Excerpts from Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*

Sinclair, Upton. The Jungle. New York:

Bantam Classics, 1981.

American Nightmare #1: Working Conditions

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “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 crisscrossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them…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.” **(Excerpt 1, 1)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “though often the bosses would stat the gang ten or fifteen minutes before the whistle…They did not pay for any fraction of an hour – for “broken time” A man might work full fifty minutes, but if there was no work to fill out the hour there was no pay for him.” **(Excerpt 1, 2)**

American Nightmare #2: Housing

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “In back of the yards the dreary two-story frame houses were scattered farther apart, and there were great spaces bare-that seemingly had been overlooked by the great sore of the city as it spread itself over the surface of the prairie. These bare places were grown up with dingy, yellow weeds, hiding innumerable tomato cans; innumerable children you thought there must be a school just out…”

**(Excerpt 2, 1)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “There were no pavements—there were mountains and valleys and rivers, gullies and ditches and great hollows full of stinking green water. In these pools the children played, and rolled about in the mud of the streets; here and there one noticed them digging in it, after trophies which they had stumbled on. One wondered about this as also about the swarms of flies which hung about the scene, literally blackening the air, and the strange, [rotten] odor which assailed one’s nostrils, a [horrible] odor, of all the dead things in the universe.” **(Excerpt 2, 2)**

American Nightmare #3: The Government

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “A man who was employed as a night watchman asked him if he would not like to take out naturalization papers and become a citizen. Jurgis did not know what that meant, but the man explained the advantages. So they drove downtown and stopped before an imposing granite building, in which they interviewed an official, who had the papers all ready, with only the names to be filled in. So each man in turn took an oath of which he did not understand a word, and then was presented with a handsome ornamented document with a big red seal and the shield of the United States upon it, and was told that he had become a citizen of the Republic and the equal of the President himself.” **(Excerpt 3, 1)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “And then finally, when election day came, the same night watchman took Jurgis and the rest of his flock into the back room of a saloon, and showed each of them where and how to mark a ballot, and then gave each two dollars, and took them to the polling place, where there was a policeman on duty especially to see that they got through all right. Jurgis felt quite proud of this good luck till he got home and met Jonas, who had taken the leader aside and whispered to him, offering to vote three times for four dollars, which the offer had been accepted.” **(Excerpt 3, 2)**