Jill Reiner

**Biographies:**

**Nelli Bly**

Famed investigative journalist Nelli Bly writes articles for the purpose of bringing out social injustice. Bly became known for her investigative and undercover reporting, also known as stunt journalism. Some issues that she exposed were labor laws to protect working girls, reform of Pennsylvania’s divorce law, poverty in Mexico, and the terrible living conditions of patients in Blackwell’s Island Insane Asylum. Bly successfully exposed these injustices and led to major reform. Now, Bly is reporting on the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York City that killed 145 workers. She tells the disturbing facts behind the causes of this deadly fire and the corruption of the garment industry, with hope to open the eyes of the nation and spark a reform of conditions in workplaces around the country.

**Jacob Riis**

Newspaper reporter, social reformer, and photojournalist Jacob Riis aims to improve the living conditions of the impoverished in tenement housing. Riis writes of hunger, lack of sanitation, unheated apartments, dangerous firetraps, and poor treatment of the dead. With his shocking and disturbing exposés on slum conditions on the Lower East Side and his book, *How the Other Half Lives*, he caught the eye of many concerned Americans, including President Theodore Roosevelt. While Riis continues to write about slum conditions in his books, he focuses on living conditions but does not attack capitalism when doing so. He does not just write about the terrible conditions, but also suggests ideas to fix them. Riis’ efforts to improve conditions for the impoverished has drastically changed the way citizens viewed the poor. Riis writes for us today to go into detail on the harsh conditions in tenement housing.

**Upton Sinclair**

Activist writer Upton Sinclair aims to expose the horrendous working conditions that are seen in the meat-packing industry. As the meat-packing industry is growing, the conditions seem to be deteriorating. Sinclair’s exposés focus on the Packingtown neighborhood in Chicago. These exposés sparked a period of transformation in the nation’s meat industry and incited President Roosevelt to enact a series of food safety laws. He tried to focus on the difficult lives of the workers, but the public seemed to be more interested in the gruesome details regarding meat production. Sinclair writes with us today to explain the details of the meat-packing industry.

**John Spargo**

Socialist writer and leader John Spargo first became a muckraker to find a solution to stop child labor and expose the horrific working conditions that children experienced in the factories. Child labor was a serious issue until Spargo and the Social Democratic Federation met with other labor groups and trade union leaders to establish a Labor Representation Committee (LRC). Currently, Spargo is working on a book that is expected to uncover all of the elements of child labor which included the horrific things that were being done to children. John Spargo has successfully reformed child labor, and he writes with us today to discuss what he dealt with and how he dealt with it.

**Ida Tarbell**

American teacher, author, journalist and leading muckraker Ida Tarbell had become very concerned by the rise of monopolies and trusts. Her 1904 book, *The History of the Standard Oil Company,* a 19-part series, exposed of the inner workings of Rockefeller’s trust and his interest in the oil business, all while avoiding condemning capitalism. She accurately documented the aggressive and unethical techniques that Rockefeller used to outsmart his opponents. Tarbell’s studies exposed the realities of big business and successfully destroyed the Standard Oil Company in 1911, when the Supreme Court found that it was in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act.

**Lincoln Steffens**

American journalist, lecturer, and political philosopher Lincoln Steffens has been fascinated by the corruption of American cities since his time working as a police reporter for the *New York Evening Post*. Alongside Jacob Riis, Steffens became a better investigative reporter and also a student of corruption, reform, and urban politics. Steffens focuses on the relationship between corruption and government and between knowledge and action. He traveled to many cities and spoke with politicians, reforms, crooks, and editors to get the information he needed. In 1904, Steffens released *The Shame of the Cities*, where he revealed the universal nature of municipal corruption and the equally widespread indifference on the part of the public.

**Frank Norris**

American novelist Frank Norris’s work often includes portrayals of suffering caused by corrupt and greedy corporate monopolies. In 1901, Norris released The Octopus: A Story of California, where the tensions between the railroad, the ranchers and the ranchers’ League were exposed. Norris emphasized the power of railroad monopolies had over individuals and how helpless these individuals actually were. Norris attacked the railroad system in this novel and proved that corporate monopolies affected citizens negatively. His work didn’t create any new laws or reforms, but it did open the eyes of many citizens and added to the value of muckrakers’ works.

**Thomas Nast**

German-born American caricaturist and editorial cartoonist Thomas Nast is considered to be the “Father of the American Cartoon.” Nast’s cartoons focused on topics like the Civil War, slavery, and corruption. By the 1870s, Nast focused on political cartoon and led a cartoon protest against corruption by using his cartoons to try to remove Boss Tweed and his workers from power. One of his best cartoons even upset Tweed so much that he offered Nast a bribe of $500,000 to leave town, but Nast refused and continued to expose Tweed. His caricature of Tweed fleeing town led to Tweed’s identification and arrest. Nast’s cartoons of Tweed were one of the main factors in Tweed’s downfall. At the end of his cartooning career, in 1902, Theodore Roosevelt appointed him the position of US counsel general for Ecuador.

**Ida B. Wells**

African-American journalist and activist Ida B. Wells has experienced many occasions of discrimination and injustice in her lifetime, which fueled her to fight it. Wells started an anti-lynching campaign after examining the act of lynching and also published A Red Record, a personal examination of lynching in the United States. Wells brought her campaign to the White House, led a protest, and called for President McKinley to make reforms. Ida formed the National Association of Colored Women, cofounded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and works with the National Equal Rights League. She also created the first African-American kindergarten and fights for women’s suffrage.

**Ray Stannard Baker**

American journalist, historian, biographer, and author Ray Stannard Baker is one of the leading journalists of his generation. Baker wrote many articles on social and economic problems with his liberal viewpoint, for the purpose of exposing corruption and sparking reform. He earned a reputation for his writings on industrial relations, including coverage of various strikes and working conditions. His freelance article on the Pullman, Illinois strike of 1894, focused on the working class injustices. Baker gave a full account of the strikers’ complaints and violence on the company’s parts. He criticized George Pullman’s “model city” and handled the *Chicago Record* relief fund for the strikers. Baker influenced many in the workforce and led to major reforms.

**Theodore Roosevelt**

President Theodore Roosevelt is the man who first coined the term “muckraker.” The President shares many of the goals of the Progressive movement and could be considered the first Progressive president. He is the first president to become a popular leader by using the media to appeal to the American people. Roosevelt agreed and disagreed with muckraking. He liked that these reporters “scraped off the muck” of America and really exposed the flaws in many areas, but he also thought that “the man who did nothing else was certain to become a force of evil.” Roosevelt liked the muckraking that was going on, but also carefully monitored what they were writing. He did not want the American public to get lied to, which shows what kind of man and leader he really is.