

The jungle essay

[Environment](#), [Nature](#)



The Jungle Throughout Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, the inhumane and disgusting treatment the working men and women was shown to the eyes of the American people. Although what the book is most recognized for is creating the Pure Food and Drug Act, an act that gave consumers protection from dangerous and impure foods, the many various horrors the lower working class had to go through was something that deserved more recognition. Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, gives an insight on how it was nearly impossible for someone of lower class to work and survive in the various big cities in America.

The Jungle is about a family from Lithuania who travels to America in hope of a better life. When they first arrive things immediately begin to go downhill. The first place they stop is a hotel, they stay for a night, but unfortunately are unable to read English and sleep there without knowing there will be a very large fine for their stay. "The law says that a rate card shall be on the door of a hotel, but it does not say that it shall be in Lithuanian." (23) The next morning they're devastated and quickly pay and leave, learning that the people in this country will do anything for a quick buck.

Soon they reach their destination, Chicago, and Jurgis and his family began to search for a home, and jobs. They buy a house, but soon find out there is a lot more to the house than what meets the eye, such as interest and the fact that the house is only rented until they can pay it off. After moving in Jurgis begins a job at the meat factory, and it was anything but pleasant. Jurgis' job is to sweep the entrails and calves from cows into a trapdoor in the floor. Many people are at risk of injury every day, working with sharp knives and there was always almost a foot of blood on the floor.

It is disgusting and horrible work, but Jurgis does it with a smile on his face because he thinks “ at least I have a job,” but as the story goes on, Jurgis’ opinion begins to change drastically. Jurgis’ father, Antanas wanted to get a job, and he finally did at the meat factory, as “ A squeedgie man. ” “ His job was to go about all day with a long handled mop, swabbing up the floor. ”(60) After one day he comes back complaining about how he had to clean out the trapdoors and then shove all the junk in with the rest of the meat!

HE also works with chemicals and they are very bad for him. “...he worked in a place where his feet were soaked in chemicals, and it was not long before they had eaten through his new boots. Then sores began to break out on his feet and grew worse and worse. ”(76) Soon he dies and the family must prepare a funeral for him, Jurgis can’t even find the time to grieve because he is too busy trying to barter the funeral man for a lower price. It is a horrible loss, and winter just continues to bring more hardships for the family.

First, with the horrible and huge quantities of snow, it is almost impossible to do the two mile trek every day to get to their job, but even when they get there the horrible conditions don’t end. “ There was no heat upon the killing beds; the men might exactly as well have worked out of doors all winter”... “ On the killing beds you were apt to be covered with blood, and it would freeze solid; if you leaned against a pillar, you would freeze to that, and if you put your hand upon the blade of your knife, you would run a chance of leaving your skin on it.

The men would tie up their feet in newspapers and old sacks, and these would be soaked in blood and frozen, and then soaked again, and so on, until by nighttime a man would be walking on great lumps the size of the feet of an elephant. Now and then, when the bosses were not looking, you would see them plunging their feet and ankles into the steaming hot carcass of the steer, or darting across the room to the hot-water jets.

The cruelest thing of all was that nearly all of them – 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. ” (80) The men had to work in those horrible conditions day after day until winter was over, but none of them would quit, they needed the money and if they quit or demanded better conditions, there were thousands outside just waiting to take their place.

Mister Sinclair shows that even though the working conditions were so dreadful, not one man would stop coming to work. They would rather risk dying in the factories, or dying from frostbite as they trekked through the snow than stop coming to work and allow someone else to take their job, because back then that was suicide. If you didn't go to work you were allowing your family the possibility of not being able to survive the winter, because it's just less money to fill more mouths. The horrible hardships the family faces in the winter is merely the beginning of their problems.

As the book goes on things seem like they're looking up, Ona has her baby, which they name Antanas, and the family is working hard to make money. Then Jurgis breaks his ankle and cannot return to work for months. “ in

leaping out of the way he turned his ankle. There was a twinge of pain, but Jurgis was used to pain, and did not coddle himself. When he came to walk home, however, he realized that it was hurting him a great deal; and in the morning his ankle was swollen out nearly double its size, and he could not get his foot into his shoe. (114) Jurgis is laid up for a couple weeks and tries to return to work, but in doing this he injures himself more and has to stay out of work for much longer and when he returns there is no job left for him. Jurgis faced many other hardships in his life, such as being put in jail, his wife dying in childbirth and his son dying as well. His story was horrific, but he was unfortunately, not alone. The horrible conditions Jurgis faced and went through were the problems of thousands of men, women and even children all over America in the early 1900s.

Upton Sinclair shines a bright light on how horrible the people had it and how the upper class people didn't even notice or care. The main issue was to generate as much product as they could for as small of a cost as possible. Then people from various countries didn't know anything about rights and things like they, they just craved any job they could get, no matter how bad. Many of their family members also died from work, or other things like starvation, childbirth or simply like Antanas died; by drowning in the rivers of water that flowed through the streets in the spring.

Mr. Sinclair did an amazing job giving the people insight on how horrible the conditions really were, although people mainly focused on the disgusting conditions of the meat packing industry. Upton Sinclair definitely focused on how horrible the lower class had it, but his horrific details about what is

really put into everyday meat, was quite disturbing and the people must have been more shocked about what they were putting into their mouths, than who was working to do it. The Jungle is a book about hardships, the American dream and the struggle for survival.

Jurgis was an example of what almost everyone who came over to America experienced. A lucky few went on to do great things, such as Andrew Carnegie, a man from Scotland who went on to create the largest steel factory in the world, but the latter ended up like Jurgis. Risking it all, and ending up with nearly nothing. Jurgis came over with ten people, and in the end there were five. Half of his family had died, and coping with it was hard, but in the end he decided to buck up, and try and make the best of it.

Upton Sinclair allows the human race to reflect on what is really important in life, by showing that there are people in this world who have to go through every day without knowing if they will make enough money to keep themselves and their family alive into tomorrow. He truly captured and chronicled how horrific and devastating the conditions back then really were, and being able to reflect on the things of the past can truly give insight for the future.