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Sinclair, Upton

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American novelist, essayist, journalist, and social economic reformer, Upton Beall Sinclair, Jr. (1878–1968) was born in Baltimor, Maryland. After graduating from the City College of New York in 1897, he studied for a time at Columbia University. In 1933, he was a candidate of the Democratic Party for governor of California. He became popular in the first half of the 20th century, earning fame for his classic muckraking novel *The Jungle* (1906). He published more than 50 books in his lifetime. Besides politics and social writing, he was interested in occult phenomena and experienced with telepathy. *Mental Radio* (1930) was a book about his wife's telepathic experiences.

While living in California, Sinclair founded the American Civil Liberties Union and ran for Congress—in 1920 for the House of Representatives, and in 1922 for the Senate. Although he was an unsuccessful political leader, Sinclair's platforms—the End of Poverty in California (EPIC)—was a successful movement of his time. During the Great Depression, a large number of people from the southern and Great Plains migrated westward. Sinclair's plan to end poverty was a controversial issue, as the conservatives considered his proposal a communist takeover. From the mid-1930s, Sinclair abandoned politics and returned to writing. He wrote a series of 11 novels with a central character named Lanny Budd from 1940 to 1953. In this series, Sinclair highlighted socioeconomic classes and political history of the Western world.

The Jungle

In *The Jungle*, Sinclair criticized the social and economic conditions of the early 20th century and focused mainly on his views of the injustices of capitalism and the severe impacts of poverty during the Great Depression. *The Jungle* was based on his investigation that exposed the unsanitary conditions in the U.S. meatpacking industry as well as the inhumane conditions. Before writing this novel, Sinclair disguised himself and worked nine weeks as a packing-house employee in the meatpacking industry to collect material for the book.

The following passage from *The Jungle* describes the sorry state of the fertilizer men in Chicago:

Worst of any, however, were the fertilizer men, and those who served in the cooking rooms. These people could not be shown to the visitor—for the odor of a fertilizer man would scare any ordinary visitor at a hundred yards, and as for the other men, who worked in tank rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard!

Sinclair vividly portrayed the poor working conditions and the low quality of food that threatened the health and well-being of the public in *The Jungle*. This novel is centered on the lives of Jurgis Rudkus and Ona Lukosaitis, who immigrate from Lithuania to an area of Chicago known as Packington. Packington is described as the center of the Lithuanian immigration and of Chicago's meatpacking industry. In this dangerous and filthy place, Jurgis is forced to work in an unheated slaughterhouse in the cold winter season. Angered by his workplace conditions, Jurgis joins a union and begins to understand the political corruption and bribery that makes Packington run. Although the book's conclusion functions as an argument for socialism, this is a story that depicts the lives of the inhumane, the unjust, and the violent social and economic system that was an outcome of unbridled capitalism.

In the history of corporate crime in America, Sinclair and other muckraking journalists focused on contemporary scandals such as the poor sanitation in food-processing plants, the large-scale adulteration of meat products, and the false claims of medicine advertisements, leading to massive public outrage. Sinclair's writing drew the attention of the government as well as the public. Sinclair's *The Jungle* not only caused a public uproar, but President Theodore Roosevelt also read it and invited Sinclair to the White House to discuss the Chicago working situations of immigrants depicted in his novel. Sinclair contributed in the formulation of two powerful legislations, the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 and the Meat Inspection Act of the same year.
Although his critics called Sinclair hysterical, unbalanced, and untruthful, he is a noted author, and his book *Dragons' Teeth* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1943. Some of his popular works are *Sylva* (1913), *Wide Is the Gate* (1943), and *O Shepherd, Speak!* (1949). His classic books are widely taught in schools and colleges today. Among his most influential books, *The Jungle*, *The Wet Parade*, and *The Gnomobile* were adapted for films.

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*See Also:* Capitalism; Food and Drug Administration; U.S. Food Fraud; Industrial Revolution; Labor Crime; Meat Inspection Act; Pure Food and Drug Act; Roosevelt, Theodore; Unions; Unsafe Working Conditions; Workplace Deaths.

**Further Readings**


### Identity Theft and Mortgage Fraud

Prior to their arrest in March 2004, Small and five other Denver metro residents began posting help wanted advertisements on job Web sites such as Monster.com and in local newspapers, seeking account representatives for a mortgage company known as Amerifunding that was owned by Small. Promising salaries over $100,000, Small and his associates lured potential job seekers to their Westminster, Colorado, office, where they asked applicants to fill out job applications as well as provide their social security cards and driver’s licenses. Small and his associates then proceeded to falsify mortgage applications for the individuals they interviewed and used the money obtained from the falsified mortgage loans for their own personal benefit. The case was investigated by both the Internal Revenue Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Prior to his arrest and subsequent indictment, assets obtained by Small through his mortgage scheme—including 15 houses in Colorado and Nevada, luxury cars including a Lexus and a Jaguar, and over $8 million in cash and bank accounts—were seized by authorities.

Small did not commit the crime of mortgage fraud alone. Several associates participated in the crime and were similarly charged and convicted.

Small’s wife, Kelli, was sentenced to five years probation and 160 hours of community service for her part in the mortgage fraud scheme. Robert Bickel was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison and ordered to pay restitution of $140,800 to Washington Mutual Bank and restitution of over $2 million to various other victims. Robert Sigg and Charles Winnett were sentenced to time served while awaiting trial, and 54 months in prison, respectively. Sigg was also ordered to pay restitution to Washington Mutual, and Winnett was ordered to pay restitution to Flag Star Bank and Impac Warehouse Lending Group. Chad Heinrich received a 28-month sentence in federal prison and was ordered to pay restitution to Flag Star Bank and Impac Warehouse Lending Group as well. Finally, Harry Lou Gayre was charged and later pleaded guilty to filing a false tax return. Information on his sentence was unavailable.

### Greater Consequences

At the time, the mortgage fraud perpetrated by Gerald P. Small and his associates was the largest