

Good essay about the jungle: an analysis

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The Jungle by Upton Sinclair talks about the poor conditions of immigrant workers in the meat packing industry in Chicago. The place, aptly named Packingtown, is the area where the major meat packing companies were found. This is where Jurgis, his family, and his then girlfriend and later on wife's family migrated from Lithuania in hopes of a better life. Sinclair discusses in vivid details the hardships that the whole family went through in Chicago as their naivete as immigrants in a foreign country were played on and taken advantage by both the influential and the not so influential ones. However, through thorough investigation that exposed the wrongdoings committed against the poor unsuspecting immigrants, the novel inadvertently aroused outrage from the public upon learning of the unsanitary quality of meat that was sold in markets for public consumption. The issue that Sinclair wanted to portray, which is the harsh realities of the working class, and his goal to garner sympathy for the socialist viewpoints, was overshadowed by the public's furor over food production. In reaction, Sinclair was quoted saying, " I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach."

With the shift of attention towards the atrocities of meat production, the treatment of meatpacking workers discussed in the novel became obscure. People complained about the government's inadequacy in protecting the health of the public by maintaining sanitation standards in food production. In response, the government enacted the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, whose purpose was " to ban foreign and interstate traffic in adulterated or mislabeled food and drug products" (The Library of Congress). The law required that active ingredients be placed on the label of drug

packaging and that drugs should not be below the purity levels assigned by either The United States Pharmacopeia or The National Formulary (The Library of Congress). The U. S. Bureau of Chemistry was tasked by the government to take charge of the inspection of the products and report the offenders to prosecutors. More laws centered on safeguarding the health of the public followed.

“ The meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one – there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit.” (Sinclair ch14). This description of how meat was produced in Packingtown was among the most influential passages that attracted public attention. With this reality, regulation of meat production in the early 1900s, as well as today, was necessary. Regulating production of food and other consumer products will somehow guarantee that standards are being followed, thereby guaranteeing that the products are clean and safe for public consumption.

Although the issue of poor working conditions of the immigrants in Packingtown was obscured by the case in production, the reality of the said situation is not obliterated. Jurgis, his family, and all the other workers in the meat production companies were subjected to a cruel life that brought in cheap labor, a far cry from the decent and comfortable life that they were tricked to believe. Unfortunately, the harsh reality of poor working conditions continue to persist to this day. Multinational companies have been making the news in the past years for allegedly exacerbating poor working conditions in developing countries such as China and Cambodia. Factory

workers making iPads for Apple in China were said to be made to work excessively without a single day off during the week, housed in crowded dormitories, were made to stand for longer time that had their legs swelling and disabling them from walking after working for 24 hours, and exposed to dangerous chemicals (Duell). A similar scenario was also presented in a video in youtube, showing a Nike factory in Indonesia where workers receive 1. 25\$ everyday (Team Sweat). In July last year, the “deadliest disaster in the history of the garment industry” occurred in Bangladesh as a factory building collapsed, taking away the lives of more than 1, 000 people (Coffey Blog Kaleidoscope). Before the said disaster, two incidences of fire took place in Bangladesh, one in November of 2012 and another in early 2013, with casualties recorded to be more than 100.

Rana Plaza, an eight-storey building factory just outside Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, collapsed. The building was said to be housing several garment factories for European and Western retailers. McCarthy reported that it was the poor condition of the building that caused the tragedy, as it was built on marshy land, with its top three floors illegally added. Workers in the said building, mostly women in their early 20s, were said to be among workers receiving the lowest wages in the world, with most of them receiving a measly \$37 a month (McCarthy). Survivors of the tragedy lost family members, while some of the survivors were badly injured or with body parts decapitated. Until the disaster, workers’ rights activists have been relying on Western retailers and consumers to help the 4 million garment workers advance their demands for decent wages and safer working conditions. 2 ½ months after the tragedy, some 70 retailers, who are mostly Europeans,

signed an agreement that will facilitate independent inspections of factories and allocate budgets for fire and safety upgrades of factories.

This poor working condition has been collectively known as sweatshops, wherein workers are subjected to extreme exploitation (dosomething.org).

Sweatshops are said to be products of the global economy and “free” trade, wherein companies increase profits by minimizing production costs. In order to do so, big companies set up low-cost factories in places where labor is cheap and human rights protections are low (dosomething.org). To date, sweatshops are found in Central and South America, Asia, some regions in Europe, and even some in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

A large number of sweatshops are found in developing countries, and when the reality of the working conditions in such factories were exposed, people from developed countries started movements that aimed to boycott sweatshops. Activists sought to put a stop to sweatshops that endangered underage and underpaid workers. However, some economists pointed out to the necessity of sweatshops in modernization and development. Jeffrey D. Sachs of Harvard and Paul Krugman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology argued that sweatshops manufacturing goods like clothing and shoes for foreign markets help in the economic prosperity of developing countries. They explained that sustainable investment in low income countries will do a great deal in the said countries’ economic progress. Aside from the production facilities, sweatshops also provide developing countries with capital, transfer production technology, skills, capacity for innovation, better organizational and managerial practices, and access to some international marketing networks (Wong).

Ethical issues about sweatshops remain to be vague. Although people from developing countries may benefit from working there, these benefits will remain unattainable if improvements in the working conditions will remain constant. Workers should be paid accordingly, given off days, provided with better living and a chance to educate themselves. Perhaps the benefits of sweatshops will also be realized by Asian workers when they see and experience the fruits of their labor the same way the factory owners do. People from low-earning countries do not necessarily need the same amount that workers from developed countries earn for them to survive. Cost of living in developing countries are comparatively lower than in developed countries. Therefore, reasonable salary and better working conditions in safer environment would perhaps make the issue of sweatshops ethical. Workers in sweatshops also live in fear of the violent measures that they are being dealt with should they fail to conform with the rules. The youtube video posted by the researchers that compose the Sweat Team showed of how a union leader was threatened at gun point if he doesn't stop his campaign for increase wages. The few unions of factory in developing countries have been hoping for a long time for their voices to be heard. Instead, their demands are met with violence and punishments. Factory workers have been making the same demands for better working conditions and wages, demands that do not seem unreasonable considering the huge amount that major companies such as Nike give to its endorsers. Tiger Woods, for instance, earns in a second an amount " enough to buy a house" for a factory worker in Indonesia (Team Sweat). With the controversies surrounding this issue, as well as the tragedies that have resulted from this

atrocious business practice, quicker actions are called for in order to protect the lives of sweatshop workers.

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