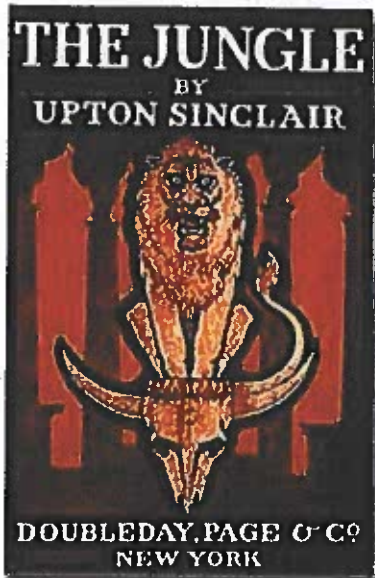


# Muckrakers



Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle* in 1905 to expose labor abuses in the meat packing industry. But it was food, not labor, that most concerned the public. Sinclair's horrific descriptions of the industry led to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act, not to labor legislation.

The pen is sometimes mightier than the sword.

It may be a cliché, but it was all too true for journalists at the turn of the century. The print revolution enabled publications to increase their subscriptions dramatically. What appeared in print was now more powerful than ever. Writing to Congress in hopes of correcting abuses was slow and often produced zero results. Publishing a series of articles had a much more immediate impact. Collectively called muckrakers, a brave cadre of reporters exposed injustices so grave they made the blood of the average American run cold.

## Steffens Takes on Corruption

The first to strike was Lincoln Steffens. In 1902, he published an article in *McClure's* magazine called "Tweed Days in St. Louis." Steffens exposed how city officials worked in league with big business to maintain power while corrupting the public treasury.

More and more articles followed, and soon Steffens published the collection as a book entitled *The Shame of the Cities*. Soon public outcry demanded

reform of city government and gave strength to the progressive ideas of a city commission or city manager system.

## Tarbell vs. Standard Oil

Ida Tarbell struck next. One month after Lincoln Steffens launched his assault on urban politics, Tarbell began her *McClure's* series entitled "History of the Standard Oil Company." She outlined and documented the cutthroat business practices behind John Rockefeller's meteoric rise. Tarbell's motives may also have been personal: her own father had been driven out of business by Rockefeller.



John Spargo's 1906 *The Bitter Cry of the Children* exposed hardships suffered by child laborers, such as these coal miners. "From the cramped position [the boys] have to assume," wrote Spargo, "most of them become more or less deformed and bent-backed like old men ..."

Once other publications saw how profitable these exposés had been, they courted muckrakers of their own. In 1905, Thomas Lawson brought the inner workings of the stock market to light in *Frenzied Finance*. John Spargo unearthed the horrors of child labor in *The Bitter Cry of the Children* in 1906. That same year, David Phillips linked 75 senators to big business interests in *The Treason of the Senate*. In 1907, William Hard went public with industrial accidents in the steel industry in the blistering *Making Steel and Killing Men*. Ray Stannard Baker revealed the oppression of Southern blacks in *Following the Color Line* in 1908.

## The Meatpacking Jungle

Perhaps no muckraker caused as great a stir as Upton Sinclair. An avowed Socialist, Sinclair hoped to illustrate the horrible effects of capitalism on workers in the Chicago meatpacking industry. His bone-chilling account, *The Jungle*, detailed workers sacrificing their fingers and nails by working with acid, losing limbs, catching diseases, and toiling long hours in cold, cramped conditions. He hoped the public outcry would be so fierce that reforms would soon follow.



Yale University  
This sketch of "Gotham Court" from Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* shows the bitter side of tenement life.

The clamor that rang throughout America was not, however, a response to the workers' plight. Sinclair also uncovered the contents

of the products being sold to the general public. Spoiled meat was covered with chemicals to hide the smell. Skin, hair, stomach, ears, and nose were ground up and packaged as head cheese. Rats climbed over warehouse meat, leaving piles of excrement behind.

Sinclair said that he aimed for America's heart and instead hit its stomach. Even President Roosevelt, who coined the derisive term "muckraker," was propelled to act. Within months, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act to curb these sickening abuses.

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1. Who "proved" that the "pen was mightier than the sword"?

2. Muckrakers used newspapers to challenge
- a. the government
  - b. organized religion
  - c. the economy
  - d. the press

3. Lincoln Steffens exposed government corruption at which level?

4. Who did Ida Tarbell attack?

5. Aside from government, name two other topics Muckrakers addressed.

a.

b.

6. In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wanted to expose what?

7. What concerned the public about *The Jungle*?

8. What were two results of *The Jungle's* publication and popularity?

a.

b.

# Progressivism Sweeps the Nation



Student in the Electrical Division at Tuskegee Institute

Conservatives beware! Whether they liked it or not, the turn of the 20th century was an age of reform. Urban reformers and Populists had already done much to raise attention to the nation's most pressing problems.

America in 1900 looked nothing like America in 1850, yet those in power seemed to be applying the same old strategies to complex new problems. The Populists had tried to effect change by capturing the government. The Progressives would succeed where the Populists had failed.

The Progressives were urban, Northeast, educated, middle-class, Protestant reform-minded men and women. There was no official Progressive Party until 1912, but progressivism had already swept the nation.

It was more of a movement than a political party, and there were adherents to the philosophy in each major party. There were

three Progressive Presidents — Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt and Taft were Republicans and Wilson was a Democrat. What united the movement was a belief that the laissez faire, Social Darwinist outlook of the Gilded Age was morally and intellectually wrong. Progressives believed that people and government had the power to correct abuses produced by nature and the free market.



Library of Congress  
Official program of Woman suffrage procession,  
Washington, D.C., March 3, 1913

The results were astonishing. Seemingly every aspect of society was touched by progressive reform. Worker and consumer issues were addressed, conservation of natural resources was initiated, and the plight of the urban poor was confronted. National political movements such as temperance and women's suffrage found allies in the progressive movement. The era produced a host of national and state regulations, plus four amendments to the Constitution.

When the United States became involved in the First World War, attention was diverted from domestic issues and progressivism

went into decline. While unable to solve the problems of every American, the Progressive Era set the stage for the 20th century trend of an activist government trying to assist its people.

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1. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was an age of what?

- a. War
- b. Standards
- c. Questions
- d. Reforms

2. Progressives were most likely in favor of

- a. Agriculture
- b. Reforms
- c. Conservatism
- d. All of these

3. Name three US Presidents with a progressive agenda.

- a.
- b.
- c.

4. How did progressive leaders view the Gilded Age?

5. Who did Progressives believe had the power to fix abuses?

6. Identify four ways that society was changed because of Progressivism.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

7. What brought an end to Progressivism in the US?

8. What trend did Progressivism set into place?