

Progressive Era

Muckrakers



People that helped bring reform issues to the attention of the American public.

Name: _____

Upton Sinclair

- 1) In what year or time period was this individual influential?
- 2) What issues did this person bring to the attention of the American public? How did they do it?
- 3) Why was this individual considered a Muckraker?
- 4) What long-term impact was a result of this person's influence?

Station 1: Jacob Riis

- 1) In what year or time period was this individual influential?
- 2) What issues did this person bring to the attention of the American public? How did they do it?
- 3) Why was this individual considered a Muckraker?
- 4) What long-term impact was a result of this person's influence?

Station 2: Lincoln Steffens

- 1) In what year or time period was this individual influential?
- 2) What issues did this person bring to the attention of the American public? How did they do it?
- 3) Why was this individual considered a Muckraker?
- 4) What long-term impact was a result of this person's influence?

Station 3: Ida Tarbell

- 1) In what year or time period was this individual influential?
- 2) What issues did this person bring to the attention of the American public? How did they do it?
- 3) Why was this individual considered a Muckraker?
- 4) What long-term impact was a result of this person's influence?

Station 4: Frank Norris

- 1) In what year or time period was this individual influential?
- 2) What issues did this person bring to the attention of the American public? How did they do it?
- 3) Why was this individual considered a Muckraker?
- 4) What long-term impact was a result of this person's influence?

Modern Day Muckraker

Directions: You are a modern day muckraker. What social or political issue do you need to expose to the public? Express your opinion(s) through image (photojournalism) or text (magazine article or book).

Muckraker: Upton Sinclair

The Jungle

1905

“There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it.”

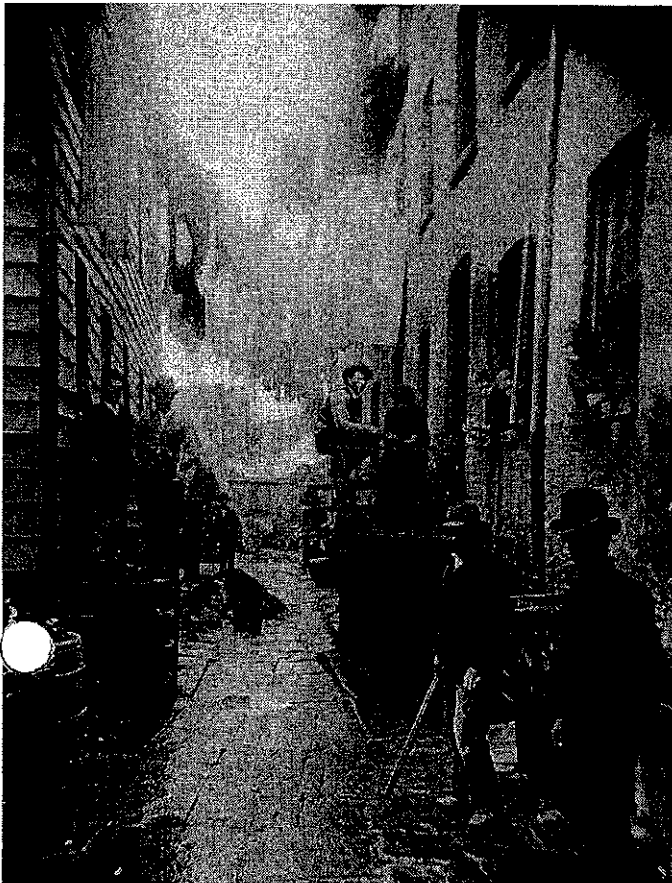
“the meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one—there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit. There was no place for the men to wash their hands before they ate their dinner, and so they made a practice of washing them in the water that was to be ladled into the sausage.”

Muckraker: Jacob Riis

How the Other Half Lives

1890

“Be a little careful, please! The hall is dark and you might stumble over the children pitching pennies back there. Not that it would hurt them; kicks and cuffs are their daily diet. They have little else. Here where the hall turns and dives into utter darkness is a step, and another, another. A flight of stairs. You can feel your way, if you cannot see it... That short hacking cough, that tiny, helpless wail--what do they mean? They mean that the soiled bow of white you saw on the door downstairs will have another story to tell-- Oh! a sadly familiar story--before the day is at an end. The child is dying with measles. With half a chance it might have lived; but it had none. That dark bedroom killed it.”





Muckraker: Lincoln Steffens

The Shame of the Cities

Perhaps the most influential of the muckrakers was Lincoln Steffens. Steffens' articles were published in McClure's magazine in 1902 and 1903 and then collected in *The Shame of the Cities*, published in 1904.

As an editor of *McClure's Magazine*, he began a series of articles on corruption in various American cities entitled "The Shame of St. Louis," "The Shame of Minneapolis," and so on, which portrayed a pattern of shocking corruption in municipal government throughout the country.

The publication of Steffen's articles, in conjunction with the first chapters of Ida Tarbell's exposé of the Standard Oil Company, led to a sharp climb in *McClure's* circulation, and soon many other magazines were competing to boost their circulations by exposing the ills of American government. This type of writing was derided by President Theodore Roosevelt as "muckrake" journalism, and the term stuck.

Steffen's series, published as *The Shame of the Cities* (1904), became a best seller. Its popularity was well deserved, for Steffens's work stood far above most of the other muckraking exposés of municipal corruption in terms of both literary style and intellectual perception. He was not interested in merely exposing corrupt bosses. Indeed, his affection for many of those colorful characters shows through in his work. He wanted to expose the pattern of corruption and the real villains, the supposedly respectable, honest businessmen whose bribes and greed fueled the whole system.

"Now, the typical American citizen is the business man. The typical business man is a bad citizen; he is busy. If he is a "big business man" and very busy, he does not neglect, he is busy with politics, oh, very busy and very businesslike. I found him buying hoodlars in St. Louis, defending grafters in Minneapolis, originating corruption in Pittsburgh, sharing with bosses in Philadelphia, deploring reform in Chicago, and beating good government with corruption funds in New York. He is a self-righteous fraud, this big business man. He is the chief source of corruption, and it were a boon if he would neglect politics. But he is not the business man that neglects politics; that worthy is the good citizen, the typical business man. He too is busy, he is the one that has no use and therefore no time for politics. When his neglect has permitted bad government to go so far that he can be stirred to action, he is unhappy, and he looks around for a cure that shall be quick, so that he may hurry back to the shop."

Ida Tarbell

History of Standard Oil Company

1904

At the age of 14, Ida Tarbell witnessed the Cleveland Massacre, in which dozens of small oil producers in Ohio and Western Pennsylvania, including her father, were faced with a daunting choice that seemed to come out of nowhere: sell their businesses to the shrewd, confident 32 year-old John D. Rockefeller, Sr. and his newly incorporated Standard Oil Company, or attempt to compete and face ruin. She didn't understand it at the time, not all of it, anyway, but she would never forget the wretched effects of "the oil war" of 1872, which enabled Rockefeller to leave Cleveland owning 85 percent of the city's oil refineries.

Almost 30 years later, Tarbell would redefine investigative journalism with a 19-part series in *McClure's* magazine, a masterpiece of journalism and an unrelenting indictment that brought down one of history's greatest tycoons and effectively broke up Standard Oil's monopoly. By dint of what she termed "steady, painstaking work," Tarbell unearthed damaging internal documents, supported by interviews with employees, lawyers and—with the help of Mark Twain—candid conversations with Standard Oil's most powerful senior executive at the time, Henry H. Rogers, which sealed the company's fate.

"Take Standard Oil Stock," Rockefeller told them, "and your family will never know want." Most who accepted the buyouts did indeed become rich. Franklin Tarbell resisted and continued to produce independently, but struggled to earn a decent living. His daughter wrote that she was devastated by the "hate, suspicion and fear that engulfed the community" after the Standard Oil ruckus.

"But one of Mr. Rockefeller's most impressive characteristics is patience. "You must put in, if you would take out." His instinct for the money opportunity in things was amazing, his perception of the value of seizing this or that particular invention, plant, market, was unerring. He was like a general who, besieging a city surrounded by fortified hills, views from a balloon the whole great field, and sees how, this point taken, that must fall; this hill reached, that fort is commanded. And nothing was too small: the corner grocery in Browntown, the humble refining still on Oil Creek, the shortest private pipe line. Nothing, for little things grow."

Frank Norris

The Octopus

Frank Norris, (1870-1902), was an American novelist and journalist and a leader of the Naturalism movement. Norris believed that a novel should serve a moral purpose. "The novel with a purpose," he explained, "brings the tragedies and griefs of others to notice" and "prove(s) that injustice, crime, and inequality do exist."

Norris planned a three-novel series called EPIC OF THE WHEAT to tell about the production, distribution, and consumption of wheat in the United States. THE OCTOPUS (1901) dramatizes how a railroad controlled a group of California wheat farmers. The book emphasizes the control of "forces," such as wheat and railroads, over individuals or even groups of individuals.

Then, faint and prolonged, across the levels of the ranch, he heard the engine whistling for Bonneville. Again and again, at rapid intervals in its flying course, it whistled for road crossings, for sharp curves, for trestles; ominous notes, hoarse, bellowing, ringing with the accents of menace and defiance; and abruptly Presley saw again, in his imagination, the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon; but saw it now as the symbol of a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path; the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus.