Upton Sinclair, Jr. And The Jungle Essay, Research Paper

Upton Sinclair, Jr. & His Novel: The Jungle

1878 – 1968

Upton Sinclair, the man who grasped America by the stomach. His famous novel The Jungle showed how the Progressive Era was a time where the meat packaging wasn’t exactly the cleanest in Chicago. This is where the problem was brought up by Upton. In our essay we plan to discuss how The Jungle has goten its fame, before and after events all leading up to a conclusion of a bill, this law enforce stronger rules to inspect meat and to put all of the ingredients on a package label.

If we try to list the reasons why The Jungle has become a classic, we can show how much that fiction can become into a political reality factor. Historians also see The Jungle as one of the world’s best

expressions of fury over man’s cruelty to other men.

Upton Junior began his writing career as a college student. Before he was graduated from the City

College of New York in 1897, he had already sold many jokes and stories to newspapers and magazines. By the time he left graduate study at Columbia University in 1900, he had published ninety stories for magazines like Army and Navy Weekly. What turned Sinclair to more serious literature was an traumatic

religious experience. From his friendship with a young minister, Sinclair got a devotion to moral and social justice. The Reverend, W. W. Moir took the Gospels so seriously that he taught his students that a rich man had no chance of going to Heaven. When he gave Sinclair some works to read, Sinclair found them so contradictory to Moir’s teachings, he lost faith in orthodox religion, but for the rest of his life he did believe in the moral teachings of Jesus. From that point on his writing became highly serious and idealistic.

Now finally unto the interesting part. The Meat Cutters’ strike, 1904, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, with 56,000 members, demanded that the “Beef Trust” – Armour, Cudahy, Swift, and other great meat packing companies – grant a wage to all workers in all their plants throughout the country. The companies responded with an offer of a minimum wage for workers classified as skilled. The union saw this as a trick. They thought the companies would later “change” many skilled workers as unskilled. In July 1904,

packing-house workers struck in nine cities, 20,000 of them in Chicago alone. But the Trust imported strikebreakers and when the union established lines, the press reported that violence flared. The union soon exhausted its all money and the strike collapsed.

Upton Sinclair, who had followed the strike carefully in the newspapers, wrote an essay on the whole ordeal and that was published on many newspapers. He found it to be so interesting that he bought a patent to the book idea and decided to write about it. Sinclair’s research in Chicago. On his twenty-sixth birthday, September 20, 1904, Sinclair took a small room in Chicago’s Stockyards Hotel. For seven weeks he observed the life of the “wage slaves of the Beef Trust,” as he called them: “I sat at night in the homes of the workers . . . and they told me their stories . . . and I made notes. In the daytime I would wander about

the yards, and my friends would risk their jobs to show me what I wanted to see. I . . . found that by the simple device of carrying a dinner-pail I could go anywhere.”

What Sinclair discovered. Putting all his research together, Sinclair now had this picture of Chicago working-class life: Men, women, and children were forced to work at a furious pace, eleven or more hours a day, in cold, damp, unsanitary conditions, under the artificial stimulus of a “speed-up” system. Employers assumed no serious responsibility for injuries suffered on even the most dangerous jobs. Female employees were sexually harassed by bosses. When workers had organized to seek redress of their grievances, their union had been infiltrated by labor spies; when they had gone out on strike, the companies

had used illegal methods to break the strike.

The packers canned diseased meat and even decaying flesh; they used chemicals to doctor spoiled meat; they swept refuse and even rats, rat dung, and rat poison into the meat vats. They duped or bribed the

government inspectors who were supposedly on duty to prevent such practices.

In the introduction to the 1946 edition of The Jungle, Sinclair summed up his feelings in his most famous remark: “I aimed at the public’s heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach” In his Outpost, he says: “I am supposed to have helped clean up the yards and improve the country’s meat supply – though

this is mostly delusion. But nobody even pretends . . . that I improved the condition of the stockyards workers.”

Lyndon Johnson and Sinclair. On December 16, 1967, Sinclair again made the first page of The New York Times: Johnson Welcomes Upton Sinclair, 89, At Meat Bill Signing

As Max Frankel described the ceremony, the President had invited the novelist to “witness the signing of the Wholesome Meat Act,” which would gradually help this Federal meat inspection law.

In a wheelchair, attended by a nurse, daughter, and son-in-law, Mr. Sinclair stood with assistance through a special tribute to his own efforts at the start of the 20th century and shook hands after Mr. Johnson gave him one of the pens used in the signing. This was an author admired all over the world because of his ability to poke at America’s way of work. He then died 11 months later in November of 1968.