

Muckrakers in the progressive era

[Business](#)



A time of significant change in American history was the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution was from 1760 to 1840 and it began to introduce ways to mass produce different goods in assembly lines with the help of machines. Unfortunately, the economic, scientific, and technological advancements weren't the only effects of the Industrial Revolution.

Many aspects of life for factory workers such as tenements, working conditions, and unsafe food led to the time of change known as the Progressive Era. During the Progressive Era, one group that targeted change for these issues were muckrakers. Muckrakers were "reform minded" American journalists who attacked unjust and hazardous issues presented during the Progressive Era by exposing the true conditions of life in magazines and books. Two muckrakers who sought to shine light on current issues were Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair. One muckraker who exposed significant issues during the Progressive Era was Upton Sinclair. Sinclair became a novelist while working as a freelance journalist to make ends meet.

Whenever a newspaper needed an article, they would call him to do the job in exchange for compensation. His first literary success was his book 'The Jungle' which was about the appalling working environment of meatpackers. Sinclair took the path of socialism and believed that the greater community should control the means of production instead of private owners such as Rockefeller. In 1904, he was sent to Chicago to write a piece for Appeal to Reason newspaper about meatpacking conditions. He spent several weeks undercover working to expose the mistreatment of the workers. Sinclair

wrote of the acid used in the meat that wore away the skin of these mens' hands.

There were barely any men who operated with a knife and still had thumbs. Most had lumps of flesh used to help hold the knives. Hands were " criss crossed with cuts" so that you could no longer differentiate them from one another. Nobody had any nails because they had been worn off. These mens' knuckles were swollen to the point where their fingers " spread like a fan." The conditions of the meat was unsanitary and shameful.

Moldy sausage from Europe would be mixed with borax and glycerine to be mixed in with new meat and sent for consumption. Rooms were so dark that one couldn't see, and rats ran across the meat leaving dried manure on top. Workers for simply sweep it off the meat and keep going with their work. Meat was shoveled into rusty buckets, and one wouldn't remove a rat if he saw it. There was no water to wash your hands in, so the men washed them in the water that was added to the meat. The process referred to as " smoking the meat" too a long time, so the chemistry department would preserve sausage with borax and use gelatin and coloring to make it brown which would allow the company to charge more money per pound because of a " special process.

" Sinclair's novel ultimately changed the way people shopped for food. Jack London, a fellow writer, helped Sinclair publicize his book as well as translate it into 17 different languages. Within months, The Jungle became a massive best seller and President Theodore Roosevelt himself read the book cover to cover. The President invited Sinclair to the White House, and he ordered an

inspection of the meatpacking industry. As a result the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act were passed in 1906.

Because of the efforts of muckraker Upton Sinclair, the meatpacking conditions were forever changed. Another muckraker who created a significant impact in the Progressive Era was Ida Tarbell. As a child, Tarbell's father was an oil producer and refiner who was, like many people, negatively impacted by John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company because it forced smaller producers to sell only to Standard Oil, and those who didn't like Tarbell's father struggled greatly to keep their business running. Later in life, Tarbell worked at McClure's Magazine where she wrote many political articles, but Tarbell let her past guide her to her most successful writing, like many journalists seeking to condemn unfair situations and issues in the 1900s. She used her past experiences as a base to deeper investigation on Standard Oil Company and John D.

Rockefeller's business dealings. Tarbell wrote a 3 part series that eventually became a 19 part literary success titled, The History of the Standard Oil Company, which exposed the Company's suspicious and questionably legal practices as well as the terrible conditions of life left for the small oil businesses decades before Tarbell's book was published. Tarbell wrote about Rockefeller beginning to gather the oil markets one by one. In 1817 he first began to become an important factor in oil trade, while refined oil was going into every civilized country in the world. The market for oil had been built up for 10 years by men who had developed oil territory and who created processes for refining and transporting oil. All of America was buying refined oil for illumination.

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After the rise of Rockefeller, many refiners got agents to look out for markets while others sold to wholesale dealers or grocers. Rockefeller's business tried to replace independent agents by his employees and offering them jobs to steal the competition. Tarbell's investigative form of journalism became known as muckraking, and her efforts were essential to dismantling the "monster" created known as The Standard Oil Company in 1911. The company's actions were considered to be a violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act which was all about competition between companies. Tarbell's endless efforts to bring fairness among the competition of oil refiners, changed the quality of life for so many oil producers and refiners in America. The work of journalists Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair significantly impacted the condition of life for workers and business owners in America during the Progressive Era.

Ida Tarbell revolutionized the opportunity of work in the oil producing and refining markets. While Upton Sinclair permanently changed the work conditions of meatpackers and meat consumption in North America. These muckrakers help to pave the way to better, safer, and cleaner way of life for Americans today who wouldn't have gotten here without the hard work and dedication of people like Tarbell and Sinclair who devoted their life to making for a better tomorrow.