public response.

**Immediate Impact**

Sinclair’s gruesome descriptions of packinghouses led the public to push for food industry reform, which the government passed in the Pure Food and Drug Act and Meat Inspection Act of 1906. When The Jungle was first published as a book in February 1906, its descriptions of the meat industry elicited strong public reaction.  

The public’s response to the novel was so strong that Ogden J. Armour, the head of one of Chicago’s largest packing companies, wrote an editorial in the Saturday Evening Post denying Sinclair’s accusations. He wrote, “In Armour & Co.'s business not one atom of any condemned animal or carcass finds its way, directly or indirectly, from any source, into any food product or food ingredient.”

*The Jungle* eventually reached President Roosevelt, who had made the passage of food regulation one of the major goals of his administration. He reacted to the novel with disdain for Sinclair’s political views.  

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12 Gale, "Sinclair Publishes The Jungle, 1906," Gale in Context, last modified 2003, accessed November 17, 2022, https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Reference&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&hitCount=8&searchType=BasicSearchForm@tPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CEJ2105240693&docType=Event+overview&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXBK-MOD1&prodId=SUIC&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ2105240693&searchId=R3&userGroupName=dove10524&inPS=true.
14 Gaughan, Harvey Wiley
Roosevelt was a strong opponent of socialism, and Sinclair’s political views disgusted him. Roosevelt also distrusted investigative journalists, known as “muck-rakers”. In his famous speech “The Man with the Muck-Rake,” he said,

But the man who never does anything else, who never thinks or speaks or writes, save his feats with the muckrake, speedily becomes not a help to society, not an incitement to good, but one of the most potent forces for evil.

Roosevelt clearly thought that muckrakers could be a harmful influence on society. Despite his views, the President wrote Sinclair, “But all this has nothing to do with the fact that the specific evils you point out shall, if their existence be proved, and if I have power, be eradicated.”

The president ordered the Secretary of Agriculture, James Wilson, to conduct a preliminary investigation of the Chicago meatpacking industry. The inspection began on March 12 and ended on April 21, 1906; it denied most of Sinclair’s claims.

However, Roosevelt wasn’t finished. He did not trust the beef manufacturers. In a dispatch to the Chicago Tribune he wrote,

16 Gaughan, Harvey Wiley
“Yet the book, after all, may tell enough truth to reveal a shocking condition, which public sentiment ought to correct if the law is unable to do so. A patient investigation at the stockyards may develop a condition of affairs which the preliminary inquiry scarcely hinted at. If that be true the packers will be the guilty persons, and they, in turn, will be held up in some public manner to the contempt of the people, and, if possible, a legal process will be discovered to punish them or to prevent a repetition of the shocking offenses.”

The president followed up on this statement by ordering Charles Neill, the Commissioner of Labor, and James Reynolds, a social worker, to further investigate the meatpacking industry. The resulting report corroborated Sinclair’s claims of filth.

Appalled, Roosevelt considered publishing the report to expose the meat industry. However, concerned by a 50% drop in domestic meat sales, Roosevelt decided to withhold the report and use it as behind-the-scenes political pressure.

On June 4, 1906, the president submitted the Neill-Reynolds report to Congress with the words, “I therefore commend your favorable consideration... this amendment being commonly known as the ‘Beveridge amendment [Federal Meat Inspection Act];”

The amendment quickly passed the Senate. However, it faced fierce opposition from the House of Representatives, where the meat companies had strong influence. In response to

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20 "THE PRESIDENT'S," A Milestone in Reform.
22 Gaughan, Harvey Wiley
staunch opposition, Roosevelt decided to release the Neill-Reynolds report to the public. The report was met with public outrage and a steep drop in meat exports.\textsuperscript{24}

Political cartoons, like “The Meat Market,” reflected the public’s reaction. In the cartoon, a crude butcher, "The Beef-Trust," stands over a counter with a knife, wearing a chef's hat with a poison sign. Adulterated products like embalmed sausages, deodorized ham, decayed roast beef, and chemical corn beef line the shelves around him.\textsuperscript{25}

In response to the Neill-Reynolds report, a group of eight major Chicago meatpacking companies declared “that their plants are kept clean, their methods of manufacturing are sanitary, their products wholesome” and that inspectors “who have made examinations of the manner in which the meat packing plants are conducted, have been entirely satisfied in every instance with the conditions existing in this industry.” The meat companies supported their statement with a report by Professors T. J. Burrill and H.S. Grindly of the University of Illinois that contradicted Neill and Reynold’s allegations.\textsuperscript{26}

However, the packers were not as complacent as they appeared. A correspondent to Theodore Roosevelt wrote the president to describe the companies’ efforts to conduct a cover up. He wrote,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Gaughan, Harvey Wiley
\item \textsuperscript{26} “Packers Reply to the Report," The Tazwell Republican, June 7, 1906, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn95079154/1906-06-07/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1904&index=0&rows=20&words=PACKERS+REPLY&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1907&proxtexthe+packers+reply&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1.
\end{itemize}
In the afternoon I visited the plant with the superintendent. By the time the next inspecting party arrives they will have still more new lavatories, toilet rooms, dressing rooms, etc. Cuspidors everywhere and signs prohibiting spitting. On every hand there was indication of an almost humorous haste to clean up, repave, and even to plan for future changes.  

The meat companies’ efforts to clean their factories show that *The Jungle* put significant public pressure on the food industry.

In light of increasing public pressure, Congress passed both the Beveridge amendment and the Pure Food and Drug Bill on June 30, 1906. President Roosevelt signed the bills into law shortly after.

**Long-Term Impact**

*The Jungle* helped create modern day food industry regulations and set an example for investigative journalism. It was significant in passing the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act, which are still in effect today.

The Beveridge Amendment, also known as the Federal Meat Inspection Act, dictates that, “The Secretary [of Agriculture] shall cause an examination and inspection of all amenable species, and the food products,” and that, “all amenable species found on such inspection to show symptoms of disease shall be set apart and slaughtered separately.”

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28 Gaughan, *Harvey Wiley*
The Beveridge Amendment also created strict sanitation standards for packinghouses, setting a basis for more than one thousand pages of regulation that dictate animal inspection, processing, and commerce today.31

Similarly, the Pure Food and Drug Bill banned harmful food ingredients, food adulteration, and misleading food labels. It also paved the way for the Food and Drug Administration, which governs food commerce in the United States.32 The USDA’s Bureau of Chemistry, which enforced the Pure Food and Drug Act, became the FDA in 1927. Today, the FDA inspects food to ensure it is safe for public consumption.33

While Upton Sinclair had hoped to expose the evils of the meat industry, he was disappointed that the public had ignored his endorsement of socialism. However, The Jungle helped pioneer a new frontier in literature.

Sinclair was at the forefront of journalistic activism with other muckrakers such as Jacob Riis and Ida Tarbell. Jacob Riis’ most famous book, How the Other Half Lives, documented the lives of New York City’s poorest people. Thanks to his work, New York City passed minimum building standards for all dwellings. Ida Tarbell exposed how John D. Rockefeller had used unethical business tactics to monopolize the oil industry in The History of the Standard Oil

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31 "Meat Inspection," Gale in Context.
Company. Her book helped the government sue Standard Oil, Rockefellers’ company, for violating the Sherman Antitrust Act in federal court.34

Before the early 1900s, public opinion was against government regulation of business. However, muckrakers like Upton Sinclair turned public sentiment in favor of government intervention by revealing companies’ unethical practices. In particular, the landmark passage of the Meat Inspection and Pure Food Act showed that books could influence politics by capturing the public’s attention.

The Jungle had such a profound impact on the public that the author Jack London compared it with Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a novel that had a profound impact on attitudes toward slavery before the Civil War. The muckrakers performed a necessary role by exposing unethical practices and reining in the excesses of the Second Industrial Revolution.35 Even Theodore Roosevelt acknowledged the work of the muckrakers. In his speech “The Man With the Muckrake,” he said:

There should be relentless exposure of and attack upon every evil man whether politician or businessman, every evil practice, whether in politics, in business, or in social life. I hail as a benefactor every writer or speaker, every man who, on the platform, or in book, magazine, or newspaper, with merciless severity makes such attack.36

By helping pass food industry reform and pioneering journalistic activism, The Jungle inspired far-reaching ramifications that live on today.

34 James L. Outman, Elisabeth M. Outman, and Matthew May, Industrial Revolution: Biographies (Detroit: UXL, 2003), [Page 114-129].
35 Outman, Outman, and May, Industrial Revolution, [Page 114-129].
Conclusion

When Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle* in 1906, he helped pass food industry regulation and pioneered a new, lasting frontier of journalistic activism. By putting public pressure on meat companies, the novel helped pass significant food industry reform. Even more importantly, it showed that novels could capture the public’s attention and bring about change. *The Jungle’s* impact will continue to be felt in the fields of food legislation and journalism.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources


In this editorial, J. Ogden Armour, a meatpacking executive, pushed back against The Jungle. I quoted it to show the meat industry’s reaction to the publication of the novel.

Chicago Daily Tribune (Chicago, IL). "SCRUB BRUSHES AND SOAP WORK WONDERSIN PACKINGTOWN SINCE NEILL WAS THERE." 

This source helped me understand the Chicago meatpackers’ efforts to sanitize their factories after The Jungle was published. I quoted the article to show the impact The Jungle had on the meat packing industry.


Reading the Federal Meat Inspection Act helped me understand the details of food industry regulation. I quoted the bill to explain The Jungle’s long term impact on legislation.


The political cartoon The Meat Market helped me understand the public's response to The Jungle. I described it in my paper to illustrate the public’s reaction to the novel.


This article showed me Sinclair’s efforts to expose the meat industry after he published The Jungle. I included it in my paper to show the fight for meat regulation after the publication of The Jungle.

This article is a transcription of a speech Theodore Roosevelt gave to Congress. Roosevelt asked the Senate to pass the Beveridge Amendment in this speech. I quoted it to demonstrate Roosevelt’s commitment to reforming the food industry.

"THE PRESIDENT'S IRE AROUSED BY THE APPEAL'S GREAT STORY!" A Milestone in Reform.

This article described Theodore Roosevelt’s immediate reaction to The Jungle. It helped me write the short term impact section of my paper.


This “Letter to Upton Sinclair” provided interesting insights about Roosevelt’s views toward socialism, Upton Sinclair, the meat industry, and The Jungle itself. I used it to describe the president’s reaction to The Jungle.


This speech helped me understand Roosevelt’s delicate relationship with investigative journalists (muckrakers). I used it in my paper to flesh out his stance toward muckrakers and to write about journalism’s frontiers during the Progressive Era.


Theodore Roosevelt gave this speech to urge Congress to pass the Beveridge Amendment when he submitted the Neill Reynolds report to Congress. I quoted it to illustrate his support for meat industry regulation.


I analyzed the impact of The Jungle in this paper. I quoted it in main events to illustrate Sinclair’s claims about the meat industry.
https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn95079154/1906-06-07/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1904 &index=0&rows=20&words=PACKERS+REPLY&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1907&protext=the+packers+reply&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&
page=1.

In this article, nine major meat companies claimed that their products are safe. I quoted it in my paper to show the meat packing industry’s response to The Jungle.

Secondary Sources

https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?resultListType=RELATED_DOCUMENT&searchType=ts&userGroupName=dove10524&inPS=true&contentSegment=&prodId=SUIC&docId=GALE|VKFPQG167259044&it=r.

This article summarizes the major aspects of the progressive era. I used this source to research the historical context of The Jungle.

https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Reference&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&hitCount=8&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CEJ2105240693&docType=Event+overview&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXBK-MOD1&prodId=SUIC&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ2105240693&searchId=R3&userGroupName=dove10524&inPS=true.


This article helped me understand the political maneuvers behind the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act. I used it to write the short-term impact section of my paper.

https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Reference&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&hitCount=8&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=3&docId=GALE%7CCX3401802578&docType=Topic+overview&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXAP-VRL&prodId=SUIC&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCX3401802578&searchId=R3&userGroupName=dove10524&inPS=true.
This article described the laws and regulations passed as a result of *The Jungle*. I used it to write the long-term impact section of my paper.

This encyclopedia entry described the history of the meatpacking industry in Chicago. It helped me write about the historical context of the meatpacking industry.


This book profiled the major muckrakers of the Progressive Era. It helped me understand investigative journalism as a frontier, and I used it to write the long-term impact of my paper.

"Upton Sinclair." Gale in Context.
[https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Biographies&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&hitCount=7&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CEJ2108102105&docType=Biography&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXBK-MOD1&prodId=SUIC&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ2108102105&searchId=R3&userGroupName=dove10524&inPS=true](https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Biographies&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&hitCount=7&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CEJ2108102105&docType=Biography&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZXBK-MOD1&prodId=SUIC&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CEJ2108102105&searchId=R3&userGroupName=dove10524&inPS=true).

This resource helped me understand Upton Sinclair and his work. I used it to write the main event and historical sections of my paper.