

2001

The Jungle

Robert A. Slayton

Chapman University, slayton@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/history_books



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Slayton, Robert. "The Jungle." In *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, edited by Paul Boyer and Eric Monkkonen, 414. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Books and Book Chapters by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact laughtin@chapman.edu.

JUNGLE, THE (1906). Published in 1906, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* remains one of the most influential novels in American political and social history. Sinclair was a socialist writer who had just published a book on chattel slavery and an article on the meatpackers' failed 1904 strike for the socialist periodical *Appeal to Reason*. Invited by the journal's editor, Fred Warren, to do another exposé, this time of wage slavery, Sinclair in the autumn of 1904 lived for seven weeks in Chicago's meatpacking district, investigating both the plants and the adjoining workers' residences.

Based on this research, Sinclair wrote a graphic description of conditions encountered by a fictional family of Lithuanian immigrants. Jurgis Rudkus, the protagonist, is optimistic that he will succeed in America because of his physical strength and his work ethic. Instead, the industrial order grinds down not only Jurgis but every member of his family, several of whom die or suffer other terrible fates.

While Sinclair's goal was to expose the evils of industrial capitalism and demonstrate the need for socialism, the public's reaction was very different. At a time when middle-class consumers were being taught to trust national name brands as symbols of purity and quality, Sinclair offered a very different message. *The Jungle* portrayed an industry in which monopolistic corporations sold diseased and damaged meat and invested in advertising rather than in pure and safe products. In the resulting uproar, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act in 1906. Commented a disappointed Sinclair: "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach." Later critics attacked the pessimism of the book, especially Sinclair's failure to recognize the resourcefulness of immigrant workers.

[See also Immigration; Industrialization; Meatpacking and Meat Processing Industry; Progressive Era.]

• James Barrett, introduction to *The Jungle*, by Upton Sinclair, 1988, pp. xi–xxxii.

—Robert A. Slayton