

# The jungle by upton sinclair. book review

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## **The Jungle Book Review**

In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair weaves the plight of immigrant workers in the late 1800's into an emotionally compelling narrative that chronicles the hardships of a Lithuanian family that has just moved to Chicago. Sinclair uses the brutal and emotionally hard-hitting story of this family (which is mostly run by the patriarch, Jurgis) and the trials it faces as a tool by which to rationalize his socialist views and as a method by which to convince the reader of these views' correctness. Over the course of the novel, Sinclair highlights certain portions of capitalist philosophy that he believes are inhumane or ironic, and he depicts capitalism to be an evil that leeches off of Jurgis and his family. By unearthing the inherent problems in American capitalism, Sinclair effectively defaces the pompous idea of the 'American dream' of the 1800's, replacing it with a sense of skepticism towards the American capitalist system.

Sinclair opens the story with the wedding feast of two central characters, Ona and Jurgis. From the start, the evils of the American system can be seen; in the opening pages of the book, Sinclair describes 'leeches' at the wedding feast, saying that these immoral people came to the feast, ate, and left without giving back. He blatantly blames this on the unfairness of the American system, saying that "since they [Ona, Yurgis, and their family] had come to the new country, all this was changing", with the word "this" referring to the good-heartedness that was present in Lithuania, but absent in America (17). As the story progresses, Sinclair tears down the seemingly perfect idea of the American dream piece by piece. He highlights the irony of the "realization of triumph [that] swept over" Jurgis upon getting a job by <https://assignbuster.com/the-jungle-by-upton-sinclair-book-review/>

immediately following it with gruesome descriptions of the working conditions at Packingtown (34). Soon after this, Sinclair clearly articulates his thesis through Tamoszius Kuszleika's comment about the omnipresent and ubiquitous nature of corruption in a capitalist society. In this seemingly methodical way, Sinclair sheds light on his contentions with capitalism, and he concludes by offering his alternative; socialism. The last three chapters are largely a method by which Sinclair propagandizes his views, abandoning the narrative and offering his solution to the problems he has previously explored.

While *The Jungle* effectively does its job in bringing the problems of corruption and sanitation in the workplace to light, it contains more than a few flaws in terms of its usefulness as an all-encompassing account of the labor front in the late 1800's. The roots of the narrative's bias can be traced to its purpose; Sinclair, in writing the book, tries to convince the reader of the evils of capitalism and the beauty of socialism, and he does this by using the harsh story of Jurgis' family as a way to appeal to the reader's emotions. This very nature of the book as a method of political propaganda renders a bias inevitable; the fact that it was written as a political weapon rather than a historical account of a time period guarantees that one side of the argument will be glorified and the other will be ignored. Therefore, when reading *The Jungle*, the reader is, by design, only exposed to the immigrant's side of the story and no one else's. Furthermore, one must ultimately treat Sinclair's writing with skepticism, as the narrative is a work of fiction. Even though he uses legitimate evidence in order to construct his story, one must realize that ultimately, Sinclair is trying to convince the reader of a certain

view, and that he has employed the use of fiction in many parts of the book. While the narrative does expose many horrific, sometimes hard-to-digest truths about the evils of capitalism, in the end, its form and function take away from its value as a complete historical account, as it fails to give the reader a complete and overall historical truth.