

Muckrakers were a group of writers during the Progressive era who tried to expose the problems that existed in American society as a result of the rise of big business, urbanization, and immigration. Most of the muckrakers were journalists. Theodore Roosevelt gave the muckrakers their creative name. He compared them to someone stirring up the mud at the bottom of a pond.

Progressives used muckrakers' writings to inspire and promote reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They fought political corruption in urban areas resulting from the power of city bosses like Boss Tweed of New York through the use of city managers. Progressives determined that Standard Oil was a monopoly and used the courts to force its dissolution. Urban reformers like Jane Addams established settlement houses to provide services for immigrants and other poverty-stricken city dwellers.

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair

Upton Sinclair was an American novelist, essayist, playwright, and short-story writer, whose works reflect socialistic views. He gained public notoriety in 1906 with his novel *The Jungle*, which exposed the deplorable conditions of the U.S. meat-packing industry. It became an immediate success, selling more than 150,000 copies. After President Theodore Roosevelt read *The Jungle*, he ordered an investigation into the meat packing industry, and ultimately the passing of the Meat Inspection Act was a result of Sinclair's book.



"There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white – it would be dosed with borax and glycerin, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. 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. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; 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."

The History of The Standard Oil Company by Ida Tarbell

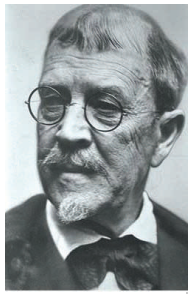


Ida Tarbell helped transform journalism by introducing what is called today investigative journalism. Through her achievements she not only helped to expand the role of the newspaper in modern society and stimulate the Progressive reform movement, but she also became a role model for women wishing to become professional journalists.

In 1902, she embarked on her ground breaking study of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, or what was called the Standard Oil Trust. Her ***History of the Standard Oil Company***, published in 1904, was a landmark work of exposé journalism that became known as "**muckraking**." Her exposure of Rockefeller's unfair business methods outraged the public and led the government to prosecute the company for violations of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. As a result, after years of precedent-setting litigation, the Supreme Court upheld the break-up of Standard Oil.

During World War I she joined the efforts to improve the plight of working women. In 1922, The New York Times named her one of the "Twelve Greatest American Women." It was journalism like hers that inspired Americans of the early twentieth century to seek reform in our government, in our economic structures, and in our urban areas. Along with other muckrakers like Lincoln Steffens, Ray Stannard Baker, and Upton Sinclair, Tarbell ushered in reform journalism. Ever since, newspapers have played a leading role as the watchdogs and consciences of our political, economic, and social lives.

The Shame of the Cities by Lincoln Steffens



As managing editor of the 'muckraking' *McClure 's* magazine (1902-6), he wrote carefully researched articles documenting city government corruption that flourished in the face of public apathy. The articles, which created a sensation, were republished in *The Shame of the Cities* (1904), an epoch-making work in urban reform. Visiting post-revolutionary Communist Russia (1919), he made the famous comment, 'I have seen the future and it works'.

"The political machine controls the whole process of voting, and practices fraud at every stage. The tax collectors list is the voting list, and the tax collector works for the political machine. . . . The tax collector pads the list with the names of dead dogs, children, and non-existent persons. One newspaper printed the picture of a dog, another that of a little four-year-old negro boy, whose names were on such a list... Rudolph Blankenburg, a persistent fighter for the right and the use of the right to vote (and, by the way, an immigrant), sent out just before one election a registered letter to each voter on the rolls of a certain selected block. Sixty-three per cent were returned marked "not at," "removed," "deceased," etc. From one four-story house where forty-four voters were addressed, eighteen letters came back undelivered; from another of forty-eight voters, came back forty-one letters; from another sixty-one out of sixty-two; from another, forty-four out of forty-seven. Six buildings on one block were said to have one hundred and seventy-two voters, more than the votes cast in the previous election in any one of two hundred blocks. The fraudulent voting is done boldly, because the political machine controls the election officers, often choosing them from among the fraudulent names on their list. The police are forbidden by law to stand within thirty feet of the polls, but they are at the ballot box and they are there to see that the political machine's orders are obeyed not to prevent corruption but to insure it. They help to furnish "intimidation" and make sure that the names they, the police, have supplied; vote for the candidate backed by the political machine. . . ." (this selection has been edited for ease of read)