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The Jungle Book Review

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The Jungle Book Review

Submitted by:
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Course: MGMT5900
Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility and Law
Professor: Martin Sivula, Ph.D.

Bibliographical Data:

The Jungle
Upton Sinclair
Published 1906

Background Information:

Who is the author? (What is the nationality and origin? When did the author write? Check standard reference books.)

The author of The Jungle is Upton Sinclair. He was an American author that wrote upwards of 100 novels over his life. He was born September 20, 1878 in Baltimore, Maryland.

Sinclair came from a once well-to-do Southern family that had suffered reverses. When he was 10, the family moved to New York. Starting at age 15, he earned money writing dime novels, which paid his way through New York's City College and Columbia University. (This Day in History, 2016)

His alcoholic father sold liquor, and the family did not have much money while Sinclair was growing up. However, his grandparents were wealthy, and because Sinclair spent much of his childhood with them, he had an early vision of the disparities between rich and poor in nineteenth-century America. Sinclair would later remark that these disparities planted the early seeds of his views on social activism. (Upton Sinclair Biography, 2016)

These novels crossed many genres. Some of the noteworthy titles included: The Jungle 1906, The Brass Check, 1919, The Metropolis 1908 and King Cole 1917.

What other work has the author done?

Upton Sinclair wrote approximately 100 novels over his career. Some of his more noteworthy titles include:

1901 Springtime and Harvest (retitled King Midas)
1904 Manassas
1908 The Metropolis and The Money-changers
1917 King Coal
1919 Jimmie Higgins
1920 The Brass Check
1927 Oil!
1928 Boston

1930 Mountain City
1931 The Wet Parade
1932 American Outpost
1937 The Flivver King
1940 World's End
1942 Dragon's Teeth. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize,
1962 Autobiography
(Institute, 2016)

In addition to his novels, he started writing short stories to pay for college, while attending City College in New York City.

What is the author's reputation?

Upton Sinclair was known as a "Muckraker" and Socialist. At the age of 26 he started researching the Jungle by moving to the Chicago Meat Packing District. Many of his books, including the Jungle pointed out social injustices, division of classes and the working poor.

"The incipient muckraker created his first socialist character in *Manassas* and began contributing to socialist newspapers and magazines, including the prominent weekly paper the *Appeal to Reason*." (Bachelder, 2006)

Are there any important or enlightening circumstances connected with the composition of this work?

Upton's ability to take on *The Jungle* was tied to his new found participation in the Socialist movement. He was writing weekly articles for the *Appeal for Reason*, according to Chris Bachelder, in *The Jungle at 100*, published in *Mother Jones*:

when they offered him a \$500 advance for the serial rights to a novel about wage slaves in the Chicago stockyards. Sinclair accepted the advance—it was more than half the money he had made on his four previous novels—and before leaving New Jersey pitched the novel to George Brett, his Macmillan editor, as a break from his previous artistic work and a "definite attempt to write something popular." (Bachelder, 2006)

After the work was published it was a instant success, being translated into 17 languages within months. (Bachelder, 2006)

Most notably Sinclair's novel helped initiate federal regulation. His novel *The Jungle* caused a lot of talk. When Theodore Roosevelt read this book, he ordered an

investigation of the meat packing industry. Roosevelt also passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act 1906.

Subject Matter of the Book

What kind of book is it? (Is it fiction, history, popular psychology, textbook, technical?)

This is a book of fiction based on facts. The author spent two months in the stockyards in Chicago, gathering information on the inner workings of "Packingtown". He wove into the expose style writing of the happenings into a story of Jurgis and his family from Lithuania. Although, this part of the story was not based on an actual family from Lithuania, it is very close to the truth and describes in detail what many immigrating families experienced in that part of the United States.

What is the subject of the book?

According to Upton Sinclair the goal of the book was to expose the slave wages the lower levels of the United States economy endured. In reality he exposed the unsanitary conditions tied to the meat packing industry in Chicago, Illinois.

The purpose of the novel, which Sinclair dedicated to "the Workingmen of America," was to draw attention to the misery of the lowest tier of workers in a capitalist economy. And yet *The Jungle* brought far more attention to rotten sausage than to wage slavery. What most people tend to remember about the novel, besides perhaps the half-inch pools of blood on the slaughterhouse floor or the geysers of gore that shoot from infected or diseased cattle, is its instrumental role in the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act. Sinclair's novel helped initiate federal regulation—a century later, this seems unimaginable—but the author had missed his target. As he famously remarked after publication, "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach." (Bachelder, 2006)

What material does it treat?

The material "The Jungle" treats is, place, time and industry. One of the main factors that dictated the outcome of this story is the year. Upton Sinclair researched this story in the early nineteen hundreds and was using this as a back drop for the political, social and industry norms. This ultimately dictated what was expected of the working class, how classification was being used to structure society and in general the rights you had based on this classification.

The second factor that greatly affected this story was location. It was set in Chicago, which at this time was full of changes. Jurgis and Ona emigrate from Lithuania to Chicago with the hope for a better life. Chicago at that time was a constant stream of migration, each group having its moment at the “bottom” and working their way up the socio-economic ladder. During the time Sinclair researched, Lithuanian’s were the main new group entering Chicago and had to take some of the hardest working, lowest paying jobs.

This can be seen through the conversation Jurgis has with his neighbor, Grandmother Majauszkiene in chapter six.

“The first family had been Germans. The families had all been of different nationalities--there had been a representative of several races that had displaced each other in the stockyards. Grandmother Majauszkiene had come to America with her son at a time when so far as she knew there was only one other Lithuanian family in the district; the workers had all been Germans then--skilled cattle butchers that the packers had brought from abroad to start the business. Afterward, as cheaper labor had come, these Germans had moved away. The next were the Irish--there had been six or eight years when Packingtown had been a regular Irish city. There were a few colonies of them still here, enough to run all the unions and the police force and get all the graft; but most of those who were working in the packing houses had gone away at the next drop in wages--after the big strike. The Bohemians had come then, and after them the Poles. People said that old man Durham himself was responsible for these immigrations; he had sworn that he would fix the people of Packingtown so that they would never again call a strike on him, and so he had sent his agents into every city and village in Europe to spread the tale of the chances of work and high wages at the stockyards. The people had come in hordes; and old Durham had squeezed them tighter and tighter, speeding them up and grinding them to pieces and sending for new ones. The Poles, who had come by tens of thousands, had been driven to the wall by the Lithuanians, and now the Lithuanians were giving way to the Slovaks. Who there was poorer and more miserable than the Slovaks, Grandmother Majauszkiene had no idea, but the packers would find them, never fear. It was easy to bring them, for wages were really much higher, and it was only when it was too late that the poor people found out that everything else was higher too. They were like rats in a trap, that was the truth; and more of them were piling in every day. By and by they would have their revenge, though, for the thing was getting beyond human endurance, and the people would rise and murder the packers. Grandmother Majauszkiene was a socialist, or some such strange thing; another son of hers was working in the mines of Siberia, and the old lady herself had made speeches in

her time--which made her seem all the more terrible to her present auditors." (Sinclair, 1906)

And finally, the last main factor is the industry. The meat packing industry was unique. The type of work, the hours required and dangers associated with were significantly different than other work immigrants were forced into. If this family would have immigrated to a different part of the United States, they would have had a very different experience. That being said, in many cases the outcome was the same for new immigrants, but the hardships they had to endure were different.

What is the tenor of the book—the author’s basic interpretation of the material?

The Jungle is exhausting, sad, relentless and infuriating. Around every corner there is one more obstacle to overcome for Jurgis, Ona and the other main characters in the family.

In chapter one, Jurgis and Ona marry. Instead of this ending as a joyous moment in their life they are faced with a \$100 bill to the hall to cover expenses not covered by guest donations, as Lithuanian custom dictates. This is more than several months of income for the whole family.

In chapter five, the family purchases a home and later finds out that the terms were not fully explained and they owe more money than they expected. Given the news of the interest and insurance they now have to purchase they become “house poor” a common term used currently. The family can technically make enough money to pay for the house but every other choice in their life suffers because of this.

In chapter twelve, Jurgis injures himself and cannot return to work for months. The children take jobs to help add to the family income.

In chapter fifteen, we find out Ona’s new boss is sexually harassing her and forcing her to stay late at work and even overnight to provide sexual services. Jurgis is also arrested and put in jail for attacking the boss to avenge the treatment of Ona.

Events such as these continue on and on throughout the novel. The author relays the needlessness and sadness of these events through his writing. You truly feel the pain through the narrator’s vivid explanation of each event and the emotional turmoil it creates with in the characters.

Every event, especially in the first twenty-seven chapters of the book, is chosen deliberately to portray a particular failure of capitalism, which is, in Sinclair’s view, inhuman, destructive, unjust, brutal, and violent. (Editors, 2015)

Method of Organization

Summarize in your own words the table of contents

The table of contents is simple and to the point. It lists the chapters 1-31 with no titling. This might be tied to process it took to become a completed published work. The Jungle was originally written for news. As stated on Slate.com, appearing first as a serial in a Socialist weekly, *The Jungle* became a best seller once it was published in book form, and Roosevelt ordered two investigations of conditions in the plants (Olssen, 2006)

What are the tone and style of the book? (What kind of audience is being addressed? Does the author give interesting facts or analyses?)

The overall tone of *The Jungle* is dark and oppressive. Any glimmer of hope that is presented to the characters is quickly taken away with an exponentially negative turn of events. For example,

- 1) The family purchases a house, then finds out they did not fully understand the terms and owe more money each month than they planned for.
- 2) Ona finds employment but is raped by her boss and while birthing the child of another man, dies at 18.
- 3) Family members find jobs but not paid fairly for the work they do.
- 4) Although the family purchased a house, there is not proper sanitation in the neighborhood and the children are diseased and the family cannot afford medical care
- 5) Elzbieta is ultimately forced into prostitution to help her family survive. While working here she is introduced to morphine as a way to mask the pain of her life.

The following passage from chapter eighteen of the book exemplifies the overall tone well.

Their home! Their home! They had lost it! Grief, despair, rage, overwhelmed him--what was any imagination of the thing to this heartbreaking, crushing reality of it--to the sight of strange people living in his house, hanging their curtains to his windows, staring at him with hostile eyes! It was monstrous, it was unthinkable-- they could not do it--it could not be true! Only think what he had suffered for that house--what miseries they had all suffered for it--the price they had paid for it!

The whole long agony came back to him. Their sacrifices in the beginning, their three hundred dollars that they had scraped together, all they owned in the world, all that stood between them and starvation! And then their toil, month by month, to get together the

twelve dollars, and the interest as well, and now and then the taxes, and the other charges, and the repairs, and what not! Why, they had put their very souls into their payments on that house, they had paid for it with their sweat and tears--yes, more, with their very lifeblood. Dede Antanas had died of the struggle to earn that money--he would have been alive and strong today if he had not had to work in Durham's dark cellars to earn his share. And Ona, too, had given her health and strength to pay for it--she was wrecked and ruined because of it; and so was he, who had been a big, strong man three years ago, and now sat here shivering, broken, cowed, weeping like a hysterical child. Ah! they had cast their all into the fight; and they had lost, they had lost! All that they had paid was gone-- every cent of it. And their house was gone--they were back where they had started from, flung out into the cold to starve and freeze!

Jurgis could see all the truth now--could see himself, through the whole long course of events, the victim of ravenous vultures that had torn into his vitals and devoured him; of fiends that had racked and tortured him, mocking him, meantime, jeering in his face. Ah, God, the horror of it, the monstrous, hideous, demoniacal wickedness of it! He and his family, helpless women and children, struggling to live, ignorant and defenseless and forlorn as they were--and the enemies that had been lurking for them, crouching upon their trail and thirsting for their blood! That first lying circular, that smooth-tongued slippery agent! That trap of the extra payments, the interest, and all the other charges that they had not the means to pay, and would never have attempted to pay! And then all the tricks of the packers, their masters, the tyrants who ruled them-- the shutdowns and the scarcity of work, the irregular hours and the cruel speeding-up, the lowering of wages, the raising of prices! The mercilessness of nature about them, of heat and cold, rain and snow; the mercilessness of the city, of the country in which they lived, of its laws and customs that they did not understand! All of these things had worked together for the company that had marked them for its prey and was waiting for its chance. And now, with this last hideous injustice, its time had come, and it had turned them out bag and baggage, and taken their house and sold it again! And they could do nothing, they were tied hand and foot--the law was against them, the whole machinery of society was at their oppressors' command! If Jurgis so much as raised a hand against them, back he would go into that wild-beast pen from which he had just escaped! (Sinclair, 1906)

State four to ten main ideas of the book. Be as descriptive as possible.

There are many themes that run through *The Jungle*. Four significant themes include socialism, muckraking, labor and unfair practices and unsanitary conditions in the meatpacking industry.

Socialism: Throughout the novel capitalism is being presented as a failing system that oppresses the working man. This is seen over and over again with every character on the story. Sinclair conceived *The Jungle* as a Socialist novel. The problems of the main characters demonstrate the evils and corruption of capitalist economies. Jurgis and Ona, as well as their immigrant friends and family, live in extreme poverty. Their lives are at risk when they go to work, if they are able to find work. These conditions are the result of a company that seeks to maximize the speed and efficiency of labor with no regard to how such methods of production affect the lives of workers. The novel is a sustained argument that workers must gather collectively in order to assure rights and dignity for all individuals.

For examples in chapter six, Jurgis's neighbor, Grandmother Majauzskiene, tells the family about the endless cycle of immigrants who have been beaten down by the Beef Trust operating in the stockyards. She identifies herself as a Socialist and her discontent is voiced in typical Socialist thought. Jurgis has no idea what the word means, and quickly forgets about it. (Sinclair, 1906)

In chapter 28 Jurgis accidentally attends a Socialist party meeting and is transformed by what he hears from the speaker onstage—that the squalor and toil of Jurgis's life was not destiny but a result of capitalist greed. This idea changes Jurgis's life and when the speaker asks him if he'd like to know more about Socialism, he is eager but says he doesn't know what Socialism is. (Sinclair, 1906)

And in chapter 30, Jurgis is hired at Hind's Hotel and discovers that his boss, Tommy Hind, is the state organizer of the Socialist Party. When Hind finds out that Jurgis is a brand new member of the Socialist Party and a former worker in the meatpacking plants, he is ecstatic. Because the hotel is a hotbed for Socialist activity, as well as a popular inn for Western cattlemen, Hind encourages Jurgis to tell his stories of unsafe food handling activities in the processing rooms, and unfair labor practices. (Sinclair, 1906)

Muckraking: Upton Sinclair was commissioned by "Appeal to Reason" to investigate and write multiple articles about the Chicago stockyards. The original intent was to promote socialism and deface capitalism. Because of this, muckraking can be considered a theme throughout the story.

In chapter three, Sinclair writes that the government inspector, who was to inspect the cattle for disease and injury, was easily distracted and any number of sick, diseased cattle could be slaughtered and processed for consumption by humans. Sinclair indicates that beef bosses distracted the inspector on purpose. (Sinclair, 1906)

In chapter nine, Jurgis is paid for his vote in an election, and bribed with beer. His co-workers explain the system of graft to him: how his bosses force workers to hand over some of their pay in order for the workers to keep their jobs. (Sinclair, 1906)

And in chapter twenty-five, Jack Duane introduces Jurgis to the boss of the Racing Trust-an underground, corrupt organization that fixes races by disabling horses, drugging them, and bribing members of state legislatures. (Sinclair, 1906)

Labor and Unfair Practices: The author spends a significant amount of time outlining unfair labor practices. This is tied to the slant promoting socialism as the cure to the capitalist economy.

In chapter three, the workrooms at the meatpacking plants are unheated and dangerous in the winter. Men often suffer frostbite, and in desperation, stick their frozen feet into the steaming carcasses of cattle when the bosses aren't looking. The steam is so thick in the butchering rooms that it creates an extremely dangerous environment where men may be stabbed in a cloud of hot steam, or suffer other injuries. Some men slip on the frozen blood on the floors. (Sinclair, 1906)

In chapter eleven, the plants bring in extra men, which bring wages down and create a surplus of labor. It isn't until later that the workers realize the extra men were being trained as strikebreakers. (Sinclair, 1906)

Unsanitary Conditions in the Meatpacking industry: is yet another theme running through the novel. Sinclair's main goal was to promote socialism; however, through the industry he chose to prove this he also uncovered unspeakable practices. Examples of this run through several chapters.

In chapter five, Jurgis watches as pregnant cows, classified by the government as not fit for food, are sneaked past the government inspector and slaughtered for meat. Even more horrible, Jurgis sees the fetus sliced out of the dead cow and processed as meat as well. Charges like this spurred the US government to enact pure food laws. (Sinclair, 1906)

In chapter nine, Jurgis learns how tubercular steer and hogs are processed for meat. He also learns the "recipes" of Durham's "pure leaf lard": the waste products of the cow, including tongue, heart, and intestines. This is then dyed with chemicals and sold as pure lard. Jurgis also learns that horsemeat was used in Durham's but had temporarily been suspended due to an investigation. (Sinclair, 1906)

And in chapter fourteen, Elzbieta sees how the sausage is doctored when she works filling casings in the sausage room. She sees how any random mix of animal parts is ground into "sausage." Anything that is spoiled is simply dyed with chemicals like borax and packaged for sale. In addition, she watches as leftovers that have fallen on

the floor of the room are scooped up, along with dead rats and other filth, and put into the grinding machine for sausage. (Sinclair, 1906)

Select and quote one short passage as an example of the author's insight. Why did you select this quote?

There were the men in the pickle-rooms, for instance, where old Antanas had gotten his death; scarce a one of these that had not some spot of horror on his person. Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle-rooms, and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten by the acid, one by one. Of the butchers and floorsmen, the beef-boners and trimmers, and all those who used knives, you could scarcely find a person who had the use of his thumb; time and time again the base of it had been slashed, till it was a mere lump of flesh against which the man pressed the knife to hold it. The hands of these men would be criss-crossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them. They would have no nails,— they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were swollen so that their fingers spread out like a fan. There were men who worked in the cooking-rooms, in the midst of steam and sickening odors, by artificial light; in these rooms the germs of tuberculosis might live for two years, but the supply was renewed every hour. There were the beef-luggers, who carried two-hundred-pound quarters into the refrigerator-cars; a fearful kind of work, that began at four o'clock in the morning, and that wore out the most powerful men in a few years. There were those who worked in the chilling-rooms, and whose special disease was rheumatism; the time-limit that a man could work in the chilling-rooms was said to be five years. There were the woolpluckers, whose hands went to pieces even sooner than the hands of the pickle-men; for the pelts of the sheep had to be painted with acid to loosen the wool, and then the pluckers had to pull out this wool with their bare hands, till the acid had eaten their fingers off. There were those who made the tins for the canned-meat; and their hands, too, were a maze of cuts, and each cut represented a chance for blood-poisoning. Some worked at the stamping-machines, and it was very seldom that one could work long there at the pace that was set, and not give out and forget himself, and have a part of his hand chopped off. There were the "hoisters," as they were called, whose task it was to press the lever which lifted the dead cattle off the floor. They ran along upon a rafter, peering down through the damp and the steam; and as old Durham's architects had not built the killing-room for the convenience of the hoisters, at every few feet they would have to stoop under a beam, say four feet above the one they ran on; which got them into the habit of stooping, so that in a few years they would

be walking like chimpanzees. Worst of any, however, were the fertilizer-men, and those who served in the cooking-rooms. These people could not be shown to the visitor,—for the odor of a fertilizer-man would scare any ordinary visitor at a hundred yards, and as for the other men, who worked in tank-rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard! (Sinclair, 1906)

This quote, from Chapter nine, in particular spoke to me. I feel epitomizes the sacrifices people were willing to endure to have a chance at a better life than the one they left in "the old country". Immigrants as a whole are hardworking and hopeful individuals. They mostly hope that their hard work will allow them to provide for their families in a way not possible in their country of origin. This passage very literally describes the physical sacrifices made. Ultimately it is a statement about the working conditions and socio-economic climate at the time. People were an expendable commodity; it was and still is about making the separation of classes more severe. Sinclair is making a statement about the sacrifices workers were being forced to make because of this capitalistic economy.

Overall synopsis and final recommendations

In 1904, during the stockyard strike, socialist writer Upton Sinclair visited Chicago's "Packingtown" area for 2 months. Although the authors' main goal was to promote Socialism and expose Capitalism, another main theme emerged; the unsanitary process of producing meat products. Throughout the book, he describes the horrifying physical conditions immigrant packing plant workers and their families worked and lived. He showcased the collapse of immigrant culture under the endless pressure of industrial capitalism through Jurgis and Ona's experiences. Through the story of their journey to America and finding their way in "Packingtown" he vividly describes themes including, living in poverty, the immigrant experience, wage slavery, corruption, economic and social injustice and the hollowness of the American Dream.

The Jungle is a tragic tale of physical and emotional abuses of the workers of "Packingtown". It is a story that still resonates today and should be on everyone's reading list at least one time in their life. It is an unobscured window into the past and cautionary tale of what could still happen in the future.

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