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. 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 wool-pluckers, 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.” **(Excerpt 1, 1)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “though often the bosses would start 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. Thus the end of every day was a sort of lottery – a struggle, all but breaking into open war between the bosses and the men, the former trying to rush a job through and the latter trying to stretch it out.” **(Excerpt 1, 2)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “All of those who used knives were unable to wear gloves, and their arms would be white with frost and their hands would grow numb. And then of course there would be accidents…with men rushing about at the speed they kept up on the killing beds, and all the with butcher knives, like razors in their hands—well it was to be counted as a wonder that there were not more men slaughtered then cattle.”

**(Excerpt 1, 3)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “There are able-bodied men here who work from early morning until late at night, in ice-cold cellars with a quarter of an inch of water on the floor--men who for six or seven months in the year never see the sunlight from Sunday afternoon till the next Sunday morning--and who cannot earn three hundred dollars in a year. There are little children here, scarce in their teens, who can hardly see the top of the work benches--whose parents have lied to get them their places--and who do not make the half of three hundred dollars a year, and perhaps not even the third of it.” (**Excerpt 1, 4**)

American Nightmare #2: Housing

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “They were left standing upon the corner, staring down a side street there were two rows of brick houses, and between them a vista: half a dozen chimneys, tall as the tallest of buildings, touching the very sky-and leaping from them half a dozen columns of smoke, thick, oily, and black as night. It might have come from the center of the world, this smoke, where the fires of the ages still smolder. It came as if self-impelled, driving all before it, a perpetual explosion. It was inexhaustible; one stared, waiting to see it stop, but still the great streams rolled out. They spread in vast clouds overhead, writing, curling; then, uniting in one giant river, they streamed away down the sky, stretched a black pall as far as the eye could reach.” **(Excerpt 2, 1)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “Later that afternoon he and Ona went out to take a walk and look about them, to see more of this district which was to be their home. 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 and innumerable children you thought there must be a school just let out...” **(Excerpt 2, 2)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “The roadway was commonly several feet lower than the level of the houses, which were sometimes joined by high board walks; 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 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, fetid odor which assailed one’s nostrils, a ghastly odor, of all the dead things in the universe. It impelled the visitor to questions and then the resident would explain, quietly, that all this was ‘made land,’ and that it had been ‘made’ by using it as a dumping ground for the city garbage.” **(Excerpt 2, 3)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “In the first place as to the house they had bought, it was not new at all, as they had supposed; it was about fifteen years old, and there was nothing new upon it but the paint, which was so bad that it needed to be put on new every year or two. The house was one of a whole row that was built by a company which existed to make money by swindling poor people. The family had paid fifteen hundred dollars for it, and it had not cost the builders five hundred, when it was new….They used the very flimsiest and cheapest material; they built the houses a dozen at a time, and they cared about nothing at all except the outside shine.” **(Excerpt 2, 4)**

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)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “And now in the union Jurgis met men who explained all this mystery to him; and he learned that America differed from Russia in that its government existed under the form of democracy. The officials who ruled it, and got all the graft\*, had to be elected first; and so there were two rival sets of grafters, known as political parties, and the one got the office which bought the most votes. The ruler of the district was the Democratic boss, a little Irishman name Mike Scully. Scully held an important party office in the state, and bossed even the mayor of the city, it was said; it was his boast that he carried the stockyards in his pocket. He was an enormously rich man—he had a hand in all the big graft in the neighborhood. The newspapers had got hold of that story, and there had been a scandal; but Scully had hired somebody to confess and take all the blame, and then skip the country.” **(Excerpt 3, 3)**

\***graft**: gaining of money by dishonest, unfair, or illegal means especially through abuse of position in politics or business

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “The people of Chicago saw the government inspectors in Packingtown, and they all took that to mean that they were protected from diseased meat; they did not understand that these hundred and sixty-three inspectors had been appointed at the request of the packers, and that they 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, the whole force in Packingtown consisted of three henchmen of the local political machine!” **(Excerpt 3, 4)**

American Nightmare #4: Living as a New American

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “Such were the cruel terms upon which their life was possible, that they might never have nor expect a single instant's [break] from worry, a single instant in which they were not haunted by the thought of money….They would no sooner escape, as by a miracle, from one difficulty, than a new one would come into view. In addition to all their physical hardships, there was thus a constant strain upon their minds; they were harried all day and nearly all night by worry and fear. This was in truth not living; it was scarcely even existing, and they felt that it was too little for the price they paid. They were willing to work all the time; and when people did their best, ought they not to be able to keep alive?” **(Excerpt 4, 1)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “Here was a population, low-class and mostly foreign, hanging always on the verge of starvation, and dependent for its opportunities of life upon the whim of men every bit as brutal and unscrupulous as the old-time slave drivers; under such circumstances immorality was exactly as inevitable, and as prevalent, as it was under the system of chattel slavery. Things that were quite unspeakable went on there in the packing houses all the time, and were taken for granted by everybody; only they did not show, as in the old slavery times, because there was no difference in color between master and slave.” **(Excerpt 4, 2)**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair wrote, “Jurgis had come there, and thought he was going to make himself useful, and rise and become a skilled man; but he would soon find out his error--for nobody rose in Packingtown by doing good work. You could lay that down for a rule--if you met a man who was rising in Packingtown, you met a knave. That man who had been sent to Jurgis' father by the boss, he would rise; the man who told tales and spied upon his fellows would rise; but the man who minded his own business and did his work--why, they would "speed him up" till they had worn him out, and then they would throw him into the gutter. **(Excerpt 4, 3)**