

Machete: Finding Sinclair's *Jungle* in History**Adam Tenhouse**

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at Loyola University Chicago

INTRODUCTION

During my years at Liberty Schools in Liberty, Illinois, Sinclair's *The Jungle* was highlighted several times in junior high and high school history class. The textbooks' included extracts made the class retch and it was quickly (and gratefully) forgotten as we read further into the relevant chapter. My mother's introduction with the subject material is significantly greater: she toured the Union Stockyards before their closure in 1971¹ (Bass) as part of a 4-H tour and her English coursework in high school in 1960's Champaign included reading and analysis of *The Jungle*. It could be said *The Jungle* was a core text at her high school 50 years ago and a historical 'footnote' at mine circa 2005. Was this a typical trend for *The Jungle*? This question became "has this 'footnote' always been included in history texts for juvenile audiences, and how has it changed?"

After a preliminary reading of surviving texts since the 1960's, most allusions to *The Jungle* (and sometimes actual footnotes) are couched in the context of the relevant chapter which may encompass 20th century industrialization or an overview of Theodore Roosevelt's term as President. Liberty School's text used from 2004 to 2008 firmly linked the public outcry from the novel's accusations with the subsequent passage of 1906's Meat Inspection Act, but

¹ (Orr)

was this always the case? Was this true for most or all school textbooks since 1905? The questions deepened.

Several books tackle the differences between one era's idea of "history" and another. One contemporary example is Kyle Ward's "Not Written in Stone: Learning and Unlearning American History through 200 years of text books." Each chapter includes extracts from history textbooks published in different decades or by different publishers and presents these extracts for the reader to interpret through contrast, drawing study questions for students or interested historians.² Ward does not include Sinclair or his *Jungle* as a subject to contrast. Ward does however evince multiple occasions of drastically different narratives of a single event over time.

While Ward does not present a reason for these changes over time, Ravitch does in *The Language Police*. Ravitch states, "With few exceptions, textbooks have multiple authors, multiple editors, and multiple consultants."³ This alone might imply a textbook is directed by a wide range of researchers to produce the most accurate historical narrative possible, Ravitch makes clear throughout the chapter "The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoptions" this is not necessarily the case. She wields the anecdote of California's revamp of the historical-social studies curriculum in 1985 to assert NGO's and special interest groups influence a state's framework for 'acceptable' history textbooks, and further extends this was the case for Houghton-Milton, the publisher that adopted California's new guidelines circa 1989. Relevant to this project's search for a mention of Sinclair, Polish-American interest groups lobbied

² (Ward)

³ (Ravitch 102)

successfully for California history courses to expressly mention Polish Christians as targets and victims of the Holocaust at the tenth-grade level.⁴ It is possible the omission, mention, and context of Sinclair and *The Jungle* in a given publication were similarly influenced.

This possibility may exist for books dating from 1889 to 1913 on. Kansas, Ohio, Indiana and California passed legislation to adopt textbooks on the state level.⁵ Instead of meeting a given district's demands, after state-wide adoption legislation they grappled with either a state committee's decisions or the parameters defined in relevant state laws. Ohio also began to require textbooks be adopted for a five year cycle in 1905. Though not all efforts are analogous to California's social studies retooling in 1985, the modern state adoption standards were in place in several areas by *The Jungle*'s publication, and prior to any history text mentioning it.⁶

With the knowledge simple mention and narrative can and do change, this project then seeks the mention of Sinclair, *The Jungle*, and their given context in juvenile classroom textbooks and changes to those attributes over time. During due diligence search no other project was found with this goal. This project seeks something novel, and may illuminate how elastic 20th century American History narratives have been – and remain today. It should be of interest to anyone who has read an American history textbook, as they are often seen as monolithic, or simply 'up to date' – not an amalgam of various interests or significantly revised.

⁴ (Ravitch 99)

⁵ Illinois has not adopted a statewide textbook standard, which helps explain why my mother's English and history texts were different from mine. An informal discussion with my high school history teacher suggests my district also allows teachers to choose their own textbooks.

⁶ (Nelson 189)

PROJECT DESIGN

To determine at what point *The Jungle* was first mentioned, whether it was consistently mentioned, and if the context of those mentions was altered since 1905, it is necessary to survey a sample of surviving history textbooks for school children from 1905 to roughly the present. After deliberation the end year was placed at 1999, as the great majority of texts found throughout the 1990's and beyond were extremely consistent in mention and surrounding context. This project focuses on changes and although an 'island of stability' is significant, surveying an "additional" fifteen-year sample (1999 to 2014) with little variation would be onerous.

Though the majority of sampled texts in the survey are classroom primary and secondary textbooks, the inclusion of popular histories for a juvenile audience greatly expanded the range of contexts and mentions of *Jungle* for juvenile audiences. Examples of these texts include Asimov's 1977 *The Golden Door*, which mentions both Upton Sinclair and *The Jungle* and gives allusion of the writing process behind the novel, "Upton Sinclair had lived in the stockyards district for seven weeks" and its intent as "it was set against the background of the Chicago stockyards and was intended to arouse sympathy for the suffering workers."⁷ Seldom few classroom texts include any of *Jungle's* authorial intent, but instead focus on the public outrage following its publication. *Golden Door* notably contrasts with Heath publisher's 1977 *We The People: A History of the United States'* lack of mention of Sinclair. While Bidna encapsulates "Congress passed a law to stop the sale of food and drugs that might harm

⁷ (Asimov 164)

people's health,"⁸ Asimov goes into detail on muckrakers and their impact in American civil life. These and other contrasts lend the impression classroom texts are designed for overview to conform to state or local standards with minimal difficulty and cost while juvenile-market history texts can and often do explore history in greater depth.

Sourcing was a concern. There is no exhaustive online corpus for juvenile textbooks between 1905 and present. The catalog at Chicago's Center for Research Libraries include such texts, but due to CRL guidelines full texts are only digitized as-needed for researchers, and so its entire selection was insufficient to cover the project's scope. Similarly HathiTrust and the Internet Archive had certain digitized full texts, but did not cover all decades. Given these conditions, the project incorporates existing online texts from these and other sources and newly digitized material from Chicago area libraries. Though it is technologically feasible to scan all pages in every given physical selection, the time necessary was difficult to accommodate. Full text scanning could be interpreted as a violation of academic Fair Use in practice, which usually covers extracts of a chapter or less. To minimize legal risk, only relevant sections and front and rear material were scanned by project researchers.⁹

These real-life sources included Loyola's Cudahy and Lewis Tower libraries, Northwestern University's libraries, the Evanston Public Library on Orrington, and the Center for Research Libraries' physical stacks. Many texts were requested via interlibrary loan and delivered to Cudahy Library, and include libraries including the University of Michigan and the

⁸ (Bidna 365)

⁹ At time of writing principal research staff included one (1) graduate DH student.

University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

Physical copies were scanned to PDF or TIFF format depending on the requirements of the OCR solution. Notably Northwestern's resources included a book edge scanner on each floor as well as a Book-Eye scanner in the "collaboration" center on the first floor of Deering Tower, and included export to 400-DPI grayscale TIFF files. This affordance was especially helpful for later optical character recognition work, as many suites do not accept low-resolution JPEG or PNG files. Loyola's Cudahy Library is home to multifunction traditional Ricoh photocopiers with similar export options. This was somewhat different from a book edge scanner and presented problems, including shadows at the point of book binding when the book is pressed against a flat scanning surface. These challenges were largely overcome from previous experience with data entry and book scanning on a similar EPSON flatbed, but a book-edge scanner is recommended for those with less experience or project time.

Both the manually scanned texts and those sourced from online repositories were placed in a folder, and then sorted into subfolders named with the text's year, author, and title. While tagging is possible in Windows 7, not every user accessing these resources may have an operating system which supports the Windows meta-tagging schema. It is also possible this meta-tagging system will not be supported in the future, leaving the index and insights inaccessible to 'stock' Windows users. In the interest of 'future proofing' and greater accessibility across operating systems and platforms, this file structure remained for the duration of the project.

After sourcing and allocating it into the proper subfolder, the file was edited in Adobe

Acrobat Pro IX including page rotation, cropping, and image cleanup. Subsequently the edited file was passed through ABBYY Fine Reader 12 for optical character recognition as well as transcription to RTF. After processing, every subfolder includes a searchable PDF transcription of the relevant text. The transcription and optical character recognition results from ABBY were significantly better than OCR results from Adobe Acrobat Pro IX.

Data integrity and backup were also considered. While it is that the solid state drive, traditional hard drive, and portable 32-gigabyte flash drive would all fail or be erased, the loss of several months' worth of scans, research notes, and ancillary material would be to recoup. Due to budget constraints only low-cost solutions were considered. Final project design includes the use of Backblaze hard drive mirroring and Dropbox backup for the 'Project Files' folder. Public access of the project corpus could be served using Dropbox's sharing feature. Current projected backup costs amount to five dollars per month for Backblaze, and was absorbed at personal cost.

Presentation of the material is paramount to the project. The project includes an online and accessible component or "companion site" as a core expectation of a Digital Humanities final project. The site aims to showcase all extracts scanned by the principal research staff, links to full texts available via CRL and HathiTrust, and a chronological timeline to display all cited works. Like many digital humanities 'knowledge sites' it aims to make the materials easily available for interested people to read and draw their own conclusions. While certain copyright concerns may hinder the public availability of the site, it will use a working eighth grade American English vocabulary and "pretty" design assets. The project site is based on a Zend 2-

like framework developed in DIGH 402 utilizing PHP, HTML5 and CSS3. To make book scans more accessible and legible, accessible content will include a simple PDF viewer as well as a simple transcript and RTF form in “split screen” view. An annotated bibliography with all referenced books will be included, as well as a copy of this companion paper.

FINDINGS

There are certain historical events often linked to the publication of Upton Sinclair’s novel when included in a history textbook. In brief, as alluded to in Asimov’s *Golden Door*, Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* and included fictional characters struggling with the difficulty unsanitary conditions in the animal stockyards and meat packing facilities in Chicago and other cities. The novel was published in 1906. The Meat Inspection Act was passed in 1906 requiring regular inspections of meatpacking facility conditions. In virtually all contemporary examples, the public response to the conditions outlined in *The Jungle* is credited with Congress’ passage of the Act. This model is to be used as a metric to determine what, if any, changes have been made to the narrative in the context of any mention of *The Jungle*.

I began this project with the impression all mentions of *The Jungle* would include such a summary of the above events, and the first mention would follow shortly after Jungle’s publication in 1906. It was felt the greatest difficulty would lie in determining when the textbooks began to mention *The Jungle* or Sinclair at all. That was a significant hurdle; publications as recent as 1919 such as McLaughlin’s *History of the American Nation* made no mention of Upton Sinclair, his book, or the Meat Inspection Act. If the stockyards and *The Jungle* were so important -- and the state of affairs in Chicago was so heinous Congress needed

to take action -- why was it omitted from history books over a decade later?

Fourteen years was the smallest gap in the survey found between the publication of the book in 1906 and the explicit mention of Upton Sinclair and *The Jungle* in a juvenile history textbook. The mention found in 1920's Haworth's text *The United States In Our Own Times, 1865-1920*. The book was published in New York by C Scribner's Sons, established that same year. Even this earliest mention modifies the simple formulation of "Sinclair-Jungle-Outrage-Act" with its presentation of Roosevelt as another actor. As it states:

"In *The Jungle* Upton Sinclair exposed the disgusting horrors of Chicago meatpacking plants. The craze for such literature went so far that it became a sort of hysteria and Roosevelt himself sought to put a halt to indiscriminate abuse. Taking his example from Bunyan's "man with the muck-rake," he made a speech urging that efforts be turned from destruction to construction. Thereafter writers who stood business and political cesspools were popularly known as "muck-rakers"."¹⁰

Haworth goes on to say:

"The publication of Upton Sinclair's book, above referred to, did much to bring the agitation to a crisis, and the influence of the President and the pressure of public opinion forced Congress in 1906 to enact sweeping legislation providing for rigorous inspection of meatpacking plants engaged in interstate business, and for

¹⁰ (Haworth and Worth 326-27)

the proper labeling of books and drugs in interstate trade, and prohibiting the use of dangerous preservatives.”¹¹

This 1920 text lends the impression that no one actor was responsible for the passage of either the Meat Inspection Act or the Pure Food and Drug Act. It was a combination of pressure from the public, pressure from Roosevelt, and similar interest in drug purity which led the U.S. Congress to vote in the bills’ favor.

Though brief, this is one of the few clear (although not exhaustive) illustrations of the phenomenon surrounding the bills’ passage in Congress for several decades. It stands as one of the sole mentions of Upton Sinclair and the passage of the bills in a single section before World War II. Future volumes including whole Hulbert’s *United States history* in 1923 (published by Doubleday in Garden City, NY) extend the belief that Upton Sinclair was an agent of positive agitation, but it separates *Jungle* from the Meat Inspection Act and Roosevelt’s response to Sinclair’s accusations by several pages. Hulbert colorfully states “[people like Upton Sinclair] contributed their bit toward making the methods of oil, railway, and packing house trust the stench that arose to Heaven.”¹² Other books which take mention of both *The Jungle* and subsequent passage of the Act but do not couple the two include Macmillan’s 1944 *The Making of Civilization*, which takes pains to mention the passage of the Act and Upton Sinclair in separate sections.¹³

It was startling to discover a wide variety of material through 1954 which present

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹² (Hulbert 498)

¹³ (Beard)

silence on Sinclair and the Jungle *as well as* Chicago meatpacking at all despite addressing industrialization and wider social impact, many books fail to mention. One such example is *History of Young America* authored by Ralph Cordier, published by Rand McNally in 1954. Notably it also fails to mention President Roosevelt, without inclusion in the book's index.

When not wholly silent, many textbooks before 1954 dodge any mention of Sinclair while still addressing the meat packing legislation. Indeed many times the Meat Inspection Act of 1906 either directly or obliquely without rationale for why the law was felt necessary. One such example is 1948's *Freedom's Frontier: A History of Our Country*, noting that before 1906, "some meats and canned goods were preserved with a poisonous chemical called formaldehyde."¹⁴ Many times this is alluded to as a Roosevelt-administration reform, such as Macmillan's 1921 *History of the United States*¹⁵ or simply stated Roosevelt passed laws preventing people from consuming "bad food or drugs" as in Macmillan's 1952 *The Story of American Freedom*.¹⁶ This simplification may be best evinced in *Our America: A Textbook for Elementary School History* by Bobbs-Merrill in 1937 which simply reads "He made some of the big steel, oil, and meat companies obey the law."¹⁷ Even if there is reason to firmly plant the passage of the bill during Roosevelt's tenure or mention the bill without allusion to the full legislative process, the absence of mention of Sinclair and *The Jungle* is keenly felt. Why would 1906's America find it necessary to pass legislation? How the knowledge of these tainted goods

¹⁴ (Compton 145)

¹⁵ (Beard and Beard 523)

¹⁶ (McGuire 328)

¹⁷ (Melbo 233)

made public?

The ‘modern’ model delineated at the beginning of this section does not reappear until 1969’s *The Extremists: Gadflies of American Society* by Archer. It is a popular history with an unclear audience, but it clearly links Sinclair, *The Jungle*, and the passage of the Meat Inspection act of 1906.¹⁸ The next classroom textbook to use a similar model in the survey is Glencoe Press’s 1975 *We the People: A History Of The United States*.¹⁹ Though it mentions Roosevelt’s “support” of the Bill, the mention of Sinclair and *The Jungle* stand in a single passage. The trend continues in 1979’s *Our American Heritage*; Roosevelt is mentioned as an influencer of the bill, but Upton Sinclair and *The Jungle* are clearly linked with the passage of the bill.²⁰ It is interesting to note that another book by the same publisher (Silver Burdett) in 1979 uses the same model - *Adventures in American History*, authored by Glanzrock.²¹ Many books beyond this point use a similar model, but tellingly the 1967 version of the same textbook by the same publisher and author does not mention Upton Sinclair at all.

Among those textbooks in the survey sharing a single author, this is not a common occurrence. Merlin Ames’ books ranging from 1944 to 1951 all fail to mention Sinclair and *The Jungle* entirely. Both of William Mowrys’ books from 1914 do likewise. The only other author in the corpus to make such an “about face” is Charles Beard, who between *History of the United States* in 1921 and *Making Of American Civilization* in 1939 shifted from a failure to mention

¹⁸ (Archer 124-25)

¹⁹ (Clark 374)

²⁰ (Bass 595)

²¹ (Glanzrock Dempsey)

The Jungle to mentioning *The Jungle*, though not in the context of the Meat Inspection Act's passage – and so avoiding fulfilling this project's metric of "publication-outcry-acts' passage."²²

This shift circa 1967 is significant. Of the 38 textbooks in the survey published after 1967, only six do not mention Sinclair and *The Jungle*. The overwhelming majority prior to 1967 omitted any such mention. What occurred in the 1960's to resurface *The Jungle* as important to mention in a given summary of American history?

Historiographer Georg Igger lends a possible reason – while histories prior to the 1960's asserted a "relationship to a modern, expanding industrial world in which science and technology contributed to growth and development", "faith in progress and the civilization of the modern world has undergone a serious test since the 1960's." If histories after the Vietnam War more frequently included "criticism of political and social conditions, but also on the quality of life in a highly industrialized society," *The Jungle* would be a touchstone.²³ In many respects it serves as a scathing criticism of 'political and social conditions' in the face of industrial development in the case of meat packing factories. Igger points out the publication of several scholarly books which may have affected this change, including *The Affluent Society*, *The End of Ideology* and *The Other America*, all published between 1958 and 1962 in advance of this 1967 'watermark.' As Riesman's forward to *The Lonely Crowd* points out, the 1960's were also party to *Silent Spring*, *The Feminine Mystique*, and *Unsafe at Any Speed*. Given the reception to *Unsafe at Any Speed* in starting (or perhaps reinvigorating) a consumer rights

²² (Beard 539)

²³ (Iggers 97)

movement, *The Jungle* may have been seen as its forerunner.²⁴

Sinclair's 1962 autobiography and its subsequent press tour may have been a factor as well. In any case it the proliferation of mentions of *The Jungle* in juvenile history texts comes shortly after renewed interest in consumer activism and the autobiography's 'tour'. After his presentation filled a hall in Bloomington in October '63, Sinclair boasted "only two other persons had ever filled it – Eleanor Roosevelt and some other comedian whose name I have forgotten." (Arthur)²⁵ In 1967, he received standing ovations during lectures at colleges such as the University of Buffalo as Matterson says "a hero, someone who had stood up to wrongs in the past and had righted them."²⁶

Igger's theory might simultaneously explain the long 'silence' mentioning Sinclair or *The Jungle* from 1920 to 1954, and the muted mentions from '54 to '69. If a traditional model extolling technological progress as universally beneficial existed prior to 1967 or *Gadflies*' 1969, the sharp criticism present in *Jungle* may have been unwelcome. If the Meat Inspection and Pure Food and Drug Acts need be mentioned, perhaps it was more palatable to ascribe the push for legislation to Theodore Roosevelt, a much beloved American President. The 'redeemed' machinations of the stockyards could still be lauded even though Roosevelt "tempered" them, all without Sinclair's broad attack on industrialized means of production in the meat-packing houses. Indeed the book's survival as an important document or 'phenomenon' seemed murky even among scholars 'left' of this school of thought in 1943;

²⁴ (Riesman xi)

²⁵ (Arthur 322-23)

²⁶ (Mattson Kindle location 4446)

Granville Hicks breezed that Sinclair was “only once ... in fashion”²⁷ with *The Jungle* though he leveled “It may be true, as some critics say, that in the future only social historians will be interested in his work, but even that is a larger claim on posterity than most of his contemporaries.” (Hicks)²⁸

Given Mattson’s depiction of Upton Sinclair in *Upton Sinclair and the Other American Century* it is also possible Sinclair’s actions and positions had simply become palatable to the public before his death in 1968. During the Johnson administration, Johnson invited Sinclair’s the White House to commemorate a law strengthening the federal government’s regulations on meat inspection, the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967. It was attended by Ralph Nader, by then well known for *Unsafe at Any Speed*.²⁹³⁰ As Mattson characterizes it, “[Sinclair] had been in the White House 60 years before to hear Roosevelt, table and promise to rein in corporate malfeasance. Now he was returning to a White House that was building on the reforms of the past to enact the great Society.”³¹ The anti-Communist views Sinclair espoused between the mid-1950s and 1964 may have been comfortable for the Johnson administration, while his past deeds as a muckraker earned him admiration among university and literary circles. Despite having similar positions to those he held in 1906, Sinclair had found himself ‘mainstream.’

Even as the distance of Sinclair’s 1906 firebrand novel and other social trends may have eased resistance to *Jungle’s* inclusion in juvenile history texts after 1967, the sum of Sinclair’s

²⁷ (Hicks 1)

²⁸ (Hicks 8)

²⁹ (Arthur 322)

³⁰ Perhaps *Unsafe at Any Speed’s* popularity *did* help rekindle interest in *The Jungle* and *Sinclair*.

³¹ (Mattson Kindle location 4398)

“misdeeds” may have soured opinions of *The Jungle* from 1906 to the 1950’s. Despite the ‘free press’ granted to *The Jungle* by mainstream papers, in 1919’s *Brass Check* Sinclair sharply criticized the same newspapers and holding companies which by “1910 to 1912 ... were now owned by corporate giants and business tycoons with a staff of conservative editors sensitive to the political interests of shareholders.”³² This came at a time when the socialist and radical newspapers which first carried *Jungle* in serialized form had already closed. The administrative structure of such newspapers may have reinforced the negative associations with Sinclair; given the *New York Times* has been held by the Ochs-Sulzberger family since (Sinclair) 1896, perhaps Sinclair’s accusation the *NYT* “... pretends to favor progress; privately ... it may guard its owner’s sources of revenue and social position ... The system is dishonest to its marrow” netted Sinclair’s work lasting disfavor. The problem may have been compounded when other newspapers Sinclair mentioned in *Brass Check* were made sister companies to textbook manufacturers. These relationships may be further entangled with mergers as recent as Pearson PLC’s with Penguin Books in 2012, a clear conflation of a newspaper holdings company with a textbook manufacturer.³³

Some combination of these factors could be cause for the dramatic variation in *Jungle*’s mention since 1920, and more broadly since the book’s publication in 1905. In this respect the project’s primary question “has this ‘footnote’ always been included in history texts for juvenile audiences, and how has it changed?” has been answered – but the question of ‘why’ is beyond the scope of this study and warrants further research by future students and scholars.

³² (Sinclair xi)

³³ (Calamur)

CONCLUSION

Though the sample is not exhaustive, the surveyed texts suggest a lull spanning from 1920 to the 1960's for any significant mention of *The Jungle*. It may serve as a bell weather for historiography, and underscores that an event's lasting effect on an industry or nation does not guarantee inclusion in a schoolhouse history. Countless school children from this 'silent' era may have only heard of Sinclair or the terrible conditions as 'common knowledge' or not at all, only for it all to 'become important' enough for inclusion in texts for Baby Boomers like my mother.

Given the success of this project to assert there is a gap in mention of Sinclair between 1920 and the 1960's, similar events may be well served by this exploration. What mentions can be found of Spanish settlement in North America before, during, and after Plymouth Rock? Has this changed significantly since the Civil War, World War I, and World War II, and how so? Was there an appreciable gap between the beginning of Reconstruction after the American Civil War and its mention or in-depth exploration in American text books? What was the first primary school textbook to mention Martin Luther King's death, and how long did it take for that mention to become typical or "standard"?

If applied to these and other questions, the project's framework and timeline will make these changes in established history available to explore for students and scholars alike. It may be uncomfortable to consider how malleable 'textbook' history may be, and challenging to maintain a companion site but worth the effort – and the benefits to classroom history worth presenting this project for rigorous criticism.

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