

# Industrialization and the gilded age

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American Industrialization and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*: An Analysis *The Jungle* presents a story of poverty, exploitation of labor, and unfavorable working conditions that are often experienced by the working class during the Gilded Age. Moreover, the story centers on the effects of the Gilded Age on the economic and political system of America. The story also traces the life of Jurgis and his family as they strive to survive in the industrializing American economy, which brings out the disadvantageous effects of industrialization on the working class. Considering the events in the story, it can be said that although the Gilded Age contributes to the development of American industrialization, it also brings out the bitter circumstances of the working class. This idea is expressed in the life of Jurgis, and the lives of his family as characterized with constant work, not to live but only to survive. They signify the ones in the working class who are confronted with issues concerning unequal opportunities and labor exploitation.

As mentioned by Wasowski, *The Jungle* serves as Sinclair's commentary against Industrialization and Capitalism (n. pag.). In the story, the growth of public and private owned businesses creates a gap between employers and employees. The Gilded Age, the period after the Civil War and before the start of World War 1, drives economic and political change. For instance, as the Civil War had made the government more concerned about the people, the American government implemented the tenets of democracy more firmly during the previous years. Additionally, as America had already settled its internal political and civil conflicts, it took concern on economic expansion. The economic expansion in America during the Gilded Age created the working class, widened the gap between workers and employers, and spurred the development of American industrialization. In *The Jungle*, Sinclair

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establishes that the Gilded Age is the cause of the unfavorable working condition and unequal opportunities of the working class. Additionally, Sinclair implies that Industrialization and Capitalism can potentially deteriorate the basic American values (equality, independence, democracy). The Gilded Age contributes to the shift in ideals from cooperative alliance to competition among workers. Thus, Sinclair describes the working class in *Packington* as “ low class and mostly foreign, hanging always on the verge of starvation, and dependent for its opportunities of life upon the whim of men every bit as brutal and unscrupulous as the old-time slave drivers” (116-117). Although slavery is considered as a past trend in American society, the condition of workers during the Gilded Age was still similar to those of the slaves as they undergo the adverse effects of industrialization, which is labor exploitation due to limited working opportunities.

While the Gilded Age is influential in developing a more financially stable American economy today, it is also contributive to the growing gap between workers and employers. Today, as the rich becomes richer and the poor becomes poorer, one can only wish to eradicate the suppressing force that hinders the full potential of human beings, corruption. After reading *The Jungle*, I understood the role of the Gilded Age in the economic situation of the United States. I also understood the cause of the condition of the working class in the past and today.

#### Works Cited

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