

The american dream in the jungle

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Many immigrants migrate to America everyday with the hopes to achieve their American dream. For most immigrants the American dream consist of finding a country where effort and morality transcend to success. In " The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair, a family of hard working optimistic Lithuanians migrate to America with the belief that equality and opportunity dictates that all people should have the same opportunities open to them if they put out efforts. They arrive to the US expecting to find a land of opportunity, freedom, and equality, and acceptance.

Instead they find a land where only crime, moral corruption and crookedness enables them to succeed. The hopes and dreams of these individuals are destroyed as they encounter a land of moral corruption, crime, exploitation and a life of depression and unhealthy daily labor that brings them physical and mental pain. Sinclair clearly shows that the American Dream is simply an illusion. The title of the book " The Jungle" creates an atmosphere of predators and prey like survival of the fittest. The predators being the criminals and the prey being the Rudkus family. The title of the book symbolizes how the lower class represented by the Rudkus family is being exploited or attacked by the capitalist society and how the country is turned into a jungle . Sinclair uses similes and metaphors to demonstrate the comparison between animals of the jungle and the people .

For example in chapter 15, when Jurgis finds out that Connor " the great beast" rapes Ona, Jurgis " eyes were wild and his hair flying, and he was breathing hoarsely like a wounded bull". Jurgis " sprang" into a room to find Connor, " his prey," and " sunk his teeth into the man's cheek, and when they tore him away he was dripping whit blood, and the little ribbons of skin

where hanging in his mouth” (Sinclair 162). Such imagery is portrayed through out the novel. Exploitation is foreshowed at the beginning of the story when Jurgis and Ona celebrate their wedding and the guest refuse to leavemoneyto pay for the wedding. Ona is concerned that they wont be able to pay for the expenses and that they will be in serious debt but Jurgis assures her that he will work harder and earn all the money back. Leave it to me, leave it up to me. I will earn more money-I will work harder” (Sinclair 21).

This quotation shows how in the beginning of the novel Jurgis is very optimistic, strong, determine, energetic and, devoted to his family and his new country, being unaware of how the system works. Even when the family tries to purchase their new home which is symbolize by what their American dream is, they get exploited by the real state agent. Grandmother Majauszkiene tells them “ You are all alike all the rest, they trick you and eat you alive. They never sell the house without interest. Get your deed, and see”(Sinclair 73). The tone of this quote also expresses the jungle atmosphere when she mentions how they are been tricked and eaten alive. Another individual that serves as an opposing force to the Rudkus family is Phil Connor.

He is Ona’s boss at the factory and represents the higher corrupt authority in Chicago. He also rapes and takes advantage of Ona by pushing her into prostitution and makes life harder for Jurgis and his family when he decides to put him in the blacklist, making it absurd for Jurgis to get a new job. He is clearly an example of someone who abuses his power over others for his

own personal profit It is an argument that its up to everyone to do whatever is in their power to be happy. By exploiting the Rudkus family the real estate agent was happy because his American dream is to sell and make as much profit as possible. But up to what extend is it fair to achieve one's American Dream? It is not fair to exploit other individuals in order to achieve onesgoalsand dreams. These people are coming to America unknowingly of how the system works blind to the ways of capitalism. For example, in chapter 3 Jurgis is portrayed as a naive individual that is not familiar on how the labor system works, he is overwhelmed with his new job that he doesn't understand Jokubus' cynicism when he cynically points out the signs posted that demand cleanliness, " That was why to Jurgis it seemed almost profanity to speak about the place as did Jokubas, skeptically".

Jurgis was grateful to have a job and that's all he knew at the time " to be given a place in it and a share in its wonderful activities was a blessing to be grateful for, as one was grateful for the sunshine and the rain" (Sinclair 43). Is not until later on when he starts to understand more and more about the bitterness he sees in his co-workers. Another form of exploitation that doesn't allow Jurgis and his family to achieve their American dream is the long hours of labor they must work in order to maintain the family alive. These unhealthy long hours of labor that they must work brings the family physical and mental pain. When Jurgis starts to work in the meat packing plant he is excited and happy to have a job, soon after he discovers that he is engaged in unfair labor activities as well as unsafe food handling. In chapter 11 Jurgis suffers from a terrible accident at work. The company doctor tells him that he'll be laid up for months with a severe ankle and foot injury.

The accident poses a terrible problem for the family. Without Jurgis' wages, they might starve. " It was dreadful that an accident of this sort, that no man can help, should have meant such suffering. The bitterness of it was the daily food and drink of Jurgis. It was of no use to them to try to deceive him, he knew as much about the situation as they did, and he knew that the family might literally starve to death" (Sinclair 120). Soon after Ona becomes terribly ill with a cough similar to the one that killed Dede Antana, she also becomes pregnant and not long after dies when giving birth. " They were beaten; they had lost the game, they were swept aside.

It was not less tragic because it was so sordid, because that it had to do with wages and grocery bills and rents. They had dreamed of freedom; of a chance to look about them and learn something; to be decent and clean, to see their child group up to be strong. And now it was all gone-it would never be! (Sinclair 163) Jurgis and his family have failed in the attempt to pursue the American dream because the wage slavery and unfair labor practices shatters every aspect of their lives. Not only does the unhealthy labor causes the family physical pain but also mental pain. For example Stanislovas, one of Elzbieta's children witnesses a little boy with severe frostbite to his ears that fall off when a man rubs them strongly to try to save them. After that, Stanislovas develops a phobia of the cold winter and throws a fit before work each day. He doesn't want to go out in the cold with the fear that his ears are going to fall off.

Also seeing how the food is processed becomes a sort of trauma for the characters. Sinclair uses symbolism to show how the torture of the pigs and

the meat is symbolic of the middle class. Workers get chewed up just like the meat. It is an argument that if one is working in a slaughterhouse one must have to be strong minded and expect to work with blood, and other bodily fluids that can cause effect. The problem with this argument is that at the cost of a whole factory staff only a few get to be happy, while those workers down on the killing floors are being hurt on a daily basis and get little to no pay. Ironically labor is suppose to be part of the American dream, immigrants travel to the country to find jobs to prosper and make money but in this case the hard long hours of work only corporate towards their family destruction. As the novel progresses the role of family diminishes as the characters become increasingly abuse and battered.

For example in chapter 13 Kristoforas, one of Elzbieta's children dies, Jurgis is more relief than sad because that only mean that there is one less mouth to feed. The only thing that concerns Jurgis is the expenses for the funeral since they have no money. " Kristoforas had howled his last howl. No one was really sorry about this except poor Elzbieta, who was inconsolable. Jurgis announced that so far as he was concerned the child would have to be buried by the city, since they had no money for a funeral" (Sinclair 134). At this point in the novel the main focus is survival and the desperate need for nourishment takes priority over compassion and love, as evidenced by Jurgis's beating Stanislovas when he doesn't want to go to work. The unity of the family is destroyed by thepoverty, a result of capitalist economics and it doesn't allow them to give affection to one another.

In chapter 10 it is evident that Ona and Jurgis don't have time for their newborn baby, " Jurgis had to go to sleep himself. Then in the morning there was no time to look at him, so really the only chance the father had was Sundays. This was more cruel yet for Ona, who ought to have stayed home and nursed the him, the doctors said for her own health as well as the baby's, but Ona had to go to work and leave him" (Sinclair 114) Jurgis and Ona aren't able to enjoy each other anymore, whenever they talk it is merely about their concerns and worries. " Talked they had only their worries to talk of- truly it was hard, in such a life, to keep any sentiment alive" (Sinclair 129). Ona doesn't feel love anymore by Jurgis, she is concerned that the misery is wearing out their love. She wondered if he cared for her as much as ever, if all this misery was not wearing out his love"(Sinclair 130). Sinclair shows how this family has been destroyed by the corruption and greed of others, the tone is very depressing and tragic.

In this point of the novel the characters have been consumed from head to toe by the oppression of their job, they don't even have energy to show emotions such as love, hate, or sadness. Jurgis is clearly a robot to the society that engages in a routine from home to work and back to home just to sleep. Jurgis and his family have become dehumanized and become more zombie like as they are described with intense imagery " Jurgis cant not stay angry. The poor fellow looked like a homeless ghost, whit his cheeks sunken in and his long black hair straggling into his eyes; he was too discourage to cut it, or think about his appearance. His muscles were wasting away, and what where left where soft and flabby. He had no appetite and they couldn't

not afford to tempt in whit any delicacies. It was better, he said, that he shouldn't not eat, it was saving.

" (Sinclair 127) Some people argue that if Jurgis and Ona never had a baby, the money being used for that baby could have been used for other purposes like food or toward their home. having children while having no money is bad. But being happy with the little bit of money they had, Ona and Jurgis didn't think it would be much of a problems In chapter 10 before Ona gets pregnant, the family has enough money to survive and even has money left to pay little by little his debts. During the early part of winter the family had had money enough to live and little over to pay their debts" (Sinclair 105). But Jurgis then gets injured and has no work. When he has no work there is no money flowing into the home, this causes despair and urgency. It was also part of their American dream, to have kids watch them grow and give them an education.

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The Jungle New York: Bantam Classic edition, 1906

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