Different Approaches to Investigatory Journalism in the Muckraking Era

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DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO INVESTIGATORY JOURNALISM
IN THE MUCKRAKING ERA

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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by
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ABSTRACT

The muckraking era is seen as a golden age of investigatory journalism. This thesis argues that within the muckraking era, there were a number of distinct types of journalism. To understand the muckrakers, we must recognize these different types of investigatory journalism and the potential influence the different types of storytelling can have on public opinion. Fourteen of the preeminent muckrakers are analyzed based on their most important investigatory journalism articles.
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“Muckraking,” as an epithet for investigatory journalism was birthed from the mouth of President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 in the midst of one of the golden ages of investigatory journalism. The President first used the term “muckraker” during a speech delivered at the Gridiron Club, and again the next day at the laying of the cornerstone at the House of Representatives. He began his speech by praising “every writer … in book, magazine, or newspaper” who exposed “evil” in business and politics, so long as that writer does it with absolute truthfulness (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 59).

The President called for continued “unsparing exposure of, the politician who betrays his trust, of the big businessman who makes or spend his fortune in illegitimate or corrupt ways.” Nevertheless, journalists must remember “that even in the case of crime, if it is attacked in sensational, lurid and untruthful fashion, the attack may do more damage to the public mind than the crime itself …” (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 59).

Then the President made the memorable association between investigatory journalism and the muckrake, by drawing on the 17th Century Christian parable, Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan, saying:

the men with the muckrake are often indispensable to the well-being of society, but only if they know when to stop raking the muck, and to look upward to the celestial crown above them …. If the whole picture is painted black there remains no hue whereby to single out the rascals for distinction from their fellows. (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 60)

The President was trying to draw attention to two different types of journalism, which he felt had very different effects on public opinion. One type of journalism provided the foundation for positive social change; the other planted seeds of chaos and radicalism. The President continued:
Hysterical sensationalism is the very poorest weapon wherewith to fight for lasting righteousness. The men who with stern sobriety and truth assail the many evils of our time, whether in the public press, or in magazines, or in books, are the leaders and allies of all engaged in the work for social and political betterment. (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 61)

This thesis will reexamine the muckrakers’ writing based on the type of investigatory journalism they practiced, and in the process bring forth some of the tremendous stories that were told by the muckrakers. This could be seen as an extension of President Roosevelt’s muckraking speech – an attempt to re-capture the distinction between different types of investigatory journalism, and to consider the possible implications that different types of journalism can have on public opinion and democracy. By considering the potential effects that different types of journalism can have on public opinion, it draws attention to the more subtle and nuanced aspects of a journalist’s storytelling. With that said, it is beyond the reach of this thesis to test the effects that different types of journalism have on public opinion. Instead a consideration of effects is an underlying theme that is mixed into my analysis of different types of investigative journalism in the muckraking era.

President Roosevelt’s muckraking speech highlighted two important points related to the role of journalism in a democracy: First, a healthy democracy requires citizens to have an accurate worldview. Second, because the task of informing the citizenry has largely fallen on journalists’ shoulders, the type of journalism affects the public’s view of the world.

The broad type of journalism that Roosevelt took aim at was investigatory journalism of a civic nature – known at the time as “the literature of exposure.” This type of journalism is a contrast to the beat reporting that follows day-to-day crime, politics, or sports, for instance. Where beat reporters supply a daily stream of information to the public, investigatory journalists can take months or even years to assemble isolated facts into a broader story that gives those facts greater meaning.
While investigatory journalism may be thought of as a “type” of journalism, Roosevelt argued that amongst investigatory journalists, there are different types. There are investigatory journalists who report with “stern sobriety and truth” and who trust the public with a balanced and nuanced picture of events. And there are investigatory journalists who report with “hysterical sensationalism,” which can create an exaggerated and distorted picture of reality (whether to sell more papers, to actively shape public opinion, or out of a journalists mistaken understanding of events).

Roosevelt contrasted the effect he thought these two types of investigatory journalism had on democratic decision-making. When public opinion is guided by “honesty, sanity and self-restraint” long-term reform can proceed on a path of “steady and natural growth,” argued the President. But if public opinion is provoked by “men who act crookedly, whether because of sinister design or mere puzzleheadedness,” that “spasm of reform” leads to extremism. Eventually that “violent emotionalism leads to exhaustion” (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 62).

Persuading the public to adapt a belief (even a righteous belief) without providing a full and accurate picture of the available facts, can lead to a flawed understanding of reality, which can cause extremism and eventual disillusionment. “Wild preachers of unrest” are “the most dangerous opponents of real reform,” said Roosevelt (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 62). Roosevelt was certainly not the first to make this argument, but he used the “bully pulpit” of the Presidency to raise the distinction.

The “muckraking era” at the beginning of the 20th century was a formative time for American journalism – a time when the modern ideal of the press as a check on government power was taking shape. President Roosevelt seemed to recognize that journalism, and the country as a whole, was in the midst of a great change:
At this moment we are passing through a period of great unrest – social, political and industrial unrest. So far as this movement of agitation throughout the country takes the form of a fierce discontent with evil … the feeling is to be heartily welcomed as a sign of healthy life. (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 62)

But, Roosevelt warned, if the groundswell of social change and investigatory journalism becomes “a mere crusade of appetite against appetite,” then the literature of exposure “has no significance for good, but only for evil” (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 62). The President was essentially saying that the style or structure in which ideas are communicated, influences what those ideas will be to the reader.

Following the speech (and lasting a century and beyond), the term “muckraker” has remained in the public lexicon, but not as a distinction between journalism that was beholden to “stern sobriety and truth” versus journalism that was “sensational, lurid, and untruthful.” Rather, all investigatory journalists who were actively digging up stories and contributing to the literature of exposure were labeled “muckrakers.”

Politicians and trust companies that were the targets of investigatory journalists’ exposés took Roosevelt’s term and used it to attack all investigatory journalists by labeling them “muckrakers.”

Whether the President intended to throw water on the “literature of exposure” or whether he meant to contain the fire so it didn’t burn out, is debatable. But in the days after Roosevelt’s muckraker speech, many of the investigatory journalists who were contemporaries of President Roosevelt, including some who had personal relationships advising the President, like Lincoln Steffens and Ray Stannard Baker, felt the president’s remarks had hurt the reputation of all investigatory journalists.

The President had “attached a name of odium to all writers engaged in exposing corruption regardless of whether they deserved it or not,” wrote Baker. Baker wrote the
President a letter saying that even if some of the exposure articles had been extreme, “have they not, as a whole, been honest and useful?” Baker argued that a speech that was seen as attacking investigatory journalist would “give aid and comfort to these very rascals” they were trying to expose. And wouldn’t Roosevelt’s muckraking speech make it “more difficult in the future not only to get the truth told but to have it listened to?” (Baker, 1945, p. 203)

The President responded two days later, saying Baker had misunderstood him:

I feel that the man who in a yellow newspaper or in a yellow magazine … makes a ferocious attack on good men or even attacks bad men with exaggeration or for things they have not done, is a potent enemy of those of us who are really striving in good faith to expose bad men and drive them from power. (Baker, 1945, 203)

President Roosevelt told another muckraker, Lincoln Steffens that the muckraking speech wasn’t targeting Steffens, Baker or their colleagues at *McClure’s Magazine*, but was specifically talking about David Graham Phillips who was in the midst of writing, “The Treason of the Senate” for Hearst’s *Cosmopolitan* (Steffens, 1931, p. 581). In any case, Roosevelt’s distinction between different types of journalism did not stick - the term muckraker, on the other hand, did.

Eventually the term muckraker shifted from being an insult, to being embraced by investigatory journalists. Today, muckraking is synonymous with investigatory journalism and all the investigatory journalists (both “stern and sober” as well as “sensational and lurid”) from the Roosevelt years to the start of World War One (roughly 1902-1914) became known as muckrakers. The original distinction between different types of investigatory journalism is all but lost.

The muckraking era stands out as one of the times in U.S. history when journalism has come closest to living up to the “watchdog”/Fourth Estate ideal. Never before and arguably never since has investigatory journalism been more prominent, prevalent and powerful than during the muckraking era. Nationally distributed magazines sprouted up and spent and made
fortunes conducting multi-year investigations of industry, government, labor and the public itself. Ida Tarbell wrote a nineteen-part expose of Rockefeller’s Standard Oil. Ray Stannard Baker wrote dozens of articles about the railroads, race, capital and labor. John Mathews wrote about the Guggenheims and J.P. Morgan’s mining interests in Alaska and Montana. Mark Sullivan wrote about the “patent” medicine industry, as did Samuel Hopkins Adams. David Graham Phillips wrote the controversial series, “Treason of the Senate.” Thomas Lawson’s “Frenzied Finance” blasted at the financial sectors and titans of industry. Lincoln Steffens, perhaps the most famous muckraker, told stories of municipal government corruption in places like Minneapolis and St. Louis in his series, “Shame of the Cities.” In The Jungle, Upton Sinclair described the conditions of meatpacking plants in Chicago and sold a million copies of his novel – an astounding number for the times. Charles Edward Russell also took on the meat packers, and their influence on almost every agriculture product. There were other muckrakers who wrote about tenement houses, prisoner abuse, prostitution, newspapers, steel, coal, timber, insurance, and more.

Muckraker historian Louis Filler estimated that between 1903-1912 there were 2,000 investigative articles (Filler, 1976 p. 23). This downpour of investigatory journalism coincided with a blossoming of social change during the Progressive Era.

Yet it was not just the amount of investigative journalism that took place – it was the popularity of investigatory journalism that set the muckraking era apart from other time periods. There may well be more investigative journalism today than there was in the muckraking era, but investigative journalism in the muckraking era occupied a place in popular journalism that it rarely occupies today. Widely read general magazines muckraked to build up readership, including: McClure's, Collier's, Cosmopolitan, Everybody's, The Independent, Pearson's,
Hampton’s, Success, The American Magazine, Leslie’s, amongst others (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. xv). McClure’s, for example went from 120,000 readers in 1895 to almost half a million readers (a very high circulation in those days) by 1907. News stands sold out when the latest installment of David Graham Phillips “Treason of the Senate” came out in Cosmopolitan, or Ida Tarbell’s “History of the Standard Oil Company” articles were printed in McClure’s (Mott, 1957, p. 599).

“To an extraordinary degree the work of the Progressive movement rested upon its journalism…. What was new in the muckraking in the Progressive era was neither its ideals nor its existence, but its reach,” wrote historian Richard Hofstadter (1985, p. 185-186). The muckrakers “were able, as very few of the practitioners of exposure had been able before, not merely to name the malpractices in American business and politics, but to name the malpractitioners and their specific misdeeds, and to proclaim the facts to the entire country” (Hofstadter, 1985, p. 186).

Sociologist Herbert Gans argued that modern journalism’s values emerged from the muckrakers and the Progressive Era (1980, p. 204). “The values [of the muckraking era] signify and maintain a proud chapter in American journalism, for during the Progressive period, journalists achieved a level of power and influence in American life” they have rarely held since, writes Gans (1980, p. 204).

There’s consensus amongst journalism historians that the muckrakers deeply influenced American journalism, yet to speak about the muckrakers as a singular force with a singular influence, is misleading. While all muckrakers were involved in exposure and investigation, they differed, sometimes drastically, in how they exposed. This may seem like a minor point, but I believe it has profound effects on public opinion and the traditions of journalism.
Sociologist Gaye Tuchman argued that journalism “imparts a public character to occurrences” - what that character is depends (among other things) on how journalists structure their stories (1980, p. 4). “News is a window on the world,” wrote Tuchman. “Through its frame, Americans learn of themselves and others, of their own institutions, leaders, and life styles” (1980, p. 1). The “frame delineates a world” and “the view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, whether the window faces a street or a backyard” (Tuchman, 1980, p.1).

There are numerous ways to analyze journalism and to test whether it is living up to its democratic ideal. One of the landmark tests of the news from a similar time period as the muckraking era provides a parallel and contrast to the approach of this study. 

“A Test of the News”

In 1920, Walter Lippmann and fellow New Republic editor Charles Merz undertook a historic study to test whether journalism could fulfill its democratic responsibility and supply the public with accurate information. Their central question was: “How reliable is the news?” In “A Test of the News,” Lippmann and Merz looked at close to 4,000 New York Times articles about the Russian Revolution from 1917 to 1920. They found that the New York Times, arguably America’s most trusted newspaper, failed to supply the basic information necessary for the public to form an accurate opinion. The hopes and fears of the journalists and editors at the New York Times painted a picture of the Russian Revolution that was tinted to show what the journalists’ hoped would happen, as opposed to what was happening (i.e. it was reported ninety-one times that the Bolsheviks were on the brink of collapse, which did not happen for more than 70 years). Lippmann and Merz concluded that journalist’s produce the news through their own subjective outlook, which ends up coloring the news to correspond with their worldview. They
saw this journalistic failure as not uniquely the fault of the New York Times, but as a sign of weakness in the entire field of journalism.

This was still early in Lippmann’s career and “A Test of the News,” was a seedling that would grow into a redwood-sized critique of journalism, public opinion and democracy as a whole. Lippmann, who would become one of the most influential thinkers in American journalism, built upon these ideas in his book Liberty and the News (1920), where he charged that journalism as a whole is unable to supply the basic facts that are required for the formation of a wise public opinion: “True opinions can prevail only if the facts to which they refer are known,” and if they are not known, false ideas are just as believable as true ideas, argued Lippmann (p. 71). One of the thickest roots of Lippmann’s critique asks: without access to reliable news, how can sturdy public opinion exist, and without a sturdy public opinion, how can a strong democracy exist?

In Lippmann’s best-known work, Public Opinion, he furthers this critique:

the press is … much more frail than the democratic theory has as yet admitted. It is too frail to carry the whole burden of popular sovereignty, to supply spontaneously the truth which democrats hoped was inborn. And when we expected it to supply such a body of truth we employ a misleading standard of judgment. We misunderstand the limited nature of news, the illimitable complexity of society; we overestimate our own endurance, public spirit, and all-round competence. (Lippmann, 2010, p. 362)

Which news to test?

There are a number of reasons why Lippmann and Merz’s study may have painted an inadequate picture of journalism’s capabilities. “A Test of the News” looked at foreign news coverage, which is the most difficult type of news to report accurately. Not only is foreign newsgathering slower and more expensive, but information is harder to fact-check and journalists have less oversight and guidance from editors (Hamilton, 2009). Language and cultural differences further skew both the journalists and the public’s understanding of events.
Additionally, public knowledge and interest tends to be at its lowest point with foreign affairs, which makes it difficult to devote large sections of a daily paper towards creating a rich background and adequate context of a foreign news event. The daily deadlines of a newspaper like the *New York Times* (as opposed to a weekly or monthly magazine) further heightens the difficulty of getting the facts right in a fast changing foreign news event like the Bolshevik Revolution. Lippmann and Merz’s choice to critique a daily newspaper covering a complex foreign news story may have inadvertently portrayed American journalism as more inept and less able to fulfill its democratic role, than it actually was.

The journalism of the muckraking era, in contrast, largely focused on domestic issues and journalists often had years or even decade’s worth of evidence to guide their investigations (i.e. Ida Tarbell’s investigation of Standard Oil or Charles Edward Russell’s history of the meat packer trust). The muckrakers primarily wrote for weekly and monthly magazines and they were given months or in some cases years to research and write their stories, which often stretched hundreds of pages over multiple articles.

**How to test the news?**

My study of the muckrakers differs from Lippmann and Merz’s study of journalism in another substantial way. As opposed to analyzing journalists based on the accuracy of the information they presented (as Lippmann and Merz did), I will analyze the muckrakers based on the way they told stories and the way they justified the information within their stories.

Telling the truth is perhaps the most basic tenant of journalism, but *how* to tell the truth is much less clear. Within journalism, the dominant way to tell the truth is the ideal of “objectivity;” sociologist Michael Schudson described objectivity as a separation between facts and values (1978, p. 5). Facts are statements about the world that can be objectively verified;
values are an individual’s subjective “conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world
should be,” writes Schudson (1978, p. 5). “The belief in objectivity is a faith in ‘facts,’ a distrust
of ‘values,’ and a commitment to their segregation” (Schudson, 1978, p. 5).

Where Lippmann and Merz tested whether the New York Times “facts” were in deed true
facts, I will be considering (amongst other journalistic values) which muckrakers followed the
path of objectivity and which ones followed a different path.

Without downplaying the vital importance of being factually correct, the way journalists
tell a story and the meaning they attach to a story, are also influential to the public’s
understanding of an issue.

In the famed muckraker Lincoln Steffens autobiography (and recounted in Schudson’s
wave,” or more precisely, the appearance of a crime wave (Steffens, 1931, p 285). Steffens and
another journalist Jacob Riis were both working the crime beat for competing daily papers. One
day while Steffens was hanging out at the police headquarters, he pretended to be asleep and
overheard the dramatic details of a crime connected with a famous citizen of New York. Riis,
who missed the story, was scolded by his editor.

Riis then dug in and was able to out-report Steffens on a number of crime stories. This
time Steffens was called out by his editor. Steffens and Riis went back and forth, one-upping
each other with more and more crime stories until it appeared the city was in the midst of a crime
wave. Theodore Roosevelt, who was acting as New York City’s police commissioner and was
close friends with both Steffens and Riis, was not happy with this reporting crime wave; it was
making him look bad. Roosevelt asked them both to cut it out and the crime wave ended
(Steffens, 1931, p. 290). “When Riis and I ceased reporting robberies … the monthly magazines
and the scientific quarterlies had some belated, heavy, incorrect analyses of the periodicity of lawlessness,” writes Steffens (1931, p. 291).

“Journalists not only report reality but create it,” writes Schudson (2003, p. 2). This does not mean that journalists create (or report) reality without limits or restrictions. The crimes that Steffens and Riis reported, presumably took place. “By selecting, highlighting, framing, shading, and shaping in reportage” journalists “create an impression that real people - readers and viewers - then take to be real and to which they respond in their lives,” writes Schudson (2003, p. 2).

As we read different news, reported in different ways, we understand the world differently. The journalistic “act of making news is the act of constructing reality itself [for readers] rather than a picture of reality” (Tuchman, 1980, p. 12).

Walter Lippmann wrote in Public Opinion: we "live in the same world, but we think and feel in different ones" (2010, p.14). One of the many reasons we perceive the world differently is because we get our news from different journalists who tell stories differently; the way journalists tell stories influences how the public constructs reality (Schudson, 2003, p. 3).

When we bounce from issue to issue, and disagreement to disagreement without recognizing the role of storytelling in the way we establish our beliefs, we not only fail to solve our problems, we fail to understand each other. How a journalist tells a story and the way a journalist justifies information, influences the picture of the world that develops in a readers mind.

A modern analogy of a computer analyzing data can help explain my approach. There are three main parts: the raw data, a back-end computer code, and a front-end code. A back-end code relates to accessing and organizing data - this all takes place behind the scenes. A front-end
code is what a user sees and interacts with, and is a bridge between the raw data/back-end code and the user. In this analogy, the raw data represents what the journalist experiences (what they see for themselves, who they talk to, what documents they’ve read … etc.). The back-end code is how journalists understand what they have experienced (both conscious and subconscious understanding and opinions about what they’ve seen and heard). The front-end code is what the journalist shares with readers (the magazine article).

The basic front-end code for journalism is the narrative - journalists tell stories (Tuchman, 1980, p. 105). The narrative is typically based on what a journalist thinks is important and what makes sense (their back-end code) and select examples from the raw data. A journalist may try to live up to the ideal of objectivity, by attempting to separate his/her facts from values, but a journalist cannot craft a story without drawing on his/her personal values (Gans, 1980, p. 39). These values are reflected in the words a writer uses and the emphasis she or he places on certain aspects of a story.

I am primarily analyzing the muckraker’s front-end code (e.g. how did Ida Tarbell tell the story of Standard Oil?). While the back-end code is more difficult to discern, I will attempt to uncover some of the muckraker’s journalistic philosophies and ways of understanding the world by drawing on their autobiographies.

**To understand or to advocate?**

Testing the news based on the accuracy of information, as Lippmann and Merz did, is relatively straightforward; after enough time, most facts can be verified as either true or false. There is less of a “right” answer when looking at storytelling, as the right answer has to do with our own subjective beliefs and our expectations of journalism. Where Roosevelt advocated for
one type of investigatory journalism over another type, my purpose is not to advocate, but to try to understand the different types of journalism within the muckraking era.

To do so I will look at some of most important texts from the muckraking era and try to let the muckrakers own words reveal their storytelling style and the way they justify information. “The values in the news are rarely explicit and must be found between the lines - in what actors and activities are reported or ignored and in how they are described,” writes Herbert Gans in *Deciding What’s News* (1980). With each muckraker, I will analyze the individual’s journalism with the following questions in mind: Which aspects of the story are given emphasis and which areas are glanced over? Whose perspective is shared and how? Are alternative perspectives given a fair hearing? How is the story arranged – chronologically or for persuasive effect? What sort of language is used – passionate and poetic soliloquies or disinterested and neutral terms? Who is the intended audience? How bold or confident are the journalist’s statements? Does the journalist share her or his own opinions or do they stay detached and neutral? Is a conclusion about what a story means stated before the evidence is given, or does the evidence precede the conclusion? Does the journalist share the evidence that justifies a story, or does the journalist simply tell a story without including raw evidence? How does the journalist indicate the relative sturdiness of verifiable evidence (when it exists), expert opinions, self-interested opinions, and unsubstantiated rumors? And, what appears to be the overall purpose of the journalist’s story: To understand? To persuade? To advocate for specific change?

The way a journalists maneuvers questions like these, not only shapes the way a reader imagines an event, but also reveals the symptoms that can be used to diagnose the type of journalism that is being practiced. Below is an outline of the main characteristics I will look for as I analyze the muckrakers.
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Language: Is the language that the journalist uses passionate and emotional or dispassionate and unemotional?

Justification: Is the primary rational for a story based on opinions or verifiable evidence?

Perspective: Whose perspective is shared? Are the opinions and evidence one-sided or multi-sided?

Audience: Is the story intended for an elite audience or the general public?

Solutions: Does the journalist provide a solution to the problem she or he has presented, or is it left up to the audience to decide what should be done?

Purpose: Does the journalist help the reader understand an event or an individual, or does she or he try to persuade the audience to adopt the journalist’s beliefs? Whether a journalist is attempting to persuade or to understand may be the most significant and all encompassing of the other categories.

The order in which I will analyze the muckrakers was chosen to ease my comparison of different muckraking styles. When two muckrakers wrote about similar topics (railroads, big business, corruption, etc.), or when two muckrakers have demonstrably different muckraking styles, they neighbor each other in the order of my analysis.

I start with Ida Tarbell and a textual analysis of the first two articles in her series, “The History of the Standard Oil Company.” The second chapter focuses on Henry Demarest Lloyd who also muckraked Rockefeller’s Standard Oil, in his book *Wealth Against Commonwealth.*
Not only did Lloyd and Tarbell write about the same topic, but they have different muckraking styles, which makes them the easiest two muckrakers to compare. I will build on this exploration of Tarbell and Lloyd, by analyzing Ray Stannard Baker and three of his articles on labor violence, railroad publicity, and race relations. In strong contrast to Baker’s relatively conservative and straightforward muckraking, Thomas Lawson’s insider expose of big business is full of hidden motives, cryptic sourcing and provocative language. Lawson (Chapter 5), C.P. Connolly (Chapter 6) and John Mathews (Chapter 7) all deal with mining and the exploitation of natural resources, but do so with different language and different storytelling approaches. Chapters 8 - 12 focus on Lincoln Steffens, Will Irwin, David Graham Phillips, William Hard, and Mark Sullivan - all wrote about political corruption. Sullivan also muckraked the “patent medicine” industry, as did Samuel Hopkins Adams (Chapter 13), so they neighbor each other. Finally, Charles Edward Russell (Chapter 14) and Upton Sinclair (Chapter 15) both muckraked the Chicago meat packers.

To better understand the muckraking era and investigatory journalism, we need to see muckraking as a tradition that is composed of diverse and often times clashing journalistic approaches, as opposed to a singular monolithic tradition of investigatory journalism.

As President Roosevelt argued in his muckraking speech, the type of journalism influences what type of public opinion develops, which in turn influences social change and reform. The journalist who trusts readers with a full portrayal of available information, and who avoids spurring the public to make emotional decisions based on incomplete information, leaves the reader space to become aware of various sides of an issue before his or her opinions crystallize. Alternatively, journalists who (in effect) try to think for the public by coercing readers with emotional language, opinions masquerading as facts, and a one-sided depiction of
events, undermines the democratic process. It does so, because this type of journalism doesn’t provide the public with the raw information that is needed for the public to make up its own mind. The facts are tainted at their source. Roosevelt argued that more even-handed, less emotional investigatory journalism would produce more even-handed, less emotional public opinion, which would generate more even-handed and less emotional political reform.

The President feared that if the watchdog press, which was in its infancy, grew-up in a way that it only responded to some culprits and not others, or responds in such a frenzy that it made it difficult to accurately understand the situation, then the well-being of the state would be threatened.

Since the muckraking era, the issues facing citizens of the United States have grown infinitely more complex and globalized. One result of this globalization is that citizens are expected to form opinions and choose between solutions (or candidates proposing solutions) to problems that they have even less first-hand experience with, then did the citizens in Roosevelt’s time. The lack of first-hand experience makes journalists responsible for painting more and more of the world, in the public’s mind.

The “form in which ideas are expressed, affect what those ideas will be,” argued media theorist Neil Postman (1985, p. 34). Postman was primarily talking about the influence of technological mediums, and the change from print to television, but this idea can be applied to storytelling structure within a medium. By focusing on storytelling and the way information is justified, we can recognize the various journalistic approaches during one of the most formative times in American journalism.
CHAPTER 2 IDA TARBELL

Of all the muckrakers, Ida Tarbell’s approach to journalism may have been the closest to that of a scientist (or a historian) seeking to understand the world. Her dedication to placing facts above opinion, education above activism, and a broad range of perspectives over her own self-interest is apparent early in Tarbell’s life, long before she became a journalist.

When Tarbell was in high school, she began to question her Christian creationist beliefs as she developed a love of science and the microscope. “Nothing was ever again to be final …. How can I accept without knowing more? The quest of truth had been born in me – the most tragic and incomplete, as well as the most essential, of man’s quests” (Tarbell, 2003, p. 30). This lack of faith inspired Tarbell “to questioning, qualifying even what I advocated, which no first class crusader can afford to do” (2003, p. 399).

Tarbell would not jump to a conclusion, even when she was considering issues that directly affected her life, such as whether she (and other women) could vote. With a hint of agony, Tarbell questioned her own unsettled feelings about woman's suffrage, asking herself: “why must I persist in the slow, tiresome practice of knowing more about things before I had an opinion?” (2003, p. 85)

Tarbell’s famed magazine series, *The History of the Standard Oil Company* was perhaps the single greatest journalistic achievement of the muckraking era. The nineteen-part series is often credited with galvanizing public opinion against business trusts. Yet the serial was never meant to be an attack on Rockefeller’s Standard Oil; it began as a history and to a lesser extent a biography of John D. Rockefeller.

Sam McClure, the owner and editor of *McClure’s Magazine* (which was perhaps the best known of all the muckraking organs), had originally aspired to have a series “on the greatest
American business achievements” (McClure, 1997, p. 238). McClure also felt the issue of trust companies was on the public’s mind and he wanted a series that would educate the public, who “took a threatening attitude toward the Trusts, and without much knowledge” (1997, p. 238).

Since Standard Oil was known as the “Mother of Trusts,” as many other trusts were directly or indirectly controlled subsidiaries of the Standard Oil Company, it made the oil juggernaut a suitable choice for the series (McClure, 1997, p. 238). Because John D. Rockefeller, “the Napoleon among business men,” was at the head of the Standard Oil Company, “the history of this Trusts would lend itself to the simplicity of biographical treatment,” wrote McClure (1997, p. 238).

Ida Tarbell was the natural choice among the McClure’s staff as she had already written two popular biographical series on Napoleon Bonaparte and on Abraham Lincoln. Additionally, Tarbell grew up surrounded by “oil derricks, oil tanks, pipe lines, refineries, oil exchanges” as she was raised less than thirty miles form where oil was first discovered (Tarbell, 2003, p. 203).

As a child, the affairs of Standard Oil had a direct influence on her family. Tarbell’s father had a small business making oil tanks and when Standard Oil took over the industry, Mr. Tarbell’s business went under and his business partner committed suicide. This left Mr. Tarbell burdened with debt and forced the family to mortgage there home (Tarbell, 2003, p. 203).

On what would become close to five years of research and writing, and would ultimately cost an estimated $4,000 per article (McClure, 1997, p. 245), Tarbell set to work looking though thousands of pages of Congressional Investigations, State Investigations and the transcripts of various court hearings regarding Standard Oil. At first an executive from Standard Oil named Henry Rogers, even agreed to help facilitate Tarbell’s project. McClure remembers:

when the Standard Oil people learned of our project, H. H. Rogers sent us word through his friend, Mark Twain, that the Standard Oil people would gladly help us in securing
material, and would lend us every facility for the production of this history. (McClure, 1997, p. 239)

When Tarbell met with Rogers, as opposed to taking a hostile or accusatory attitude, Tarbell seems to have genuinely tried to understand Rogers. Tarbell writes:

The more we talked, the more at home I felt with him and the more I liked him …. Finally we made our compact. I was to take up with him each case in their history as I came to it. He was to give me documents, figures, explanations, and justifications — anything and everything which would enlarge my understanding and judgment. (Tarbell, 2003, p. 215)

After almost three years of research, Tarbell’s first article of *The History of the Standard Oil Company* was printed in the December 1902 issue of *McClure’s* (McClure, 1997, p. 240). Originally, the Standard Oil series was to be only three articles long, but as the trove of material on Standard Oil grew, it warranted the series to be extended to six articles; then once the series began, the public’s massive interest extended the series to nineteen articles (Tarbell, 2003, p. 240).

Tarbell’s first article in *The History of the Standard Oil Company* was titled “The Rise of the Standard Oil Company.” Tarbell chronicles the early career of John D. Rockefeller, from his time as a twenty-three year old buying and selling produce on Cleveland’s docks at Lake Erie, to investing $4,000 in an energetic engineer, Samuel Andrews, who wanted to start an oil refinery (Tarbell, 1961, p. 246-247). Their firm, Rockefeller & Andrews was started in 1870 and would eventually grow into Standard Oil (p. 248).

In the opening article, Tarbell presents Rockefeller as a talented and disciplined businessman who relished getting the best possible price and achieving the highest possible efficiency in all aspects of his business (p. 248). But Standard Oil and other oil refineries located in Cleveland, had a disadvantage; Cleveland was more than a hundred miles west of where the oil fields lay in Oil Creek, Pennsylvania. This meant Cleveland refiners had to transport crude
oil west before transporting the refined oil east to New York, Boston and the eastern seaboard. When oil was first discovered this geographical inefficiency wasn’t a problem because there were no oil refineries located directly at the Oil Creek wells, but over the years competing refineries began to establish themselves directly at the wells.

As Rockefeller was trying to figure out how to overcome this geographical disadvantage, the railroads were in the midst of a shipping war over who would carry Oil Creek’s oil to the cities of the East Coast. The Lake Shore Railroad transported oil from the wells at Oil Creek to Cleveland and then to the East Coast cities; the Pennsylvania Railroad took oil directly from the refineries located at Oil Creek to the East. Rockefeller recognized that the fate of Standard Oil was intertwined with the fate of The Lake Shore Railroad (p. 250). Rockefeller then made a secret agreement with the Lake Shore to transport all of Standard Oil’s product on the Lake Shore railroad at a rate that was considerably lower than the rates charged by other railroads. Standard Oil would pay the regular price of forty cents per barrel, but at the end of each month Standard would get a kickback of fifteen cents per barrel on all the oil carried by the Lake Shore (p. 250).

At first the secret agreement was not noticed, but after a year the small refineries which had been making $10,000 or $20,000 annual profit found they were no longer profitable despite the booming of the oil industry (p. 250). The secret agreement had allowed Standard Oil to undercut the other refineries. “Only one firm – the Standard Oil Company – was making much money” (p. 250).

A rival refiner realized that Standard must have secured a special freight rate and approached the Lake Shore Railroad. The rival was told, “if he would ship as large a quantities as the Standard Oil Company he could have as good a rate. Ship as large a quantity!” Tarbell
writes. “It was a new principle in railroad policy. Were not the railroads public servants? Were they not bound, as common carriers, to carry ten barrels at the same rate per barrel as they did a hundred?” (p. 249) The business charter of the railroads designated them as common carriers, making the discriminatory act illegal, but Tarbell acknowledged that “in all branches of business the heaviest buyer got the best rate” – the violation was because railroads were common carriers (p. 249).

Tarbell shows a respect as well as a bit of uneasiness about Rockefeller’s business acumen and his ambition; she writes that Mr. Rockefeller was “a brooding, cautious, secretive man, seeing all the possible dangers as well as all the possible opportunities in things, and he studied, as a player at chess, all the possible combinations which might imperil his supremacy” (p. 251). Rockefeller’s “control of a railroad from the wells to the seashore gave him an advantage nobody else had had the daring and the persuasive power to get” (p. 251).

Tarbell’s first article did not end there. The Cleveland refiners were not the only ones who feared the rise of the Oil Creek refineries; Pittsburgh and Philadelphia were also threatened by the railroads that carried refined oil directly from the wells to New York City. The railroads that serviced Pittsburgh and Philadelphia were part of the New York Central railroad system. In 1871, a group of Pennsylvania refiners and one of the railroad executives presented Rockefeller a new scheme to form a secret combination of refiners that would be large enough to convince all other railroads to give the Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia refiners a special rebate; this agreement would end the railroad rate wars over oil transportation and would squeeze any profitability out of all refiners who were outside of the combination, especially the refiners at Oil Creek (p. 252). Once the combination had eliminated all competition “they could then limit their output to actual demand and so keep up prices” and prevent the transportation of crude oil for
export to Europe (p. 252-253). The group of conspirators formed the South Improvement Company and Rockefeller and Peter Watson, the President of a branch of the New York Central Railroad system set out to persuade railroads and refiners to join the new trust. Each person who they approached had to sign two pledges of silence before Watson and Rockefeller would share their plans (p. 253).

By 1872, all the pieces of the South Improvement Company were in place, with Standard Oil holding the largest amount of shares of stock in the new company. Under the scheme, the railroads had agreed to transport oil from the Oil Creek wells to Cleveland for $2.56 per barrel and the South Improvement Company got a $1.06 rebate on each barrel, and another rebate on oil shipped from Cleveland to the East coast. Additionally, the waybills of all the oil companies outside of the trust were sent to the South Improvement company which gave them “knowledge of just who was doing business outside of their company – of how much business he was doing, and with whom he was doing it” (p. 257).

The day before the South Improvement Company begin operating Standard Oil doubled its capitalization. Rockefeller set out to buy-up all the other Cleveland refiners, telling them the scheme gave those within the trust “absolute control” of the oil industry (p. 258). “There is no chance for any one outside,” said Rockefeller. “But we are going to give everybody a chance to come in. You are to turn over your refinery to my appraisers, and I will give you Standard Oil Company stock or cash” (p. 258). Tarbell writes that Rockefeller was “regretful, but firm,” and told them it was useless to resist and those who didn’t join “would certainly be crushed” (p. 258).

Where other muckrakers such as Upton Sinclair, David Graham Phillips, Will Irwin or Thomas Lawson were prone to wax poetically about the unquenched greed of a politician or a businessman, Tarbell dispassionately explained how Rockefeller “pointed out in detail and with
gentleness, how beneficent the scheme really was – preventing the Creek refiners from destroying Cleveland, keeping up the price of refined oil, destroying competition and eliminating speculation” (p. 258). Within three months, Rockefeller had taken over twenty-one of Cleveland’s twenty-six refiners and now had control of one-fifth of the oil refining in the United States (p. 259-260).

The entire scheme of the South Improvement Company worked because the trust was able to keep their plans secret – this all changed when a railroad freight agent, who held the secret freight rates had left his office in the care of subordinates while he went to attend to his dying son. The freight agent forgot to tell his employees that the freight rates inside his desk were to be kept secret. When they were published, “the independent oil men heard with amazement that freight rates had been put up nearly 100 per cent. They needed no other proof of the truth of the rumors of conspiracy which were circulating” (p. 260).

Tarbell’s opening article is driven by facts, and only lightly seasoned by her personal commentary, which itself reflects Tarbell’s restrained personality and her quest for a multifaceted understanding of the facts. The subject matter is complex, but Tarbell takes these convoluted facts and figures and brings out the drama, intrigue, and conspiracy that led to the creation and destruction of huge amounts of wealth. The drama comes from a straightforward telling of the facts, and not from Tarbell’s language or opinions.

Tarbell’s second article in the nineteen-part series appeared alongside Lincoln Steffens’ “The Shame of Minneapolis” and Ray Stannard Baker’s “The Right to Work” in the historic January 1903 issue of McClure’s. The three articles along with McClure’s editorial are often recognized as the moment the muckraking movement took off. The McClure’s issue sold out across the country and additional issues were purchased as fast as they were printed.
Tarbell’s January 1903 article, “The oil war of 1872” picked up where her first article left off, with the discovery of the South Improvement Company and the inflated freight rates. The independent oil producers realized the South Improvement Company could ship oil a dollar a barrel cheaper than the independents. In addition, the South Improvement Company received a dollar a barrel kickback on every barrel that the independents shipped – “this scheme was worth an additional $6,000,000 to the Southern Improvement Company” (Tarbell, 1961, p. 28). In response, the independent oil producers formed the Petroleum Producers’ Union and set out to enforce a blockade against the members of the South Improvement Company.

Tarbell tried to represent the mindset of both the independent oil producers as well as the South Improvement Company. On the minds of the independent oil producers was “the burning question:” who is behind the South Improvement Company? “Who are the conspirators?” Tarbell writes: “Whether the gentlemen concerned regarded themselves in the light of ‘conspirators’ or not, they seem from the first to have realized that it would be discreet not to be identified publicly with the scheme” (p. 24).

The Oil City Derrick, which Tarbell describes as “one of the most vigorous, witty, and daring newspapers in the country” published a blacklist at the head of its editorial section each day – seven individuals who were the heads of oil refineries, including John D. Rockefeller were listed, as well as the railroads that had made the notorious freight deal (p. 24-25). The Producers’ Union swore they would refuse to sell crude oil to the refineries listed in the Derrick and whenever possible they boycotted the offending railroads (p. 25).

In “The Oil War of 1872,” Tarbell brings out the intensity and the anger that was felt in the oil regions, but she does not do this at the expense of demonizing the South Improvement Company or the railroads. Tarbell gives fair expression to the perspective of Rockefeller and the
South Improvement Company. The listed President of the South Improvement Company, P. H. Watson argued “the contracts with the railroad are as favorable to the [oil] producing as to other interests [like oil refining]; that the much-denounced rebate will enhance the price of oil at the wells, and that our entire plan in operation and effect will promote every legitimate American interest in the oil trade” (p. 26). Tarbell writes that Mr. Rockefeller believed:

the “good of all” was in combination …. Of course Mr. Rockefeller knew that the railroad was a public carrier, and that its charter forbade discrimination. But he knew that the railroads did not pretend to obey the laws governing them, that they regularly granted special rates and rebates to those who had large amounts of freight. That is, you could bargain with the railroads as you could with a man carrying on a strictly private business depending in no way on a public franchise. Moreover, Mr. Rockefeller knew that if he did not get rebates, somebody else would; that they were for the wariest, the shrewdest, the most persistent. If somebody was to get rebates, why not he? This point of view was no uncommon one. Many men held it. (Tarbell, 1961, p. 37-38)

Tarbell was not trying to present a clear cut story of good versus evil, independents versus conspirators; honest men versus the dishonest. Rather she wrote the perspective of Standard Oil with as much sincerity as she wrote the perspective of the independent oil producers. Even Tarbell’s analysis of Rockefeller is full of nuance, thoughtfulness and even respect, and it’s almost completely void of any attempt to anger her readers. Tarbell writes:

If Mr. Rockefeller had been an ordinary man, the outburst of popular contempt and suspicion which suddenly poured on his head would have thwarted and crushed him. But he was no ordinary man. He had the powerful imagination to see what might be done with the oil business if it could be centered in his hands – the intelligence to analyze the problem into its elements and to find the key to control. He had the essential element to all great achievement, a steadfastness to a purpose which once convinced nothing can crush. (Tarbell, 1961, p. 37)

Tarbell also wrote from the railroad’s perspective, stating the claim that the railroads only signed the contracts because they were told that all oil refiners and producers would be allowed to join the South Improvement Company (p. 31). Tarbell quotes from a government investigation, the Hepburn Committee:
The objects of the railroads in making this contract with the South Improvement Company was to obtain an evener to pool the freight – pool the oil freight among the different roads; that they [the railroads] had been cutting each other on oil freights for a number of years, and had not made any money of it, although it was a freight they should have made money from; that they had endeavored to make an arrangement among themselves, but had always failed. (Tarbell, 1961, p. 32)

Once under government investigation, the railroads claimed they could now see that the South Improvement Company did not represent all oil refiners and producers. The railroad owners, including William Vanderbilt offered to make a new deal with the independent Petroleum Producers’ Union, but the independents would not agree. The independent producers:

believed in independent effort – everyman for himself and fair play for all. They wanted competition, loved open fight. They considered that all business should be done openly – that the railroads were bound as public carriers to give equal rates – that any combination which favored one firm or one locality at the expense of another was unjust and illegal. (Tarbell, 1961, p. 37-38)

Another party that would be affected by the South Improvement Company was the public – the end buyers of the refined oil. A Congressional committee investigation found that the public would pay an additional $7,500,000 for oil under the South Improvement Company’s scheme (p. 29).

Tarbell had an uncanny ability amongst the muckrakers to share the perspective of all parties involved in a way that seems natural and common sense. In the January 1903 article, Tarbell shares the perspective of the independents, the South Improvement Company, and the railroads in a balanced and reasonable fashion. This multifaceted approach discourages the reader from demonizing the guilty and instead gives the reader possible insights into why Standard Oil and the railroads behaved as they did. Even if a reader ultimately disagrees with the actions of Standard Oil and the railroads, Tarbell encourages her readers to try to understand this alternative perspective. It is not until the very end of the article that Tarbell tries to sum up and weigh the arguments on either side. In summary, Tarbell writes:
On the one hand there was an exaggerated sense of personal independence, on the other a firm belief in combination; on one hand a determination to root out the vicious system of rebates practiced by the railway, on the other a determination to keep it alive and profit by it. (Tarbell, 1961, p. 38)

The muckrakers are often associated with a crusading and activist style of journalism that tried to bring down politicians or corporations, but Tarbell acts more like a deliberative judge encouraging a jury of readers to postpone judgment until all the evidence is presented. Tarbell is not an advocate for one side over another, but instead insists that all the facts and arguments in support of and against both sides are given a fair hearing. With this evenhanded perspective, Tarbell is able to aptly identify the universal dimensions of the story she is telling and make this struggle of the oil industry of the 1870s, into something much more omnipresent:

Those theories which the body of [independent] oilmen held as vital and fundamental Mr. Rockefeller and his associates either did not comprehend or were def to. This lack of comprehension by many men of what seems to other men to be the most obvious principles of justice is not rare. Many men who are widely known as good, share it. Mr. Rockefeller was “good.” There was no more faithful Baptist in Cleveland than he …. He gave to its poor. He visited its sick. He wept with its suffering. Moreover, he gave unostentatiously to many outside charities of whose worthiness he was satisfied. He was simple and frugal …. He was a devoted husband, and he gave much time to the training of his children. (Tarbell, 1961, p. 38)

In the end Tarbell does pass a judgment against Standard Oil and the South Improvement Company. Tarbell writes that Mr. Rockefeller:

was willing to strain every nerve to obtain for himself special and illegal privileges from the railroads which were bound to ruin every man in the oil business not sharing them with him. Religious emotion and sentiments of charity, propriety and self-denial seem to have taken the place in him of notions of justice and regard for the rights of others. (Tarbell, 1961, p. 38-39)

The persuasive force in the article clearly lies with the demands of the independent oil producers of the Petroleum Producers’ Union, but the power of their persuasive force is in how reasonable their demands seem. Without being speculative or overreaching, Tarbell makes her article about far more than the 19th and early 20th century oil and railroad industry. Instead its
narrative stirs thoughts about human nature, economic ideals and role of government and industry in society.

To end the article, Tarbell sends the reader looking forward to the next article in the series. After the courts strike down the South Improvement Company, Rockefeller makes a trip to the oil region to “present a new plan of cooperation, and to show the oil men that it was to their interest to go into it. Whether they would be able to obtain by persuasion what they had failed to obtain by assault was now an interesting uncertainty” (p. 39).

Tarbell is able to deal with complex topics in a way that is entertaining and easy to understand, she is clearly writing for a general audience. Writing about the fierce competition between oil companies thirty years prior would seem to belong in a history book or a scholarly journal and not a popular magazine like McClure’s, but Standard Oil was still one of the most powerful forces in the world in 1903 and the issue of corporate consolidation and trust companies were drastically shaping the economic landscape that effected the lives of all Americans.

Throughout Tarbell’s career she showed a devotion to helping the public understand intricate and sometimes scholarly or scientific topics. When Tarbell worked on a story about an “air runner,” she told Dr. Langley, the head scientist:

we want the whole story of how you have done this thing and what it means, but no scientific jargon, please. We want it told in language so simple that I can understand it, for if I can understand it, all the world can. (Tarbell, 2003, p. 184)

When Tarbell was made an editor at McClure’s she, as well as others like Lincoln Steffens, were taught to remained responsive to the interests of the public by going out of the office to explore the country and “see what is going on in the cities and states, find out who are the men and the movements we ought to be reporting,” as Sam McClure told Tarbell (Tarbell,
The *McClure’s* editing strategy was to anticipate public interest in intelligent and important topics, while being careful to not force a story on readers. The scope and number of articles in Tarbell’s Standard Oil series grew “according to the response of readers. No response-no more chapters. A healthy response-as many chapters as the material justified” (Tarbell, 2003, p. 202). This belief was not simply motivated by a desire to give readers what they wanted, but a deep respect for the importance of public opinion.

Her commitment to sharing a balanced picture of reality with the public is demonstrated not just in her even handed portrayal of Rockefeller’s Standard Oil, but also in her series on leaders of industry for *The American Magazine*. Tarbell wrote about the success of industrialists like Thomas Lynch of the Frick Coke Company – “no unions could keep up with Tommy Lynch in the improvements he demanded for his mines and miners” (Tarbell, 2003, p. 286). Tarbell also wrote with deep respect for Henry Ford’s business practices as well as Ford’s personal character – Ford was “not thinking in terms of labor and capital, but in terms of... individuals, families, and with patience and sense and humor and determination were putting them on there feet” (Tarbell, 2003, p. 291). Tarbell wrote that the magazine series about the positive aspects of business came about because:

> Was it not as much my business as a reporter to present this side of the picture as to present the other? ... Was it not the duty of those who were called muckrakers to rake up the good earth as well as the noxious? (Tarbell, 2003, p. 280)

After the success of Tarbell’s exposé on Standard Oil, she found many Progressives “wanted attacks” from her and “had little interest in balanced findings” (Tarbell, 2003, p. 242). Echoing Roosevelt’s muckraking speech, Tarbell wrote that, “in the long run, the public they were trying to stir would weary of vituperation” and if reformers “were to secure permanent results the mind must be convinced” (Tarbell, 2003, p. 242). Tarbell believed that when public
opinion was based on an understanding of facts instead of on forcefully stated opinions, it gave the public firmer ground to stand on.

Towards the end of the Progressive Era, Tarbell was critical of many of her fellow muckrakers for straying from the facts in an attempt to gain further readership and profits:

We were classed as muckrakers, and the school had been so commercialized that the public was beginning to suspect it. The public was not as stupid as it sometimes seems. The truth of the matter was that the muckraking school was stupid. It had lost the passion for facts in a passion for subscriptions. (Tarbell, 2003, p. 298)

Ida Tarbell’s journalism reflects a patient and scholarly quest for truth combined with a recognition of the importance of informing the general public. The central thrust of Tarbell’s writing is propelled forward by a fair weighing of evidence on all sides, followed by a neutral treatment of the various perspectives of those involved. She makes clear the difference between a historical fact (i.e. Standard Oil made a secret contract with the railroads) and a perspective (i.e. Standard Oil believed they had the right to make a favorable contract with the railroad because they were transporting more oil than anyone else).

Tarbell’s journalistic approach appears to stem from her need to question her own subjective understanding and her recognition that her experience is only one of many understandings:

What a man or woman does is built on what those who have gone before have done, that its real value depends on making the matter in hand a litter clearer, a little sounder for those who come after. Nobody begins or ends anything. Each person is a link, weak or strong, in an endless chain. One of our gravest mistakes is persuading ourselves that nobody has passed this way before…. In our eagerness to prove that we have found the true solution, we fail to inquire why this same solution failed to work when tried before - for it always has been tried before, even if we in our self-confidence do not know it. (Tarbell, 2003, p. 399-400)

In *Liberty and the News* (1920), Walter Lippmann argued that journalism had taken over the role of “thinking” for the public and sacrifices truth and fairness in order to persuade the
public (p. 9); he said the press puts their conception of “national interest” ahead of sharing the truth and a nuanced understanding of present conditions (p. 10). The more neutral and multifaceted muckraking, which Ida Tarbell exemplifies, may have defied this pattern of discourse by trusting the public with as full a picture of the facts as she could obtain, and by showing the humanity of villains and the flaws of the honest. Of her investigation of Standard Oil, Tarbell wrote that she and her editors “were neither apologists nor critics, only journalist intent on discovering what had gone into the making of this most perfect of all monopolies” (Tarbell, 2003, p. 206).
CHAPTER 3 HENRY DEMAREST LLOYD

Almost a decade before Ida Tarbell wrote *A History of the Standard Oil Company*, the Populist journalist, Henry Demarest Lloyd took on the oil behemoth in the book, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (1893). But Lloyd’s writing was not a dramatic narrative, like Tarbell’s articles. “Nor was it a straightforward chronological history of corporate malfeasance” - it was a prosecution of Standard Oil (Jernigan, 1976, p. 64).

Over 536 pages of painstaking argument and evidence, Lloyd makes the case that Standard Oil is guilty of crimes against the public. Lloyd’s argument extended beyond Standard Oil, which he saw as representative of capitalism as a whole. Reflecting on the style of his own writing in *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, Lloyd wrote: “I realized thoroughly that I sacrifice literary effect by the method I have pursued…. I aimed to collate the materials from which others will produce literary effects” (Jernigan, 1976, p. 64).

Tarbell read Lloyd’s *Wealth against Commonwealth* and found it “brilliant,” but disagreed with Lloyd’s conclusion - that capitalism itself was the problem. Tarbell writes in her autobiography, “As I saw it, it was not capitalism but an open disregard of decent ethical business practices by capitalists” (2003, p. 204). Lloyd and Tarbell represent two different journalistic approaches, dealing with the same subject. While Tarbell’s journalism follows the path carved by academics seeking a detached understanding, the style of *Wealth Against Commonwealth* is more in line with a work of moralistic philosophy combine with an exhaustive legal case against Standard Oil.

Lloyd’s early career choices provide insights into his style of journalism, which used an avalanche of evidence and passionate, one-sided commentary to make his argument. Before writing *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, Lloyd worked as a press agent for the American Free-
Trade League, an editorialist for the *Chicago Tribune* and completed a law degree from Columbia Law School. As press agent-secretary for the American Free-Trade League, Lloyd wrote a series of letters to the *New York Evening Post* arguing the tariff caused harm to the American people. These letters were signed anonymously as: “NO MONOPOLY” and were partially a response to the protectionist editorials in Horace Greeley’s *NY Tribune* (Jernigan, 1976, p. 41). A few years later, Lloyd became financial editor, and later chief editorial writer of the *Chicago Tribune*. At the *Tribune*, some of Lloyd’s foremost campaigns were in opposition to “railroad chicanery” and “unethical financial speculations” (Jernigan, 1976, p. 44). Lloyd’s December 30th, 1881 editorial titled, “American Pashas” displays Lloyds perspective on labor and capital:

> Wealth acquired by labor is an honor to a man and a benefit to society, but great fortunes of tens of millions, acquired by bribing Legislatures, corrupting courts, betraying corporate trusts, and crushing the weak with the sheer force of accumulated wealth are a menace to the people individually and as society. (Jernigan, 1976, p. 45)

In the pages of the *Chicago Tribune*, Lloyd spoke out passionately against the railroads:

> “Railroad wars bring intolerable evils; railroad pools are to be submitted to only when they are part of the government itself” (Jernigan, 1976, p. 45). The belief that the people, acting through the government should own industries that were natural monopolies (including the railroads, the oil and natural gas, and the street cars) was a consistent argument expressed in Lloyd’s journalism.

Lloyd wrote four significant magazine investigations from 1881 to 1884. “The Story of a Great Monopoly” (1881) and “The Political Economy of Seventy-Three Million Dollars” (1882) were published in the *Atlantic Monthly*; “Making Bread Dear” (1883) and “Lords of Industry” (1884) were published in *North American Review* (Jernigan, 1976, p. 22).
“The Story of a Great Monopoly” (1887) sought to show how the violence of the railroad strike of 1877 was related to the collusion of railroad financiers and other corporate combinations. Lloyd focused on the secret collaboration between Pennsylvanian Railroad and Standard Oil. “The Story of a Great Monopoly” “marked a deciding turning point in journalistic history, since it was the first documented and authoritative study of industrial concentration,” wrote Russel Nye in Midwest Progressive Politics (Jernigan, 1976, p. 50). In this article, Lloyd’s tone was markedly different from Wealth Against Commonwealth (1894). In “The Story of a Great Monopoly,” Lloyd was willing to acknowledge the greatness of Standard Oil, while at the same time condemned their dishonest practices, in a tone that was comparable to Tarbell’s writing a decade later. In the article Lloyd wrote, Standard Oil’s “great business capacity would have insured the managers of Standard a success, but the means by which they achieved monopoly was by conspiracy with the railroads” (Jernigan, 1976, p. 47). Lloyd’s article went on to inspire the muckraker, Charles Edward Russell who wrote:

As the Standard Oil article in The Atlantic became the armory of every person willing to fight for industrial freedom, so Wealth Against Commonwealth … became the great storehouse of information to which numbers of able campaigners habitually resorted for their facts. (Lloyd, 1912, p. ix)

Lloyd’s second article for The Atlantic Monthly, “The Political Economy of Seventy-Three Million Dollars” was more sweeping and passionate. Lloyd described Jay Gould and company as engaging in “an orgy of fiduciary harlotry” and condemned the entire system that would allow one man to gain a $73,000,000 fortune, while his employees lived in poverty (Jernigan, 1976, p. 52). E. L. Godkin of The Nation, as well as others, criticized Lloyd for being too sweeping in his condemnation. Godkin thought the inequality in society was due to the work of the individual “bad man,” where Lloyd condemned capitalism as a whole (Jernigan, 1976, p. 53).
Lloyd was also criticized for his next article, “Making Bread Dear” for relying “to much on exhortation rather than on demonstration” (Jernigan, 1976, p. 55). This critique was repeated throughout Lloyd’s career - too much editorializing, as opposed to allowing facts the space to speak for themselves.

In Lloyd’s series of articles titled, “Lords of Industry” which continued for 20 years, Lloyd enumerated dozens of monopolies and detailed the character and history of trusts involved in railroads, sugar, and anthracite coal, amongst others. Throughout these histories, Lloyd passionately and poetically advocated for government regulation and ownership (Jernigan, 1976, p. 57).

Lloyd muckraked a decade before the muckraking movement and thus Lloyd had to use “alternative forums of the platform, the book and the special interest periodical.” Lloyd gave numerous speeches lashing out at the “ripe-rotten prosperity” (Jernigan, 1976, p. 58) of American inequality and blamed the “corporate jugglers and stock exchange ‘athletes,’ experts in the manufacture of Wall Street values, out of hot air, water, and ink” (Jernigan, 1976, p. 61). In the ongoing debate concerning whether government would regulate (or own) industry, or whether industry would preside over government, Lloyd stood firmly on the side of government power and believed the government better represented the will of American citizens: “ownership [of natural monopolies] by the people is the only agency which the people can use to restore their market rights and all their other rights,” wrote Lloyd (Jernigan, 1976, p. 61).

A popular journalist like Ida Tarbell or an editor like Sam McClure, who were successful at reaching a wide audience, showed a clear understanding and respect for communicating with the general public. Lloyd was less in tune with the general audience. His writing is more intellectual and philosophical, and lacks the accessible and dramatic structure of Tarbell’s
articles on Standard Oil. Lloyd did not identify with the mass public as Tarbell and McClure did, and for all of Lloyd’s populism, some of his private writing comes off as highly elitist:

I could not live if I did not think that I was in some way to be lifted above and upon the insensate masses who flood the stage of life in their passage to oblivion, but I want power unpoisoned by the presence of obligation. Can you think of any avenue to power, more independent … than Journalism? (Lloyd, 1963, p. 5)

Lloyd’s most enduring work, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* was published in 1894.
The book was not a commercial success, with only 12,000 copies printed, but the book “found an audience not with the masses but among the intellectuals, the molders of public opinion – scholars, journalists, political reformers, clergymen” writes Lloyd biographer Jernigan (1976, p. 63).

In *Wealth Against Commonwealth* Lloyd presents hundreds of pages of carefully documented evidence, but to open the book he gives his assessment of the political and economic reality of the times and then passes his moral judgment in a passionate, elegant and philosophical editorial.

To begin *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, Lloyd writes:

Nature is rich; but everywhere man, the heir of nature, is poor…. Never since time began have all the sons and daughters of men been all warm, and all filled, and all shod and roofed …. The world, enriched by thousands of generators of toilers and thinkers, has reached a fertility which can give every human being a plenty undreamed of even in the Utopias. But between this plenty ripening on the boughs of our civilization and the people hungering for it step the “corners,” the syndicates, trusts, combinations, with the cry of “over-production” – too much of everything. Holding back the riches of earth, sea, and sky from their fellows who famish and freeze in the dark …. The majority have never been able to buy enough of anything; but this minority have too much of everything. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 1)

Lloyd’s perspective is clear from the opening page - “liberty produces wealth, and wealth destroys liberty” (p. 2). Lloyd is placing himself in opposition to capital, especially big capital. “Our bigness, cities, factories, monopolies, fortunes, which are our empires, are the obesities of
an age gluttonous beyond its powers of digestion” (p. 2). This bigness separates labor from capital and citizens from their government; “the people cannot reach across … to rule their rulers; Captains of Industry ‘do not know’ whether the men in the ranks are dying from lack of food and shelter” (p. 2). The result of this lack of contract and understanding is the mill-wheels of industry “wear out the hearts of workers unable to keep up beating to their whirl” (p. 2).

Lloyd argues inductively, starting from the broadest of statements about the social, political and economic nature of humans, and then constricting his focus to the specifics about the current economic system and eventually to the case of the Standard Oil trust. On capitalism, Lloyd sees the cutthroat nature as sharing the ideals of “corporate Caesars” who fight until they have killed all their enemies (p. 2). On the current situation, Lloyd writes: “There are no solitary truths, Goethe says, and monopoly – as the greatest business fact of our civilization, which gives to business what other ages gave to war and religion – is our greatest social, political and moral fact” (p. 6).

Wealth Against Commonwealth is full of hundreds of footnotes and Lloyd states in his opening chapter the source of his information, which includes: “Decisions of courts and of special tribunals like the Interstate Commerce Commission, verdicts of juries in civil and criminal cases, reports of committees of the State Legislatures and of Congress, oath-sworn testimonies” and other official sources (p. 7).

The vastness of Lloyd’s purpose is no less than to demonstrate the nature of capitalism through the careful telling of the history of Standard Oil. Lloyd extends his conclusion far beyond the specific evidence he presents, which only touches Standard Oil. To defend this gap between evidence and conclusion, Lloyd writes:

To give the full official history of numbers of these combinations, which are nearly identical in inspiration, method, and result, would be repetition. Only one of them,
therefore, has been treated in full – the oil trust … the parent of the trust system. (Lloyd, 1894, p.8)

Standard Oil is simply “the best illustration of a movement which is itself but an illustration of the spirit of the age,” writes Lloyd (p.8). What follows this opinionated, philosophical and poetic opening chapter is over five hundred pages of well documented and a fairly straight-forward presentation of the history of Standard Oil.

Lloyd does not tell the history of Standard Oil as a chronological narrative with John D. Rockefeller as the central character, as Ida Tarbell did a decade later; rather Lloyd removes as much individuality from Standard Oil and Rockefeller as possible. Lloyd rarely identified Standard Oil by name, but instead calls it: “the oil trust,” “the trust,” “the monopoly,” “the combination.” John D. Rockefeller is only identified as “the head of the oil combination,” “the president of the oil trust,” or simply “he” – in the entire 536 page book, I didn’t find John D. Rockefeller identified by name a single time. This was likely Lloyd’s attempt to generalize the evidence beyond Rockefeller and Standard Oil, and to have the indictment wrap its arms around all of capitalism and big business. Standard Oil’s first attempt to create an oil trust, through the umbrella conglomerate of the South Improvement Company, is described by Lloyd as:

a body of thirteen men, “not one of whom lived in the oil regions, or was owner of the oil wells or oil lands,” who had associated themselves for control of the oil business under the winning name of the South Improvement Company. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 45)

Lloyd then list six points that make up the contract between the South Improvement Company and the railroads, including:

1. To double freight rates
2. To not charge Standard Oil the increased rates
3. To give Standard Oil the increases collected from all competitors
4. To make any other changes of rates necessary to guarantee their success in business
5. To destroy their competitors by high freight rates
6. To spy out the details of their competitors business (Lloyd, 1894, p. 46)
This agreement would net the South Improvement Company and the railroads $7,500,000 with $6,000,000 going to the South Improvement Company and $1,500,000 going directly to the railroads.

Lloyd gives the testimony of one of the numerous small oil companies whose profits had been averaging more than $30,000 each year and then after the increase in freight rates the profits dropped to zero (p. 52). With the small independent oil refiners thoroughly weakened by the increased freight rates, the South Improvement Company bought up the small companies for fifty cents on the dollar; “It was that or nothing” writes Lloyd (p. 53).

Lloyd quotes at length from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court verdict and the transcripts of the Committee of Congress’s investigation into the South Improvement Company. His documentation is impressive and in most of the chapters, Lloyd keeps his editorial commentary to a minimum, saving it all for his long opening and closing statements at the bookends.

Because Lloyd avoids using specific names of companies and individuals, his writing can seem clumsy when he’s trying to explain the complex structure of Standard Oil or the South Improvement Company, though a reader almost always knows who Lloyd is talking about and if reference is needed, the footnotes are available.

Lloyd’s documentation of primary sources is more through than Tarbell’s. Almost every page of Wealth Against Commonwealth has a footnote or two at the bottom of the page and almost all the footnotes have specific page numbers for the original source. Tarbell’s History of the Standard Oil Company does not have footnotes, though she does have a long appendix in the back of the book. Tarbell also weaves the source of the information she is using into her narrative, by referring to the findings of a specific congressional investigation or the testimony of
a Standard Oil executive in a State lawsuit. This sourcing makes Lloyd’s book a better reference for researchers and scholars, where Tarbell’s magazine articles were aimed at the general public.

There is drama and poetry in Lloyd’s book, but the driving force of the book is a moral argument about capitalism, in contrast to Tarbell, who lets the dramatic narrative of the rise of John D. Rockefeller and Standard Oil, propel the story forward.

The contrast between the journalistic approach of Lloyd and Tarbell is easily seen in the way they present the perspectives of Standard Oil and the railroads. Tarbell gave a strong voice to everyone involved in the story. She let her readers know of the exceptional and admirable qualities of Rockefeller, Henry Rogers and the greater Standard Oil Company. Almost exclusively, Lloyd presents the negative and immoral side of the oil trust.

When Lloyd does try to present Rockefeller’s perspective, he is quick to add his own countering judgment of Rockefeller, for example, when a Standard Oil executive was asked in court, about a meeting between the oil trust and the railroads, where more than $3,000,000 changed hands, and the executive said he didn’t recall being at such a meeting. When it was proved that the executive was at the meeting, he couldn’t remember when it took place, who else was there, or if any money changed hands. Lloyd remarks: “‘The pleasures of memory,’ are evidently for poets, not for such millionaires. That appears to be the only indulgence they cannot afford” (p. 89).

At other times, Lloyd seems to cast the opposing perspective as an unconvincing strawman that Lloyd sets fire to. When a railroad representative who was testifying before Congress said: “under this system [the South Improvement Company scheme] the rate is even and fair to all parties, preventing one locality taking advantage of its neighbor by reason or some alleged or real facility it may possess” (p. 86). Lloyd explains this confusing statement by saying that the
railroad representative was evasively arguing that the railroads had agreed to neutralize Standard Oil’s geographic disadvantage of being in Cleveland instead of at the Oil Creek wells. The railroads would do this by shipping oil from the wells to Standard’s Cleveland refineries (close to 150 miles away) at the same price as oil was moved from the wells to the refineries located at the wells, which is to say the railroads shipped oil to Cleveland for free (p. 86).

The Congressional investigator asked, “Do you do that in any business except the oil? … Do you carry a raw product to a place 150 miles distant and back again to another point without charge, so as to put them on an equality?” The investigator continued, “Could any more flagrant violation of every principle of railroad economy and natural justice be imagined than this?” (p. 86)

Tarbell made the same point, but she did so in a way that helped the reader understand the oil trust’s perspective. She did this by highlighting the context of the railroad rate wars which left the railroads unprofitable, and the threat of economic ruin facing Standard Oil because of their geographical disadvantage. Lloyd’s presentation makes the trust’s perspective indefensibly absurd, and fails to provide an adequate defense for the trust.

Most often, Lloyd does not even attempt to present the Standard Oil or railroad perspective and instead presents the perspective of the independent oil refiners. When an independent refiner approached the Pennsylvania Railroad after his companies rates had been raised, he was told even if he shipped as much oil as the Standard Oil Company he could not have his rates lowered and his only option was to sell out to Standard Oil. The independent refiner responds by saying:

we did not propose to enter into any “fix up” where we would lose our identity, or sell out, or be under anybody else’s thumb; we are willing to pay as high a rate of freight as anybody, and we want it as low as anybody has it. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 91)
The Pennsylvania Railroad responds by simply telling the man, “You cannot have the same rate of freight.” Even after the independent refiners agreed to the highly inflated freight rate, they were refused oil cars to transport their oil and when the independents offered to build their own cars, the railroads refused to use them (p. 92). The independent refiners, tried to lay a pipeline to the eastern seaboard but a Standard Oil subsidiary, the United Pipe Line, bought up all the smaller pipeline companies and the independent pipeline was stopped (p. 92). Even twenty years later, when Lloyd was writing, he says when the independent oil refiners ask the railroads to transport their oil, the answer was still “no” (p. 103).

After many years of delay, the independent oil refiners and producers consolidated all their effort for a pipeline from the oil wells to the sea; Standard Oil lawyers got an injunction to stop construction and amidst the court battle, a main independent oil producer’s refinery mysteriously caught fire and the main pipe line was cut and oil filled the valley “to the tree-tops” and caught fire, destroying the entire valley; at the same time, telegraph wires were cut so the oil continued to pump into the burning valley (p. 447).

The strength of Lloyd’s argument is in his use of evidence. For example, the oil trust argued they produce oil cheaper than anyone else; Lloyd then presents the different prices of oil and kerosene sold to the public and found that when there was competition by independent oil sellers, the price dropped from $.15 to $.10 in Paris Texas; $.16 to $.05 in Little Rock, Arkansas; $.16 to $.08 in Memphis (p. 424). Lloyd argues that the oil trust temporarily dropped their prices to drive all the profits out the independent sellers and as soon as they were bought up or went out of business, the prices jumped back up again (p. 424).

In the fashion of a lawyer brining all evidence to bear, as opposed to a storyteller who is trying to move the story forward, Lloyd tends to pile on page after page of evidence when a
fraction of it would prove his point. For instance, Lloyd tells the story of the city of Toledo constructing a municipally owned and operated pipeline that would bring gas from the city owned oil well to the citizens of Toledo at a reduced price. To undermine the effort, the oil trust purchased Toledo’s morning paper, which had previously written editorials in support of the Toledo pipeline. The trust’s newspaper fiercely attacked another Ohio paper, *The Journal*, for supporting the pipeline, calling it:

“That aged, acidulous addle-pate, the monkey-eyed, monkey-browed monogram of sarcasm, and spider-shanked, pigeon-witted public scold, Majah Bilgewater Bickham, and his backbiting, black-mailing, patent-medicine directory, the Journal.” (Lloyd, 1894, p. 319)

The newspaper editor was eventually sued for libel and was sentenced to jail, but the sentence was suspended and at the new trial the editor pled guilty and was allowed to get off with paying fines and serving no jail time (p. 325).

The overkill of evidence comes when Lloyd fills eight pages with examples of the newspaper’s fierce opposition to the pipeline and there misleading coverage. Lloyd makes his point to such an excess, it is easy to get lost in the details.

Standard Oil ended up fighting the right of the city of Toledo to own and operate a pipeline all the way to the Supreme Court; Standard Oil lost the court battle, but delayed the bond sale to fund the construction of the pipeline by a year. The oil trust also filed falsified petitions with names of deceased Toledo residents in order to further delay the pipeline (p. 333).

During these long delays, the oil trust purchased the land adjacent to the oil well owned by the city of Toledo and then proceeded to only draw from these wells for the next two years in order to drain the oil deposit as quickly as possible (p. 356). By 1893, the Toledo pipeline construction was complete and the city was supplying its own gas. Lloyd writes:
The completion of the enterprise had been delayed three years. A loss of not less than two million dollars had been laid on the city, but its victory was worth many times that. This struggle and its results of good omen will pass into duly recorded history as a warning and an encouragement to people everywhere who wish to lead the life of the commonwealth. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 367)

In the end, the oil trust spent $6,000,000 to drain the Toledo oil field at a great loss; the city spent $1,000,000 to supply their residents with gas (p. 360).

Where Tarbell would present evidence with little or no commentary, Lloyd editorialized. For example, when described the secret agreement between Standard Oil and the Rothschild family, who dominated the Russian oil industry, Lloyd adds the comment: “There is something more cruel than Russian despotism – American ‘private enterprises’” (p. 445).

Lloyd’s editorializing is strongest at the opening and closing of Wealth Against Commonwealth. The last four chapters or a total of 81 pages can be seen as a closing statement, summing up the tidal wave of evidence. To begin his closing statement, Lloyd makes a rare conciliatory statement towards Standard Oil, followed by a quick jab:

This “business success” is the greatest commercial and financial achievement of history. Its broad foundation was laid in the years of 1872 to 1879, the severest time of panic for others the world has known. A universal jaundice of ill-fortune has given its sallow complexion to everyone else. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 455)

Lloyd then presents evidence that the workers in the oil business are worse off after the two and a half decades where Standard Oil consolidated power. Lloyd quotes an oil worker:

“A well-digger that I paid $6 a day and his expenses twenty-four years ago is not working for $40 a month. This is true of every department of the oil business so far as the wages of workmen are concerned.” (Lloyd, 1894, p. 456)

Lloyd argues that the railroads were doing no better than the laborers, and the independent oil refiners as well as the producers were also facing financial suffering despite the growth of the oil industry (p. 456). Standard Oil and its subsidiaries appear to be the only ones making money, growing their “little next-egg of nothing” in 1862 into $1,000,000 less than a
decade later and by 1872 Standard Oil was capitalized at over $70,000,000; by 1892 when the Standard Oil trust was “dissolved in name” the stock was worth over $166,000,000 (p. 457).

Of John D. Rockefeller’s personal wealth, Lloyd writes, “His regular income is twenty millions of dollars a year,” which not only makes him the richest man in the United States, but Rockefeller’s income was more than three times the entire bank of England dividends of 1892 (p. 459). The Standard Oil trust is a major owner of almost every major industry, including, railroads, coal, iron, silver, gold, copper, lumber, cotton, food crops, grazing land, steamships, finance, construction, telegraphs, gas, street-railways, steel mills, shipyards (p. 460):

Ore dug out of their own iron mines at the head of Lake Superior is carried over their own railroad to their own furnaces and mills. It rolls along until that which began to move as ore lies at the docks of their ship-yards as a finished vessel … They are in the combination of anthracite coal …. Theirs is the largest share in the natural-gas business in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, Indiana, Illinois …. They are in the combination which controls lead, from pig to white lead, and turpentine and linseed-oil and paints. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 461)

As Lloyd goes on in his description of the vast reach of Standard Oil, he becomes more and more sweeping in his statement and more passionate in his language:

They feed entire mountain ranges into their mills with one hand, and with the other dispatch the product in their own cars and ships to all markets. Betrayal, bankruptcy, broken hearts, and death have kept quick step with the march of the conquerors. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 461)

Despite this vast wealth:

these successful men did not discover the oil, nor how to “strike” it…. They did not invent any of the processes of refining. They did not devise the pipe line and they did all they could to prevent the building of the first pipe line to the seaboard, and to cripple the successful experiment of piping refined oil. They own all the important refineries, and yet they have built very few…. They were not the first to enter the field in any department. They did not have as great capital or skill as their competitors. They began their career in the wrong place—at Cleveland - out of the way of the wells and the principal markets …. They had no process of refining oil which others had not, and no legitimate advantages over others. They did not even invent the rebate. They made oil poor and scarce and dear. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 463-464)
Lloyd argues they succeeded by limiting competition and controlling the means of transportation in an illegal, inefficient, and immoral way, by closing down canals, stopping pipelines, unequal railroad rebates, spying on competitors and other dubious means. “All are poorer – oil producers, land-owners, all labor, all the railroads, all the refiners, merchants, all the consumers of the oil – the whole people. Less oil has flowed, less light shone, and there has been less happiness and virtue” (p. 465).

The last few chapters are a poetic and passionate rant against the morally corrupt philosophical underpinning of the Standard Oil Company. The railroad rebate is “like an explosive bullet” not recognized by the rules of war (p. 474). Those who use the rebate:

- go about sedate and smiling, with seemingly friendly hands empty of all tools of death. But all about them as they will, as if it were only by wish of theirs which attendant spirits hastened to execute, rivals are blown out of the highways, busy mills and refineries turn to dust, hearts break, and strong men go mad or commit suicide or surrender their persons and their property to the skillful artillerists. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 475)

Lloyd rails against Adam Smith’s principle of economic self-interest, which Lloyd describes as “one of the historic mistakes of humanity” (p. 494). Despite Lloyd’s catastrophic diagnosis, at times Lloyd writes as if he is trying to will by the force of his own words, the coming of a new era:

- When the Middle Ages landed on the shores of the sixteenth century they broke ranks, and for three hundred years every one has been scurrying about to get what he could …. But now we are touching elbows again, and the dream of these picnic centuries that the social can be made secondary to the individual is being chased out of our minds by the hard light of the crisis into which we are waking. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 494-495)

Lloyd points out, what he sees as an inconsistency within public opinion:

- Political government by the self-interest of the individual we call anarchy. It is one of the paradoxes of public opinion that the people of America, least tolerant of this theory of anarchy in political government, lead in practicing it in industry. Politically we are civilized; industrially, not yet. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 496)

Lloyd continues:
Believing wealth to be good, the people believe the wealthy to be good. But, again in history, power has intoxicated and hardened its possessors, and Pharohs are bred in counting-rooms as they were in palaces. Their furniture must be banished to the world-garret, where lie the out-worn trappings of the guilds and slavery and other old lumber of human institutions. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 515)

When Lloyd describes the human cost of this philosophy of economic self-interest, his bluster reaches his highest pitch – “the scarlet-fever skins of the poor” and the “factory and mine where childhood is forbidden” and the “mousoleums in which we bury the dead rich” and the “slums in which we bury the living poor” – “all these are the rule of private self-interest arrived at its destination” (p. 499). Lloyd describes capitalism as resembling “the winnings of speculators in bread during famine – worse, for to make money it makes the famine” (p. 500).

Lloyd condemns the very business principles that govern the capitalist economy: “the power of selling dear on one side, and producing chap on the other. Thus they keep themselves happy, prices high and the people hungry. What model merchant could ask for more” (p. 502)?

Lloyd sees the greater complexity of capitalism as a sort of Frankenstinian moral insanity. “Business colors the modern world as war reddened the ancient world. Out of such delirium monsters are bred, and their excesses destroy the system that brought them forth” (p. 509).

Where Adam Smith believed social advancement was best achieved by the strivings of individuals following their self-interest, Lloyd sees self-interested capitalists as fundamentally different and less moral then the average person:

The righteous indignation that other men feel against sin these men feel against that which withstands them. Sincere as rattlesnakes, they are selfish with the unconscious possible to only the entirely common place, without the curiosity to question their times or the imagination to concern the pain they inflict…. These men are the touchstones to wither the cant of an age. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 508)
The blame for allowing the ethics of capitalism to overtake our economy is the hypocrisy of the people. The Christian ethic, which many capitalists like John D. Rockefeller, as well as the majority of American people claim to hold is the golden rule, “do un to others as you’d have done un to you,” but we live by an entirely different ethic:

We preach “Do as you would be done by”…. Just as we are in danger of believing that to say these things is to do them and be them…. Taking their cue not from our lips, but from our lives, they better the instruction, and, passing easily to the high seats at every table, prove that we are liars and hypocrites. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 509)

Lloyd moves back and forth between demonizing the greed of individual “lunatic” capitalists (p. 509) and condemning the entire capitalist system: “A system in which the prizes go to the meanness invariably marches with the meanest men at the head…. Monopoly is business at the end of its journey” (p. 512).

Hoping to avoid leaving his readers bitter, dejected, Lloyd tries to turn anger and sadness into action, Lloyd writes: “We must bring the size of our morality up to the size of our cities, corporations, and combinations, or these will be brought down to fit our half-grown virtue” (p. 524). Lloyd continues with his solution:

“Regenerate the individual” is a half-truth; the reorganization of the society which he makes and which makes him is the other half. Man alone cannot be a Christian. Institutions are applied beliefs…. History has taught us nothing if not that men can continue to associate only by the laws of association. The golden rule … can be operated only through laws, habits, forms, and institutions…. The business world is full of men who yearn to abandon its methods and live the love they feel; but to attempt to do so by themselves would be martyrdom…. The change must be social. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 522)

Lloyd argued we must not tolerate tyranny in business any more than tyranny in government. Just as the people will no longer accept being ruled by kings, Lloyd hopes the people are ready to take a similar step forward in our commerce and trade:

New freedoms cannot be operated through the old forms of slavery. The ideals of Washington and Hamilton and Adams could not breathe under kingly rule…. We must
have honesty, love, justice in the heart of the business world, but for these we must also have the forms which will fit them. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 523)

To bring about this change in business, Lloyd writes:

The next emancipation, like all emancipations, must destroy and build. The most constructive thinker in history said, Love one another; but he also drove the money-changers from the temple, and denounced the scribes and Pharisees, and has been for nineteen hundred years pulling down tenements unfit for the habitations of the soul. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 525)

Lloyd believed the solution to our inequality and economic despotism, is to apply the cooperative methods of the Post Office and the public schools to all areas where monopoly exists. Seemingly with his final gasp, Lloyd concludes Wealth Against Commonwealth:

The same rising genius of democracy which discovered that mankind did not co-operate in the State to provide a few with palaces and king’s-evil, is disclosing that men do not co-operate in trade for any other purpose than to mobilize the labor of all for the benefit of all, and that the only true guidance comes from those who are led, and the only valid titles from those who create…. When it comes to the facts the human heart can no more endure monopoly than American slavery or Roman empire. The first step to a remedy is that the people care. If they know, they will care. To help them to know and care; to stimulate new hatred of evil, new love of the good, new sympathy for the victims of power, and … to quicken the old into a new conscience, this compilation of fact has been made. Democracy is not a lie. There live in the body of the commonalty the unexhausted virtue and ever-refreshed strength which can rise equal to any problems of progress. In the hope of tapping some reserve of their powers of self-help this story is told to the people. (Lloyd, 1894, p. 536)

Lloyd hoped Wealth Against Commonwealth would reach a wide audience, but the release of the book was overwhelmed by the 1893 stock market panic, and the American Railway Union and Pullman strikes (Jernigan, 1976, p. 72). Lloyd later wrote of the book:

I could easily tell the story in one quarter the space and … tell it better. But then the story would be only told; it wouldn’t be proved …. The only string left to play … was this of Fact-Official adjudicated, massed in avalanche. I realized thoroughly that I sacrifice literary effect by the method I have pursued …. I have aimed to collate the materials from which others will produce literary effects. (Jernigan, 1976, p. 64)

In a study somewhat similar to Lippmann and Merz’s “Test of the News,” historian Chester Destler reviewed 420 of the citations in Wealth Against Commonwealth and found Lloyd
made 10 small factual mistakes. Of the 241 undocumented statements in the book, Destler found 229 fully correct, eight partially correct and four incorrect – in general Destler found the book highly credible and the “mistakes modify the narrative to only a slight degree” (Lloyd, 1963, p. 2).

The Review or Reviews praised Lloyd’s tome, writing that his “massing of facts was irresistible” (Lloyd, 1963, p. 2). However, most reviews were not so positive. The New York Times criticized Lloyd’s book, saying, “he has neither judicial fairness of mind or self control” (Lloyd, 1963, p. 1). The Nation criticized Lloyd for having “such indifference to truth, such incoherence of thought, such intemperance of speech and such violence of passion as to make him an undesirable leader. The volume is defaced by passion and is made unwholesome by intolerance” (Lloyd, 1963).

Historical scholar Jernigan writes of Lloyd: “He was psychologically unable to let the facts speak for themselves; he spoke for them through editorializing chapter titles and page headings and through intrusive textual commentary” (1976, p. 72) and “the reader sometimes loses the basic argument amid exciting details” (p. 74).

One of the lasting impacts of Lloyd’s Wealth Against Commonwealth was its influence on Ida Tarbell. British journalist Henry Steed persuaded Tarbell to read Wealth Against Commonwealth and Tarbell went on to achieve what Lloyd didn’t – mass education of the public on the history of the Standard Oil trust.

In summing up his purpose and philosophical approach, Lloyd writes about himself:

I am doing the best I can to expose the evils under which we suffer and to make known to all the facts that seem to come within my province that indicate the lines of evolution toward the remedy…. When I am asked to define myself, I say that I am a socialist-anarchist-communist-individualist-collectivist-co-operative-aristocratic-democrat. (Jernigan, 1976, p. 147)
CHAPTER 4 RAY STANNARD BAKER

If Tarbell was more like a historian than a typical journalist, and Lloyd was more like a lawyer/moralist, then Ray Stannard Baker was a writer carrying on as journalist. Baker started his career as a struggling newspaper reporter for the Chicago Record in the 1890s. He ended his career as the official biographer of President Woodrow Wilson. In between his newspaper years and his Wilson years, Baker became one of the most distinguished muckraking journalists of his era, doing most of his writing for McClure’s and later for the American Magazine.

The list of subjects Baker wrote about is prolific: the rising prosperity of America at the turn of the 20th century, German industrial innovation, the Arizona desert, water politics in the West, Marconi’s invention of the wireless telegraph, and the rise of the automobile, to name a few. Baker also wrote under the nom de plume of David Grayson, where he told simple and poetic stories about his small town in rural Michigan. Baker is best known as one of the investigatory journalists who brought forth the muckraking era; his best known muckraking included an investigation of the conflict between labor and capital, a series on the railroads, and a series on race relations called “Following the Color Line.”

Baker began work for the Chicago Record just before the 1893-1894 depression that swelled the soup lines full of “ragged, shivering, hopeless human beings” (Baker, 1945, p. 1). Baker didn’t get caught up in passion and anger in response to the suffering and injustice and wasn’t moved to become a reformer. His response to witnessing all this suffering was less sympathetic and more “fascinated” and he privately set out to turn his observations into the next “Great American Novel” (Baker, 1945, p. 2). Baker writes, “in spite of all the misery I saw around me every day, I was positively enjoying myself” (Baker, 1945, p. 2). This attitude of
detachment and distance gave Baker room to be more neutral and multifaceted as a reporter, and less emotional.

Baker’s natural curiosity and love of writing is evident throughout his journalistic career. Baker writes of his time as a young reporter: “Everything I saw interested me, and everything that interested me I wrote about” (Baker, 1945, p. 5). After a day of writing newspaper articles, Baker’s enthusiasm for learning found him standing on a chair reading under a dim gas light in his apartment or frequently working deep into the night on his novel and short stories (Baker, 1945, p. 2). In 1894 when Baker was given the assignment to cover Coxey’s Army, the “marching petition” that walked from Ohio to Washington D. C., Baker was overjoyed at the opportunity to study the problems of the unemployed: “Was there ever a luckier fellow than I am?” (Baker, 1945, p. 7)

Baker’s enthusiasm for learning, not in order to reform or help people, but for the sake of better understanding a situation is evident throughout his career, and is a hallmark of Baker’s style. For Baker, it was essential to go beyond surface level understanding and gain real insight, before a solution should be proposed.

Coxey’s Army was marching in support of the legislation to help four million unemployed get work. The difference between Baker’s thinking, and the Populist reformer, Jacob Coxey’s thinking, is clear. Baker writes:

Coxey … had complete faith in the cure they suggested, and believed that if they could march into Washington with an army of public opinion large enough behind them, they could force the immediate passage of their bills – and all the evils that Americans suffered could at once be remedied. (Baker, 1945, p. 10-11)

Despite Baker’s skepticism, his newspaper articles were giving publicity to Coxey’s march and new recruits from Chicago credited his reporting as moving them to join the march. Baker writes, “This set me to thinking, for the first time, of that vague something I had heard
called the ‘power of the press.’ … What was I doing with my share of that power?” (Baker, 1945, p. 12)

After leading an army of the unemployed, hundreds of miles through Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Maryland in the snow, slush, and rain of late winter and early spring, Coxey was arrested in D. C. for trespassing across the Capital grounds, while he made his way to address the assembled crowd from the Capital steps. At the same time, Browne made a run for the Capital steps and was clubbed by a policeman and thrown in jail. Riot police on horses moved in and dispersed the crowd and the entire event was over without so much as a final speech delivered.

Following two months of covering Coxey’s Army, Baker returned to Chicago and began covering British journalist and reformer William T. Stead and the release of Stead’s book, If Christ Came to Chicago. Stead criticized the wealthiest men in Chicago and compared the streetcar magnates, the head of the Chicago gas trust and other Chicago elite to the moneychangers of the New Testament. Stead tried to explain everything in religious and moral terms. Stead’s told Baker, “I always jump to conclusions: I never ponder…” (Baker, 1945, p. 32). Baker writes:

I was not at all satisfied with Stead’s answers to the problems he saw so clearly, nor yet Coxey’s. It did not seem to me that either of them understood what the fundamental conditions really were, or the difficulty of meeting them. I did not myself. (Baker, 1945, p. 32)

In 1894, Baker covered the Pullman Strike and Eugene “Deb’s Rebellion,” which Baker characterizes as one of the “greatest industrial conflicts in the history of the country” (Baker, 1945, p. 35).

Baker was impressed by Debs’ commitment to the working class; when Deb’s refused a high paying job, he explained his decision saying, “If I rise, it will be with the ranks, and not from them” (Baker, 1945, p. 38). Debs favored arbitration over a strike against the Pullman
company, but he backed the strike after Mr. Pullman refused to settle and said: “workers have nothing to do with the amount of wages they shall receive; that is solely the business of the company” (Baker, 1945, p. 38). Deb’s American Railway Union refused to handle Pullman cars and workers rioted when the Pullman Company tried to bring in non-union workers. Baker writes, “All Southern Chicago seemed afire. I saw long freight trains burning on side-tracks. … I saw attacks by strikers on non-union men, and fierce conflicts between strikers and police…” (Baker, 1945, p. 38). This conflict between capital and labor created a conflict in understanding within Baker:

As a reporter I could and did set down, as facts, what I saw: but I could not, in the least degree, make up my mind what ought to be done … At times I found my sympathies going out strongly to the starving strikers in Pullman, … What other remedy had they to meet injustice and oppression except to strike? … And yet, when I saw huge mobs running wild, defying the officers of the law, attacking non-union workers, putting the torch to millions of dollars worth of property – I was still more perplexed. (Baker, 1945, p. 38-39)

For Baker, the opportunity to learn about some of the most important subjects of his times, overshadowed the low pay and the daily demands or working at a newspaper:

Even when I could not earn enough to live on, I had been wonderfully fortunate. I had been able to work on subjects that interested me profoundly… - the new problems of unemployment and the relationships of labor and capital. I had been able to see and, in some measure, play a part in the most important and dramatic manifestations of these problems – the Stead exposures in Chicago, Coxey’s army and the popular uprisings which grew out of it, and finally, the ‘Debs rebellions.’ … I had learned much from all of them. (Baker, 1945, p. 45)

The Pullman strike ended with the workers going back to work, but having gained nothing; the American Railway Union was beaten and Deb’s spent three months in jail on a technicality - contempt of court. “The cowed and beaten workmen had crept back into the Pullman shops, the railroads were operating again, and the evidences of fire and riot had been
removed, nothing had been much changed, let alone settled.” Coxey, Stead, Debs and the

Pullman strike left Baker unsettled and searching for questions:

They added to my knowledge, still more to my questionings. Great things to think about,
as great and as interesting as any in the whole world – with no time in the life of a hard-
working reporter to think about them…. Moreover, events would not stand still and wait
to be thoroughly examined and written about: they rolled majestically onward, absorbing
and terrifying, confused and complicated. What was a man to do? (Baker, 1945, p. 46)

Following the Pullman strike, Baker’s newspaper editors changed his assignment to

bounce between covering murders, fires, and lavish Chicago society events and eventually Baker
settled into writing the “shop talk” column about various industries in the Chicago area. This
change in assignment no longer allowed him to learn about the subjects that interested him most:
“...I began to suffocate under the pressures of daily trivialities” (Baker, 1945, p. 46).

Baker began using all his free time to write fiction, and once he learned the “formula” for
the popular fiction magazine, The Youth’s Companion he began to make a living writing
magazine fiction. Baker explained The Youth’s Companion formula was meant to entertain the
widest possible audience and “must not fail to entertain from beginning to end”… and “must
always have incident, movement, and dramatic effectiveness” (Baker, 1945, p. 70-71). “An
ethical purpose is desirable, but the moral must be revealed by the story itself, not by any
comment of the writer” (Baker, 1945, p. 71).

Aspects of the Youth’s Companion writing principles can be seen in much of Baker’s
muckraking throughout his career, as evident in Baker’s focus on entertaining storytelling for a
wide audience and letting the ethical dimensions emerge naturally from the narrative, and not
through Baker’s moralizing or editorializing.

In his autobiography, American Chronicle, Baker expresses a pure love of writing. On
vacation, Baker once wrote a five-part serial in a week (1945, p. 74). His personal writing of
thoughts and observations filled over 70 notebooks and he estimates, over two million words (Baker, 1945, p. 66-67). Baker comments on his private notebooks: “Nothing in my life … has given me such continuous requital, such a sense of living more deeply and understandingly into the heart of things…. – setting down, without the fear of an immediately critical audience” (Baker, 1945, p. 67) Baker’s notebooks were an opportunity to be completely honest with himself:

if I had tried to make myself out something other or better or wiser than I really am, I should have lost the sense of freedom … I have never written by habit – the vice of the diarist – but only when I needed, or longed, to write…. I am not seeking to convince anyone else that I am greater, or different, or more amusing, or more thoughtful, than I am: I am trying … to realize myself…. I suppose it somewhat resembles the lonely practice, day after day, of the musician. I play for myself. It remains the greatest comfort and pleasure of my life. (Baker, 1945, p. 67-68)

Baker’s introspection is an important aspect of his muckraking. He continually refers back to the need to seek an internal balance, to be the calm amidst the chaos, in order to understand what is going on around him.

Baker’s success with the Youth’s Companion led him to try writing a story for McClure’s Magazine about his uncle, who helped capture John Wilkes Booth. Some of Baker’s early articles for McClure’s were on Theodore Roosevelt and the Rough Riders, and science and future inventions. After the economy began to pick up in 1899, he wrote a series on American Prosperity in McClure’s – every house and barn in “the unpainted West of 1896 and 1897” had a fresh coat of paint (Baker, 1945, p. 88). When his collection of prosperity articles were published in book form, Baker decided to include a stern warning:

least we forget our own grave national deficiencies and national faults. We can feed ourselves, we are great and powerful, but we have our own galling Negro problem, our rotten machine politics, our legislative bribery, our municipal corruption, our giant monopolies, our aristocracy of mere riches, any one of which is a rock on which the ship of state, unless skillfully navigated, may go to its destruction. (Baker, 1945, p. 90)
In many ways, Baker’s warning was prophetic of the issues of the upcoming Progressive era, and the issues he and his fellow muckrakers would write about.

Eventually Baker was asked to join the staff of *McClure’s* and he was finally able to leave the daily deadlines of the newspaper world behind – the magazine “medium itself was far better adapted than the newspaper to the accurate and thorough-going presentation of the new world. Since it was published only once a month, it could take time …” (Baker, 1945, p. 93). While working on an article about Rough Riders General Leonard Wood, Baker was given over a month to travel all over Cuba with General Wood, and could travel to D.C. and Boston to meet General Wood’s family and colleagues. Baker writes:

> What a boon to a writer! To be able to take his time, saturate himself with his subject, assume accuracy by studying the subject at first-hand and by consulting every possible expert, and then, above all, to be able to write and rewrite until the presentation should not only be clear to any reader of reasonable intelligence, but be interesting. *Interesting!* *Interesting!* For everything at *McClure’s*, given thorough knowledge of the subject, turned upon the quality of the writing. (Baker, 1945, p. 94)

As Baker began to learn more about issues and move beyond his first impressions, he began to see the need to keep a continuously open mind. Baker traveled to Europe and the Middle East and his series in *McClure’s* on German industrialism was published as a book.

While traveling in Turkey, Baker met Dr. Peet, who told Baker:

> When I had been in the Near East for six months, I could have written a good book about it. Now that I have been here for thirty years, I could not possibly do it. The mountains have too many foothills. (Baker, 1945, p. 114)

Baker wrote of his German book, “I had seen some of the mountains, few of the foothills” (Baker, 1945, p. 114). Baker, like his fellow *McClure’s* muckraker Ida Tarbell, was not willing to close his mind off to new information that conflicted with his previous perception; nothing was final and his mind was never fully made up. Baker’s introspection and
thoughtfulness were evident when Baker was asked to join a church; he reflected on the benefits and drawbacks of uncertainty:

It would be so comfortable to make port in the safe harbor of the old church – and stop questioning and stop thinking…. I knew I was not then ready to unite with any church. I felt that I must try to clear my own mind concerning the great questions involved. (Baker, 1945, p. 57-58)

On this question of religious certainty, Baker differed from President Woodrow Wilson, who Baker both would eventually work for and held in high esteem. President Wilson had a scholarly and open mind in many areas, but with regard to religion, when Wilson decided, “discussion is adjourned” (Baker, 1945, p. 60). Baker comments:

I was a warm admirer of Woodrow Wilson, but this attitude of mind bewildered me…. I could feel a certain envy … of such unquestioning faith, such moral certainties, but how could a scholar of Wilson’s character and attainments go though such a revolution in human thought as that which had been in progress during all his studious earlier years, and retain, quite undisturbed, the beliefs and faith of his Scotch-Presbyterian forebears? … how could a truly thoughtful man “adjourn discussion” on one of the most important, and indeed, interesting problems then baffling the human mind? (Baker, 1945, p. 60)

Illustrative of Baker’s nuanced thinking that seeks to understand all sides of an issue, Baker continues his reflection, imagining how advantageous, yet dangerous it would be to settle in his mind, one of the great questions of humanity:

Never any more doubt or controversy! What a conservation of intellectual energy…. Was not the measure of the efficiency of an engine based upon the size of the hole through which its steam was discharged? … [But] If a partially closed mind was of use to a statesman, why not to a merchant who wanted to make money: why not to a robber who wanted to steal it? And if it was advantageous to adjourn discussion on religion, why not on politics, why not in the dismal field of economic practices and institutions? Men I have known have done all three and lived. But is there not danger that the steam of the intellectual engine, reduced to a hole so small, will block up or blow out? And at what point does the closed mind produce the fanatic? (Baker, 1945, p. 60)

Once, Baker got in a long discussion with writer Jack London who wanted to convince Baker to become a socialist. Baker responded that he was not a socialist because he hadn’t learned enough about the world to make up his mind. “I have only begun to look at the world. I
want to see it all more clearly and understand it before, before I pledge myself to any final solution for the evils we both see,” said Baker. Baker’s debate with Jack London may typify the difference between the writer-reformer who seeks to convince and the writer-educator who seeks to understand:

The difference between us lay probably in the fact that he wanted to reform me, and I did not want to reform him. I wanted to see how he worked: how he had come to be what he was, for I knew that I should have to go on living in a crowded world with many people who differed from me far more radically than Jack London. (Baker, 1945, p. 139)

In Baker’s quest to learn about the world, his own interests conflicted with the commercial interests of his employers. Similar to the Youth’s Companion formula, McClure’s had a formula for what sort of articles it printed. The McClure’s formula focused on recognizing public interest and expanding on the subjects the public wanted to know more about. Baker writes of the McClure’s style:

It was a simple formula: he told people more about things of which they were already hearing a good deal. He satisfied newly awakening wonder, which usually had been stimulated by bits and strays of news published in the newspapers. Really new things about which people had not yet begun to speculate interested him little or not at all. (Baker, 1945, p. 96)

This strategy both follows public opinion and stays a step or two ahead of it, but is careful too not get too far in front of the issues the public is interested in. Even though Baker was receiving praise from McClure and other editors and was often told he was doing consequential work, Baker still questioned his importance at McClure’s:

“Important to whom?” Not necessarily important to me … To whom then? Why, to the magazine, in building up a huge circulation …? So that rich advertisers would pay high prices for reaching the public that was being attracted by the important articles. This naturally would bring in large profits to the owners of the magazine with which they could establish new magazines and a great publishing house – to make still more money. … I felt that I was more or less disloyal even to think such thoughts – but there they were: I thought them. (Baker, 1945, p. 121)
Baker’s early years at McClure’s, which at first seemed a wonderful improvement from the stress of the newspaper world, soon began to wear Baker down. “I was being as hard driven as I ever was as a newspaper writer – and I was scarcely freer to follow my own bent” (Baker, 1945, p. 121).

Feeling lost, Baker sent in his resignation to McClure’s and moved to the Arizona desert in search of himself; S. S. McClure and managing editor John Phillips decided to keep Baker on staff and pay him half of his regular salary, in hopes that he would return to McClure’s once he got tired of the desert. In the desert, Baker considered his life as a reporter and realized he had “no inward unity” (Baker, 1945, p. 129). Baker wrote in his journal, “Primary things: I have not yet learned the primary things. I know how to work: I do not yet know how to live. I have no central guide. I have no dominating purpose” (Baker, 1945, p. 115). In the Arizona desert, Baker arrived at a central question for his life:

What is my function as a writer in a crowded world – that is, a writer not wishing merely to amuse people, but, in the practice of his art, to make them see and think, and thus to help fit them for living in this inevitably crowded world?… This led to a sharp inquiry as to what were my own personal qualifications and gifts for the task ahead of me. I had to consider what I was not, as well as what I was. I was not a leader, not an organizer, not a preacher, not a business man; I was a reporter. I had certain definite gifts for seeing, hearing, understanding, and of reporting afterward what I had seen and heard and, so far as might be, what I understood. I had certain clear scientific interests: I liked the exploration of new places and new things: I was curious about ideas…. I was keenly interested in writing down everything I saw and heard.

What seemed to me then the supreme problem confronting mankind was the art of living in a crowded world. The part I could best play in it as a writer … was to become a “maker of understandings,” …. I was to help people understand more clearly and completely the extraordinary world they were living in – all of it, without reservations or personal prejudices – and in the process to make them understand one another, which I considered the fundamental basis for the democratic way of life…. If men can really be made to understand one another they can live together peaceably, even in a crowded world….

When I left the desert, … I began trying to live in accordance with my new “illumination,” and soon found it, as many a man has done, a difficult business. (Baker, 1945, p. 122-133)
Baker wanted to write exactly the kind of articles and stories that interested him, without “trying to fit them to the ‘requirements’ of any magazine,” as he had done with the *Youth’s Companion* and *McClure’s* (Baker, 1945, p. 136).

Baker’s first articles upon leaving the desert did not fit into the *McClure’s* formula and his articles on the Southwest were instead published in *Century Magazine*. He revived his earlier curiosities on labor and capital, only now he was committed to slow down and look deeply. He met with labor organizers, Samuel Gompers, Eugene Debs, and John Mitchel and visited labor meetings and picket lines – from this he wrote the article “How Labor Is Organized,” which appeared in the August, 1902 issue of *World’s Work*. He also met with J.P. Morgan and Charles Schwab and “worked hard and long to try to understand, thoroughly and honestly, what they were trying to do and why, and what things looked like to them” (Baker, 1945, p. 165). This willingness to listen to and try to understand the perspective of the industrialists of the world is similar to Tarbell’s and in contrast to a journalist like Lloyd.

Baker commented directly on Lloyd’s activism, saying Lloyd fought the powers that be “often without bothering to inquire whether the over-dogs had any case at all” (Baker, 1945, p. 166). Baker recalls meeting with a group of liberal labor leaders and “the issues were discussed with a passionate certitude not warranted … by any real or deep knowledge of the facts” (Baker, 1945, p. 167).

In 1902, Baker traveled to eastern Pennsylvania to report on the anthracite coal strike. He avoided the usual story of capital versus labor, and instead focused on a different aspect of the conflict - the violence and lawlessness of the striking union men against the non-union men who continued to work. Baker writes:

I found the newly organized miners not only at war with the powerful owners of the mining properties, but even more angrily with the large numbers of their fellow workers
who would not “come out” and support the strike. They hated these “scabs” to the point of murder. (Baker, 1945, p. 167)

Baker’s article, The Right to Work, was a “series of case histories” and “neither offered conclusions nor suggested remedies” (Baker, 1945, p. 167). The 5,000 plus word article, joined Ida Tarbell’s second installment in The History of the Standard Oil Company, and Lincoln Steffens’s The Shame of Minneapolis, to form the January 1903 article of McClure’s, which marked the start of the muckraking movement. In the opening paragraphs, Baker states the purpose of his article:

During the closing weeks of the great coal strike, seventeen thousand men were at work in and around the anthracite coal mines ... the public should know exactly who these ... American workers really were, how they fared, and why they continued to work in spite of so much abuse and even real danger. This inquiry may be made without bias without contravening the rights of labor to organize, or impugning the sincerity of the labor leader, or defending the operator. (Baker, 1961, p. 40)

His article begins with the story of David Dick, a worker who chose not to obey the strike and instead continued working; one night two bullets “whistled” by Mr. Dick’s head and lodged in the door of his home. Baker frequently includes long quotes from his sources, as evident from this quote from Mr. Dick:

I have been in this country thirty years, and have worked all these years as an engineer. I have tried all my life to live peaceably with all men... When the order was given for engineers to quite work, like many others, I did not obey the orders. Why should I?... I considered myself fairly treated; I had no grievance.

Further, I disagreed with the policy of destruction and revenge which the proposed flooding of the mines implied... I claim my right as a free man to do what my conscience approves. (Baker, 1961, p. 41)

Baker offers little commentary throughout the article, but instead lets worker after worker share their thoughts and tell their story. Independent of a reader’s perspective on the broader questions of labor versus capital, nor the specifics of the anthracite coal strike, the opinions and perspectives that Baker shares of the non-union workers are presented to be reasonable and are
easy to empathize with. Another worker, Charles Monie explained his reasoning for disobeying the union strike:

Unionism is all right when it is kept within bounds. But when it says to any man, “You can’t work until we give you permission,” and when it plans to destroy property, I claim that the individual has a right to quit. (Baker, 1961, p. 42)

Another striker, identified as Bellas, went out his front door to find a mock grave with the inscription: “Here Lies The Body of Bellas the Scab.” Bellas’ house was later stoned and he was shot at (Baker, 1961, p. 43). Another miner, John Snyder and his wife were repeatedly threatened and when Mrs. Snyder approached the President of the United Mine Workers of America, John Mitchell to ask for help, Mitchell’s assistant reassured her he would deal with the situation - the next morning Mrs. Snyder’s home was burned to the ground (Baker, 1961, p. 46).

The assault on non-union workers extended beyond threats and the destruction of property – and there were stories of murder. A union leader told Baker that if he investigated the murders, he would find the coal and iron police were behind them – “It’s a trick of the operators to try to lay all the blame for disturbances on us; they want to work up public sentiments against us” (Baker, 1961, p. 47). So Baker investigated the death of James Winstone, a prominent citizen and engineer at the coal mines, who was on his way to work one morning with his son-in-law, when three of his neighbors rushed them and beat Winstone to death (Baker, 1961, p. 49). The neighbors’ then fled the state, and were later apprehended, tried in a court of law and found guilty (Baker, 1961, p. 49).

Another group of picketing strikers accidentally killed a fellow union man, Sistieno Castelli who was out hunting in the woods to feed his hungry family - the group mistook Castelli for a strike-breaker and thought he was trying to sneak through the woods to get to the mine behind the picket line. Castelli was ambushed and before he had a chance to explain who he was
and what he was doing, the mob seized his shotgun and “placed the muzzle against Castelli’s body, and pulled the trigger” (Baker, 1961, p. 50). Inside Castelli’s pockets was a union card with a receipt for recently paid union dues (Baker, 1961, p. 51).

The strains of the strike on neighborly and familial bonds is strikingly evident in the case of John Colson, who was attacked one night as he was walking home along the railroad tracks; a large block of coal was dropped on his head and then he was beaten, robbed and left for dead (Baker, 1961, p. 52). Colson ended up in a coma, where he lay in the local hospital fighting for his life. Despite this near death experience, neither his parents nor his siblings went to visit him while he was in a coma and when he woke up and returned to his home, his family still refused to see him. Colson’s mother spoke harshly of her son John: “He might better be dead, for he’s brought disgrace on the name.” In this case, the loyalty to the union was more important than loyalty to blood. “He deserved all he got,” said his mother. “He wasn’t raised a scab” (Baker, 1961, p. 53).

Baker ends his article with the simple line: “such a story as this gives a faint idea of the meaning of a strike in the coal fields” (Baker, 1961, p. 53).

The power of Baker’s article lies in the straightforward telling of the worker’s experiences. Independent of the reader’s perspective on the right of unions to exist or to strike, or the specific validity of the anthracite coal strike, any person who approaches Baker’s article with an open mind and not wrapped up in already formed opinions on the struggle between labor and capital, can easily recognize the inhumanity of the threats and violence towards the non-union workers at the hands of the striking union workers. Baker succeeds in remaining neutral to the greater debate about the rights of labor versus capital, and instead makes the entirely safe and uncontroversial stand against violence and lawlessness.
One critique of this article, is that Baker does not offer a strong perspective from the union members on why they are striking. He also doesn’t give space to the mine owners to explain why they refuse to negotiate with the striking workers. Baker writes:

I was strong in my opinion that it should be clearly stated that I had treated only one aspect of a highly complex problem. It was true as far as it went; I did not wish to be making ammunition for mere stupid opposition to all labor organization, or even all strikes. (Baker, 1945, p. 168)

Another critique of Baker’s article is that with the exception of the mother of John Colson, Baker does not provide a rational for the union men are behaving so violently. Additionally, Baker does not explain in this article how the strike came to be violent – it appears to simply be violent from the start, which is likely not the case. Even Mrs. Coloson does not explain why standing behind the union was so dear to her that she would denounce her own son for disagreeing with her. Additionally, there is no response from union President Mitchell or his assistant whom Baker implies was involved in the burning down of the Snyder’s home.

Baker succeeded at presenting new information and educating his audience on an important and unsavory aspect of the strike, but this article does not succeed at sharing an understanding of the union perspective. Baker fails to present the humanity of his antagonists, as Tarbell was able to do with Rockefeller. Notwithstanding, Baker doesn’t mischaracterize or demonize as Lloyd did to Rockefeller in *Wealth Against Commonwealth*; Baker simply doesn’t include the perspectives of union men, in this article.

Baker effectively stays out of the broader issues between labor and capital and presents a well-documented, yet one-sided perspective. Baker wrote many articles on various aspects of the conflict between capital and labor – this article is his best known, likely because of its historical significance as being part of the January 1903 article of *McClure’s*. 
Another of Baker’s most notable series was on the railroads, which were America’s first large scale business and had immense power over the fate of small towns, as well as the livelihood of farmers across the country. Baker’s series in McClure’s covered railroad rate favoritism and rebates, the use of the private car and the free pass, the collusion between the beef trusts and the fruit industry, and the railroad’s manipulation of the press and public opinion.

The March 1906 issue of McClure’s featured Baker’s article, “Railroads on Trial.” Above the article, there is a quote from the poet, James Russell Lowell, which states: “All free governments … are in reality governments by public opinion and it is on the quality of this public opinion that their prosperity depends” (Baker, 1961, p. 301).

Baker begins his article by emphasizing the importance of public opinion: “The people are today making up their minds on the railroad problem; out of their present decision will grow laws, and those laws will shape the destiny of the nation” (p. 301). The quality of public opinion is dependent on the quality of the information that reaches the public.

Baker writes that for years public opinion towards the railroads was like a “great cloud” slowly building in from the West that was “black with complaints of railroad injustice” (p. 301). Unless public opinion was driven off course, the government would soon have new regulatory power over the railroads. In 1905 the railroads were spooked by the Esch-Townsend bill to regulate the railroads, which moved quickly through the House of Representatives, before it was killed in the Senate (p. 300).

Baker makes clear, that even if public opinion is turning against the railroads, there are still challenges with crystallizing public opinion into a force that can move government to represent that public opinion. “The people, however vigorous their demands for reform, are
undisciplined and unorganized” and a publicity organization working for the railroads could “either convince or confuse public opinion” (p. 301).

The railroads created “the most sweeping campaign for reaching and changing public thought ever undertaken” (p. 300). From the onset, Baker acknowledges that the railroads not only have a right to make their case to the American people, but if their outreach enhances the public’s knowledge with “true publicity,” then it will benefit the public’s understanding (p. 301). But the people must know the source of their information and the validity of the content. “It is one thing to inform the public mind; another to deceive it” (p. 301).

In the article, Baker outlines the structure of the railroads publicity machine, which is funded by all the railroads and coordinated by the President of the Southern Railroad, Samuel Spencer, whom Baker describes as an “experienced, agreeable, discreet man” (p. 301). Baker then gives his readers a brief explanation on the publicity channels that can be used to influence public opinion, including newspapers, magazines, speeches, lectures, books, sermons, investigations, conventions, with the most important being the newspaper – “the fountainhead of public opinion” (p. 301).

To handle the railroads publicity, a public relations firm set up offices throughout the country. Many of these offices were substantial operations, like the Chicago office which had 43 employees including many “experienced newspaper men” (p. 302).

These publicity agents began collecting a copy of every article that touched the railroads, in every paper across the country. Then traveling publicity agents met with every editor in the country in order to establish a relationship and gain information on the newspaper and the individual editor’s beliefs, as well as the town’s characteristics (and potential weaknesses) (p. 302). The information collected by the traveling agents, was combine with the record of every
article about the railroads (positive and negative), and was recorded on a card and kept in a massive catalog known as “The Barometer.” Baker writes, “reading some of the cards in this catalogue I could almost see the little villages out in the Mississippi Valley, see the country editor in his small office, and understand all his hopes, fears, ambitions” (p. 302).

Professional writers hired by the publicity firm wrote and submitted articles to every newspaper in the country. Baker characterized these publicity articles as being high quality and interesting articles that dealt with all sorts of subjects, but were always favorable to the railroads. The articles or letters to the editor were not labeled as coming from the railroad, but instead “apparently drops out of the blue heavens like a sort of mana” (p. 303). Then the agents watch the papers and record in the Barometer if the articles are published or not” (p. 303). What are the results of such an elaborate and exhaustive publicity machine?

Similar to an academic, Baker conducts a mini content analysis of a Nebraska paper, which before the publicity campaign had 212 articles that were unfavorable to the railroads and only two that were favorable. After the publicity machine was in full swing the same paper had only four articles that were unfavorable to the railroads and 202 favorable articles (p. 303).

For those newspaper editors who were radically anti-railroad, the publicity agents stirred up local public opinion against the editor by instigating personal attacks and rumors - the editor is “‘smoked out’ by his own people” (p. 304).

The publicity agency also sent out countless pamphlets and books that, at face value appear to be “perfectly dispassionate and unprejudiced discussion of the problem, but are in fact railroad propaganda” (p. 305). Baker had over thirty copies of Facts About Railroads sent to him from people around the country, who were wondering why they received this book (p. 305). Other books, specifically targeting different groups were sent out; Farmer and His Friends went
out to farmers (p. 305). Books specifically for country lawyers were sent out with “carful summaries of decisions” that were framed in a beneficial way towards the railroads (p. 305). Books and pamphlets went out to country editors that were full of clippings of articles published from around the country – many of those articles were written by the publicity machine (p. 305).

While Baker was clearly critical of the deceptive publicity efforts, he writes that he has no evidence of a “corruption fund” to buy editors – just a “highly intelligent” publicity machine.

Towards the end of the article, Baker reemphasizes his two main qualms with the railroads publicity. First, the publicity agents and articles/books do not disclose that they represent the railroads. Second, Baker asks the question, what is the chance that those whose opinions are against the railroads will be able to get a fair hearing when they are going up against “unlimited money” and the power of “a few thousand railroad owners and those powerful shippers who are favored by railroad discrimination?” (p. 304-405) Baker fears “the result is that the public gets chiefly the facts as prepared by the railroad for their own defense” (p. 304). Baker sees this campaign as a test of the people to see “whether we know enough, whether we are brave enough, to deserve a real democracy” (p. 301).

Baker’s goal to be a “maker of understandings” is evident in this article. The article is not a dramatic narrative, but it entertains by uncovering the conspiracy to manipulate public opinion. Baker’s article is an educational force meant to inform readers of the basic workings of publicity, as well as the relative power and weaknesses of public opinion to create change.

President Roosevelt, who received Baker’s writings on the railroads prior to publication, told Baker, “I haven’t a criticism to suggest about the article. You have given me two or three thoughts for my own message” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 299). Historian Arthur Link
described Baker’s railroad series as a “scholarly and convincing indictment of railroad malpractices” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 299).

In the midst of Baker’s series on the railroads and a few months after “Railroads on Trial” was published, the US Senate, which had voted down previous legislation to regulate the railroads, passed the Hepburn Act. This new law gave the Interstate Commerce Commission the power to regulate rates, storage facilities, the free pass, pipe lines, and forced the railroads to divest in steamships and the coal industry (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 299). Baker and other muckrakers who wrote about the railroads are credited with helping pass the Hepburn Act (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 299).

Racism and the treatment of African Americans was noticeably absent from the focus of the muckrakers (as well as the broader Progressive movement). Baker’s series of articles for American Magazine under the series title, “Following the Color Line” was an exception. In the introduction to the series, Baker says he set out to offer a view of how things were and not an argument for how things should be. Baker reiterates this point in the May 1907 article, stating, “I am trying to set down every point of view, both colored and white, exactly as I find it” (Baker, 1961, p. 218).

The opening paragraphs of the May 1907 article, titled “The Clash of the Races in a Southern City,” Baker indicates how intense and sensitive an issue “the Negro problem” is. Baker writes, the North is “mildly concerned in many things; the South is overwhelmingly concerned in this one thing” (Baker, 1961, p. 216). The “Negro in the South” is the “labor problem,” the “servant question,” and the “political issue” (p. 216).

The issue of race came up everywhere Baker went in the South. At one point, Baker’s African American waiter leaned over to him and said, “I understand you’re down here to study
the Negro problem.” Baker asked him if he talked about race relations with his fellow Negros. “We don’t talk about much else,” replied the waiter. “It’s sort of life and death with us” (p. 217).

At another lunch with “several fine southern men,” the group was discussing race with the “greatest freedom in the full hearing of the Negro waiters,” Baker writes (p. 217). When Baker asked if they should be sensitive of their surroundings, one of the waiters who had overheard his concern came over and said to Baker, “No, don’t mind me; I’m only a block of wood” (p 217). Baker reiterates these stories in the article, in a simple and straightforward manner; Baker’s language is dispassionate and his opinion on race relations is hard to perceive.

Baker writes about how the infrastructure fortified the color line, with elevators, “For Whites Only” and a less distinguished elevator with the sign: “This car for Colored passengers, freight, express, and packages” (p. 218). Baker remarks “an intelligent Negro” asked him, “How would you like to be classed with ‘freight, express and packages?’” (p. 218) Baker noticed that whites sometimes rode the Negro elevator, but no Negros rode the white elevator, except when a Negro was the elevator operator.

Baker chronicles small and shabby Negro waiting rooms at train stations and trains that have no Negro-sleeper cars and towns that have don’t have Negro hotels or only have unclean dormitory style hotels, without private rooms (p. 223).

The streetcars of Atlanta have a sign above the door of each car reading: “White people will seat from front of car toward the back, and colored people from rear toward front” (p. 219). There is no clear-cut line between the white seats and the Negro seats, which Baker sees as exemplary of the relationship between the two races. “The color line is drawn, but neither race knows just where it is. Indeed, it can hardly be definitely drawn in many relationships, because it is constantly changing. This uncertainty is a fertile source of fiction and bitterness” (p. 220).
One of the “leading Negroes in Atlanta” tells Baker it is unfair that Negro’s pay the same first-class fair as whites but are given second rate service; “We don’t know when we may be dislodged from our seats to make place for a white man who has paid no more than we have. I say it isn’t fair” (p. 221). Baker posed this complaint to a white man, who responded: “The Negro is inferior, he must be made to keep his place. Give him a chance and he assumes social equality, and that will lead to an effort at intermarriage and amalgamation of the races” (p. 221). Baker rarely comments on the various perspectives he presents; this can leave the articles feeling somewhat incomplete and unsettled. This is a marked difference from the moralistic tone that Lloyd took in Wealth Against Commonwealth. Baker places the responsibility on the individual reader to determine what these stories and perspectives mean.

The racial attitudes of many whites are more complex than first glance. Baker highlights the difference between race relations in the North and the South:

In the North a white woman, though having no especial prejudice against the Negro, will often refuse to work with him; in the South, while social prejudice is strong, Negroes and whites work together side by side in many kinds of employment. (Baker, 1961, p. 219)

Baker’s article gets beyond the simplistic depictions of racism. A white man tells Baker of a “big Negro with whom he was wholly unacquainted” who showed up at his office and demanded a job – “he did not ask, but demanded – a job.” The Negro told the white man, he was “the son of yo’ ol’ mammy.” The Negro was given a job in “the spirit of the hereditary vassal demanding the protection and support of the hereditary baron” (p. 226).

Baker continues:

The Negro who makes his appeal on the basis of this old relationship finds no more indulgent or generous friend than the southern white man, indulgent to the point of excusing thievery and other petty offenses, but the moment he assumes or demands any other relationship or stand up as an independent citizen, the white men – at least some white men – turn on him with the fiercest hostility. (Baker, 1961, p. 226)
Baker also tells the story of a white man who called the Atlanta Associated Charities to ask if they helped both whites andNegros; when the man was told they helped both races, he refused to donate money, but this same white man, “may have fed several Negros from his kitchen and had a number of Negro pensioners who came to him regularly for help” (p. 226).

Baker does provide analysis of what he has witnessed, but he does not try to answer the overall question of what to do and does not make a moral judgment. Instead, Baker is more likely to make subtle, nuanced statements on the nature of race relations, such as: “One of the natural and inevitable results of the effort of the white man to set the Negro off, as a race, by himself, is to awaken in him… a sort of racial consciousness” (p. 226). This racial consciousness is evident as: “The old-fashioned [Negro] preferred to go to the white man for everything; he didn’t trust his own people” but the new feeling amongst Negros is to support Negro doctors, dentists, shopkeepers, and other businesses run by Negros (p. 227). “The struggle of the races is becoming more and more rapidly economic” (p. 227).

Baker found that whites who thought they understood Negros, knew little of upper class Negro business people; similarly, Negros based most of their prejudice on lower class whites (p. 230). “The best elements of the two races are as far apart as though they lived in different continents” (p. 230).

Baker meets a “wise” postmaster who sends Negro postal carriers to the rich white neighborhoods and the whites to Negro neighborhoods. “If we only had the best class of white folks down here and the industrious Negros, there wouldn’t be any trouble,” remarked the postmaster (p. 219). Labeling the postmaster as “wise” is one of the few moments when editorializing slips into Baker’s reporting.
Baker does closes his article by summing up what he thinks this change in racial dynamics has meant for southern Negros:

the New Negro … doesn’t laugh as much as the old one. It is grim business he is in, this being free, this new fierce struggle in the open competitive field for the daily loaf. Many go down to vagrancy and crime in that struggle; a few will rise. The more rapid the progress (with the trained white man setting the pace), the more frightful the morality. (Baker, 1961, p. 232)

Baker’s reporting on race was described by historians Arthur and Lila Weinberg as “cold, scientific, reportorial logic,” where most of the writers at the time wrote about race in “high-flung prose with moralistic overtones” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 214). Arthur S. Link wrote that Baker’ series was a “pioneering study of prevailing racial attitudes” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 214).

Following one of Baker’s earlier articles on lynching, which appeared in *McClure’s*, President Roosevelt wrote Baker saying, “I think your last article… is far and away the best discussion of lynching that I have seen anywhere” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 214). Baker dealt with segregation and inequality, in a way that avoided the ethical dimensions and instead focused on the economic and social nature of segregation. Baker doesn’t blast segregationists as racist, or unchristian, and his article is noticeably absent of strong statements about morality. This lack of judgment may seem to give a free-pass to segregationists, but Baker didn’t see his place as passing judgment or convincing his readers of the rightness of his perspective – instead he sought to educate readers by giving them new information, new perspectives, and making them aware of new aspects of a problem.

By avoiding the immediate passage of judgment in favor or learning a bit more about the issue at hand, Baker tried to add new information to the debate and placed long-term understanding ahead of immediate change. This approach is demonstrated not only in Baker’s
article on race; in “The Right to Work,” Baker engages with a problematic aspect of the labor movement - striking workers use of violence and destruction of property. Baker was a supporter of the rights of labor to organize, but he was against the use of violence. By reporting on one of the more vile aspects of union strikes, Baker challenged unions to purify the righteousness of their own cause. This cut across the typically drawn battle lines of labor vs. capital. A reader of Baker’s article could be for the broader rights of labor, but be horrified by the actions of organized labor in anthracite coal strike. By clarifying one aspect of the broader labor issue, it created the possibility for a better understanding between two polarized groups.

Baker’s approach of educating readers on specific aspects of a major issue, while steering away from stereotypical disagreements, was demonstrated again in “Railroad’s on Trial.” Baker reports around the edges of the railroad issue by focusing on the railroad’s use of publicity. This allows Baker to introduce new information, as opposed to taking on the massive case of railroad guilt or innocence and falling into the predictable arguments. By focusing on smaller, more manageable pieces of the railroad debate, Baker encourages his readers to develop a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the issue, and keep a searching mindset.

Baker repeatedly reports around the edges of an issue, clarifying and building understanding, while avoiding judgment on the volatile center. Baker’s journalism questions each link in the chain of beliefs and assumptions, while leaving the ultimate judgment to the reader. This approach places faith in the eventual virtue of a properly educated public and makes Baker more of a “maker of understandings” than a crusading reformer.
CHAPTER 5 THOMAS LAWSON

While Tarbell, Lloyd and Baker all had different journalistic approaches, all three of them pointed to verifiable evidence to justify their reporting; Thomas Lawson did not. Lawson was the insider source for his exposure articles.

Lawson was not a typical journalist; he was a businessman. Nonetheless, he became one of the most important and well-known muckrakers of the Progressive Era with his insider, tell-all series, “Frenzied Finance.” Lawson was aware of the power of publicity long before he started writing “Frenzied Finance” for Everybody’s Magazine in August of 1904. “My one instrument is publicity,” said Lawson. “It is the most powerful weapon in the world” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 261).

Lawson was bold and not afraid to take risks; he made and lost numerous fortunes in the stock market; his first fortune of $60,000 was gained and lost by the time he was sixteen years old (Filler, 1976, p. 178). After Lawson had already made millions, he laid the plans to create a copper trust, Amalgamated Copper, and by 1899 he had convinced Rockefeller’s Standard Oil to support his plans. Lawson says of himself, “I laid out the plans upon which Amalgamated was constructed,” and goes on to say, “had they been followed, there would have been reared a great financial edifice, immensely profitable, permanently prosperous, one of the world’s big institutions” (Lawson, 1961, p. 264). Five years later Lawson had bitterly split with Standard Oil and had turned on his former company, placing ads in newspapers warning “every holder of Amalgamated stock to sell his holdings at once before another crash comes” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 261). The editor of Everybody’s Magazine, John O’Hara Cosgrave approached Lawson to write a “true confession,” exposing the inside world of big finance. Lawson agreed to write the story if Everybody’s agreed to spend $50,000 advertising the series –
Lawson himself would spend five times that in promoting his series (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 262).

Lawson’s magazine series covered some of the complex schemes that financiers used to exploit the financial markets including “interlocking directorates and dummy agents” (Lawson, 1961, p. 262). Lawson took on some of the most powerful financiers in the country in his series, implicating Henry Rogers, William Rockefeller, John Rockefeller, James Stillman, and others connected to Standard Oil (Lawson, 1961, p. 264).

“Frenzied Finance” begins with the line, “Amalgamated Copper was begotten in 1898, born in 1899, and in the first five years of its existence plundered the public to the extent of over one hundred millions of dollars” (Lawson, 1961, p. 264). Lawson spends the majority of the first article, describing the Standard Oil Company. “It’s countless miles of railroads may zig-zag in and out of every state in America, and its never-ending twistings of snaky pipe lines burrow into all parts of the North American continent which are lubricated by nature” (p. 266). The Standard Oil that the public was most aware of was the Standard Oil which sold oil to the public, but Lawson described another Standard Oil - “a group of money-owners – some individuals and some corporations – who have a right to use the ‘Standard Oil’ name” (p. 267).

Lawson described eight “distinct groups” that make up Standard Oil. Besides the seller of oil, Standard Oil included the activities of Henry Rogers, William Rockefeller, and John D. Rockefeller; the activities of “captains and first lieutenants”; the retired Standard Oil men who have between five and seventy-five million dollars in investments; the estates of deceased Standard Oil men; Standard Oil banks, trust companies, insurance companies; individuals who follow Standard Oil directives; and the politicians, judges, lawyers, law enforcement, and government officials who are beholden to Standard Oil (p. 267). “This giant institution moved
through the ranks of business with the ease and smoothness of a creature one-millionth its size and without noise or dissension” (p. 268). Standard Oil was able to operate with such efficiency because of rules that were as “rigid as the laws of the Medes and Persianse, yet so simple as to be easily understood by anyone” (p. 269). These eight laws include:

1. Silence is golden, so “keep your mouth shut.”
2. “Collect our debts today. Pay the other fellow’s debts tomorrow.”
3. Make buyer and seller come to us and “keep the seller waiting” and “hurry the buyer.”
4. Make all profitable deals in the name of “Standard Oil” and all questionable deals in the name of a dummy corporation.
5. “Never put ‘Standard Oil’ trades in writing, as your memory and the other fellow’s forgetfulness will always be re-enforced with our organization;” “our land is full of courts and judges.”
6. “As competition is the life of trade – our trade; and monopoly the death of trade – our competitors’ trade, employ both judiciously.”
7. Never butt heads with the government: “Our government is by the people and for the people, and we are the people and those people who are not us can be hired by us.”
8. “Always do right. Right makes might, might makes dollars, dollars make right, and we have the dollars.” (Lawson, 1961, p. 269)

Many of these rules appear to be more of a tool of Lawson’s publicity then some sort of secret rules of the Standard Oil Company, but Lawson’s rules do point towards a fixed game. Lawson does not say how he came up with these eight rules or whether they were explicitly stated by the Standard Oil people or whether they are a result of his experience with Standard Oil (and/or his disparaging imagination). At the very least, the source of these rules is kept uncertain, making the epistemological basis of Lawson’s charges hazy. Even if the rules were the basis of Standard Oil’s business practices, Lawson states the rules cruelly and somewhat insincerely. It’s likely the Rockefeller’s and Henry Rogers would object to Lawson’s characterization, if they were given the chance to respond to Lawson’s charges.

Lawson spends a few short paragraphs describing John and William Rockefeller. John D. is described as the “ideal money-maker” and “machine” like in character. William Rockefeller is described as a man made in the image of God, “brotherly,” and “clean of mind and
body” (p. 278). Prior to these short descriptions, the better part of fifteen hundred words is spent describing, a less well known Standard Oil executive, Henry Rogers, who Lawson claims is “the big brain, the big body, the Master of ‘Standard Oil’” (p. 272).

Lawson describes Rogers in oddly poetic and glorifying terms. Rogers is “as tall, as straight, as well-proportioned, and as supple as one of the beautiful American Elms” (p. 274). Rogers “every feature bespeaks strength and distinction” (p. 275). At times, Lawson’s lavish description of Rogers can appear hollow and cynical, as when Lawson spends almost a full page describing Henry Rogers eyes, writing: “One must see Mr. Rogers’ eyes in action and in response to half appreciate their wonders” (p. 275). Lawson goes on to describe Roger’s eyes as every color imagined, the “fiery red and that glinting yellow which one sees only when at night the doors of a great, roaring furnace are opened,” or the pure blue of a cloudless late summer afternoon sky “when the bees’ hum and the locusts’ drone blend with the smell of the new-mown hay to help spell the word ‘Rest’” (p. 275). Lawson writes the honesty and good will seen in Rogers eyes, is so great that no man exists “who would not consider himself favored to be allowed to turn over to Henry H. Rogers his pocketbook without receiving a receipt” (p. 275-276). To conclude his showering of praise, Lawson says that any woman would be happy to have Rogers as her husband (p. 278).

But when Rogers comes in contact with “the intoxicating spell of dollar making” … “he passes under the baleful influence of ‘The Machine,’ he becomes a relentless, ravenous creature, pitiless as a shark, knowing of no law of God or man in the execution of his purpose,” which has a “cannibalistic money-hunger” (p. 278).

It is not until the last quarter of the article that Lawson shares with his readers specific information regarding Amalgamated Copper. He tells the story of how Montana mine owner,
Marcus Daly (see later chapter on C. P. Connolly’s “The Story of Montana” for more on Daly). Daly tricked his partners into selling the Anaconda mine to Amalgamated Copper (of which Daly was a silent partner) for $39,000,000 – a few days later the mine was recapitalized at $75,000,000 (p. 280-281).

The real scandal comes in the final pages of Lawson’s article when he describes five symbolic floors where stock investors were given the opportunity to invest in Amalgamated Copper. The so-called ground floor is where stock was purchased at the company value of $39,000,000; only Henry Rogers and William Rockefeller (no mention of John D. Rockefeller) were aloud to buy at this level. On the next floor, a few million dollars above the ground floor, Marcus Daly was allowed to buy. The $50,000,000 floor admitted James Stillman and a couple other Standard Oil investors. J. P. Morgan & Co. along with a Governor and some other “dearest friends and closest associates” were allowed to buy stock at $60,000,000. The other eight different Standard Oil groups were allowed to buy at $70,000,000. Finally the public investors, who thought they were getting in “at the ground floor,” were allowed to buy at $75,000,000 (p. 281). “Right here the crime of Amalgamated was born, not so much the legal crime but the great moral crime. … The public was compelled to pay $36,000,000 profit to a few men” (p. 282).

The closing paragraph of the article begins with the statement that, on Wall Street everyday investors are “ground into gold dust,” and

  gutters run full to overflowing with strangled, mangled, sandbagged wrecks of human hopes which, in a never-ending stream, it pours into the brimming waters of the river at its foot for deposits at the poorhouses, insane asylums, states’ prisons, and suicides’ graves. (Lawson, 1961, p. 282)

Thomas Lawson, was not initially planning on covering the insurance industry in “Frenzied Finance,” but in December 1904 he purchased advertising space in Everybody’s and printed an article he called, “Lawson and His Critics” which he wrote about the insurance
industry (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 284). The opening paragraph of Lawson’s article/advertisement states that life insurance is merely another tool in which “the savings of the people are sucked from the people to the ‘System’” (Lawson, 1961, p. 286). The public is led to believe that “the basis of life insurance is security” (p. 291) and the policyholder “is supposed to pay only enough to insure a promised payment plus provision for honest expenses” (p. 295). Additionally there are laws that prevent insurance companies from using the people’s deposits to speculate in stocks (p. 292).

Lawson argues that the insurance companies get around this law by forming “banks and trust companies” and then use billions of dollars of the people’s money “in stock gambling enterprises, speculations as unsafe and as frenzied as those of the wildest plunder of Wall Street” (p. 286).

An unnamed “important man” approached Lawson to warn him that he is up against the “greatest power in the world” which are “steered and controlled” by the likes of Henry Rogers, William Rockefeller, J. Pierpont Morgan and all the Standard Oil interests (again, no mention of John D. Rockefeller), who own a majority of the stock in the three main life insurance companies (p. 289).

Lawson response to this “important man,” by saying he understands what he is up against, but his only concern is to “educate the millions of life insurance policy holders to their present peril” and “arouse them, to quick, radical action” (p. 288). In typical Lawson flair, he states:

I am going to cause a life insurance blaze that will make the life insurance policyholders’ world so light that every scoundrel with a mask, dark-lantern and suspicious-looking bag will stand out so clearly that he cannot escape the consequences of his past deeds, nor commit new ones. (Lawson, 1961, p. 288)
Lawson sketches two hypothetical scenarios, one involving the Rockefellers and J. P. Morgan buying stock in the railroads at $120,000,000 and then using insurance money funneled through a trust company to underwrite the stock purchase, which is then sold to the public at 180,000,000 with a thirty-three and one-third percent underwriting commission (p. 292-293). Lawson’s other hypothetical example involves using the people’s money to speculate in real estate (p. 293). It’s unclear why Lawson uses these imaginary examples with the names of real people included in the example, other than to stir up animosity towards these financiers and possibly confuse his readers.

Lawson does provide a few actual examples of insurance companies speculating in the stock market, but they do not contain the level of detail or as large an amount of money that his hypothetical examples contain. Prudential Insurance capitalized its stock at $2,000,000, even though they only had $91,000 in cash on hand (p. 294). Lawson then describes a circular investing ring with Prudential, the Fidelity Trust Company and the Equitable Company all invest in each other’s vastly over-valued stocks, all with the backing of the people’s insurance policies and all without risking their own personal capital. The ruse is the equivalent of a “perpetual motion” machine, writes Lawson (p. 295).

Lawson’s description of the scheme is confusing and is far from casting a blaze so bright that all the insurance injustices are illuminated, but Lawson gets his point across that the investments of these companies are unsound. Or as Lawson puts it, Prudential “desired to eat their pudding and yet have it for continuous re-eating, and had found a way to accomplish this heretofore impossible feat” (p. 295).
Lawson’s articles are a mix of emotionally charged language, salesmanship of Lawson’s opinions, and personal attacks on his enemies, with a soupcon of evidence compared to a Baker or Tarbell article. Where Baker chose to offer his analysis very sparingly and not on the big questions which most people already had an opinion on, but on a finer point of distinction or on a new piece of evidence, Lawson blurs the line between factual evidence and amplified opinion and cuts straight to the heart of the big questions. A reader is left not knowing whether Lawson is pulling back the curtain or giving his biased and selective opinions on what is behind the curtain.

Because Lawson’s style is so unbalanced, we don’t know if the continually downplayed importance of John D. Rockefeller is done out of spite and a backhanded attempt to cut down Rockefeller’s “master of the universe” reputation, or if in fact Rockefeller is simply the public face of the company and Henry Rogers is the true genius behind the Standard Oil Corporation. It is clear that Lawson’s focus was to entertain and to shock his audience; he was not trying to create a balanced, multifaceted and thoughtful inquiry, as did Baker or Tarbell.

Lawson does share some of Lloyd’s flair for moralizing and neither shied away from using the most demonic of metaphors to describe their target. Though Lloyd was much prone to academic and philosophical moralizing, while Lawson was appealing to a more general audience. Perhaps the biggest difference between Lloyd and Lawson, is that Lloyd’s epistemological basis for his opinions is quite clear (and throughly cited); *Wealth Against Commonwealth* was packed full of specific verifiable evidence. Lawson’s claims are not supported with evidence, which keeps his epistemological justification hidden from public scrutiny. Lawson simply makes a provocative statement and then tells you what he thinks about his statement.
Historian C. C. Regier says “Frenzied Finance” is the product of “mixed motives” and had mixed results; Lawson:

undoubtedly wished to pay off an old score, and it is possible that he used the sensation his articles caused to advance his personal interests in the stock market. On the other hand, there was a strange streak of altruism in the man, a sort of messianic eagerness to deliver the common people from what he regarded as their bondage. (Reiger, 1932, p. 130)

The Independent said that Lawson’s charges had a “curious mixture of truth, exaggeration and misrepresentation …. From the beginning a certain plausibility was imparted even to his most sensational charges” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 262). Allen Nevins, a Rockefeller biographer said that some of Lawson’s charges were “exaggerated,” but “his indictment of the ‘System’ of organized speculation and thimble-rigging which made Amalgamated Copper possible was perfectly sound” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 263). Arthur Link said Lawson’s series “contributed to public demand for control of the stock market that culminated in the Pujo committee’s investigation of 1913” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 263). Louis Filler praised Lawson’s remedies as being “20 years ahead of its time,” as Lawson advocated for many of the protections that were eventually enacted in the Securities Act of 1933 (Filler, 1976, p. 188).

Regardless of the accuracy of Lawson’s claims, Lawson’s goal of “quick, radical action” contrasts strongly with the style of some of his fellow muckrakers, like Ray Stannard Baker who’s stated goal was to be a “maker of understandings.” Where Baker took a deliberate and careful approach to build nuance and understanding without imparting his own personal biases, Lawson seemed to shoot from the hip at whoever provoked his interest.

In a letter to E. J. Ridgway, one of Everybody’s Magazine editors, it is said that Lawson wrote: “What do I owe to the gelatine-spined shrimps? What have the saffron-blooded apes
done for me?” Adding, “Forgive me, my dear Ridgway, but the people, particularly the American people are a joke” (Reiger, 1932, p. 130). This quote may give some indication of the faith that Lawson placed in the American people and why he chose to sensationally propagandize as opposed to providing an evenhanded and unemotional account of what he had learned.
CHAPTER 6 CHRISTOPHER P. CONNOLLY

Thomas Lawson was not the only muckraker to write about Amalgamated Copper and the rancorous struggle between businessmen to control natural resources. C. P. Connolly’s *The Story of Montana* was a multi-part series that appeared in *McClure’s Magazine*. Sam McClone introduced the series by telling readers that Connolly sought to:

> tell fully and accurately the story of the personal and political feuds, the legal and business wars which have kept the State of Montana in turmoil from the beginning of the rivalry between Marcus Daly and William A. Clark, in the early ‘90s, up to the compromise of the legal and commercial differences between the Amalgamated Copper Company and F. A. Heinze. (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 102)

In the September, 1906 issue of *McClure’s*, Connolly begins *The Story of Montana* by focusing on the mines around Butte Hill, which were so rich with copper that in the fifteen years prior to 1906, the Butte Hill mines supplied one-third of the copper supply of the entire world over the (Connolly, 1961, p. 105). The government sold this land for $5 an acre – had it held onto this land “it could have paid off the national debt. Its total output would have carried on the wars of Napoleon” (p. 105). Fifty million dollars has been the annual output of the six hundred acre mountain (p. 105).

Connolly begins the September 1906 installment of *The Story of Montana* like a novelist setting the scene with a striking description of mountains, mines and miners – rough and hard and full of sacrifice with the hopes of striking it rich. “To understand the story, one must understand the men,” writes Connolly (p. 105). These men include “mining kings of limitless wealth,” which Connolly claims “made hundreds of men, and ruined thousands” (p. 105).

As Connolly sets the scene and begins to lay out the facts, he has a tendency to slip into editorializing; for example, he writes that the fortunes gained from copper mining:

> perverted the moral sense of entire communities; it placed scores of prominent men within the shadow of prison walls… it corrupted the machinery of justice to the core, and
placed the law-making power of the state upon the auction block. (Connolly, 1961, p. 105)

Connolly’s story focuses on the conflict between two men – Marcus Daly and William A. Clark. Daly was born in Ireland and grew up poor, selling newspapers in New York after he came to the U. S. After Daly struck it rich, he was a man of the people and generous to his fellow miners (p. 106).

Clark, on the other hand, was a man of high society. He appreciated fine art, studied law, and spoke French and “a smattering of other languages” and had a residence in Paris (p. 106). Clark’s “taste and cultivation made him conspicuous among the miner-millionaires of Montana, and his intelligence would have won him the respect of all his fellows had it not been offset by a cold and selfishness which marked all his dealings with men” (p. 107).

These facts about Clark and Daly’s lives are muddled together with Connolly’s opinions about their lives. This mixing often happens without warning, which makes it difficult to recognize when one is reading a statement of fact or a statement of opinion.

Connolly contrasts Daly and Clark, largely based on Connolly’s own interpretation of the personality of each. For example, Connolly writes that Daly did not openly bribe, though his money undoubtedly was used in bribes; Clark, on the other hand, was so blunt with his bribes that he was unpopular even with those that he gave the bribes to, writes Connolly (p. 107).

This comparison casts Daly’s brand of subtle bribery in a socially acceptable light, while Clark’s brand of frank bribery, is made to appear more offensive. This subtle valuation, which casts Daly’s bribery in a more dignified manner, is due to Connolly’s opinion. Another writer could have just as easily made a different valuation and condemned both men as being corrupt. Connolly’s sentiment clearly aligns with Daly, though the article claims to be neutral.
Daly began working for various mining investors as a prospector and in 1880 Daly bought land at the foot of Butte Hill. At the time, he was laughed at by fellow prospectors, because everyone thought Butte Hill was barren (p. 108). Daly played on this perception, by pretending that he had invested poorly. He shutdown his mine, which he had named the Anaconda. “Soon rumors were current that the Anaconda was a mare’s nest and worthless” (p. 108). In reality, Daly knew the Anaconda was a copper mine of great potential and he shrewdly shut it down because he wanted to own all the land surrounding the Anaconda.

With the financial help of George Hearst (father of William Randolph Hearst), Daly’s dummy representatives began buying up all the land around Butte hill “for a song” (p. 110). Once practically all of Butte hill was owned by Daly and his fellow investors, one-hundred foot wide copper veins were opened up. In vivid language, Connolly writes:

Immense smokestacks began to vomit their clouds of smudge from scores of furnaces scattered over the hill; the moan and clank of huge pumps could be heard in the depths, forcing the water to the surface; the pound of hammers and the steady impact of drills sounded everywhere, while the earth trembled and bellowed with distant underground explosions. Great hollows, like cathedral naves, were scooped out, where the treasures had lain in the rock-ribbed earth. Horses and mules were blindfolded and lowered into the mines – where the hides, like the gray beards of the old miners, soon took on the greenish color of the copper which saturates everything below the surface. The Butte hill soon became a veritable underground city. (Connolly, 1961, p. 110-111)

Connolly’s power of description brings the mine to life, yet within all this poetic verse, Connolly makes fact statements and avoids the trap he falls into when describing Daly and Clark. The description of the Butte Hill mine is full of detail and fine distinctions. The description of Clark is not.

Connolly does not cast Clark as a well-rounded character, but merely as Daly’s adversary. Connolly writes, the reason for the feud between the two men was Clark’s “inherent narrowness” and his “jealousy of Daly.” The dislike between the two started back in the 1870s,
when Clark sent one of Daly’s investors a letter saying Daly was “extravagant and unbusinesslike” (p. 111).

In the 1880s, Clark tried again to discredit Daly from his California investors and following the huge success of Daly’s Butte Hill mines, “Clark made it a practice to refer to Daly slightlyingly, ridiculing his uncouthness and explaining his discovery of Butte hill as an accident” (p. 111).

Then in 1888, when Clark tried to run as a Democrat for Montana territorial representative (Montana was yet to be part of the Union), Daly, who was also a Democrat, switched his allegiance away from the Democrats and helped elect a Republican. Again in 1893, when Clark ran for U.S. Senate, Daly funded an opposition candidate. There was much bribery and corruption in the campaigns, though it remained underground and not an “open admission and defense of it as in later campaigns,” writes Connolly (p. 114).

Again, Connolly glances over Daly’s bribery, while putting the authors power of description to show that Clark “played with men’s honor as with poker chips, and had his agents in the field buying up the public representatives like so many cattle on the hoof, driven into the market place, weighed, tested, marked and paid for” (p. 114). In the end, no Senator was chosen when a passionate representative gave a moving speech in favor of no representation instead of a corruptly elected Senator (p. 115).

Connolly’s tolerance for Daly’s corruption and intolerance for Clark’s corruption, makes the problem appear to be more of an issue of perception than the corruption itself; Connolly will expose blatant corruption, but is willing to accept subtle corruption.

The feud continued in 1894, when Clark and Daly sparred over the location of the Montana State Capital; Daly spent more than $2.5 million in support of Butte, as the proposed
capital of Montana (p. 117). Clark gave over $400,000 in support of Helena and used his newspaper, *The Miner*, to make a skillful appeal for the choice of Helena in order to keep state government out of the hand of a corporation (Daly’s Anaconda Mining Corporation). Helena was chosen by 1,400 votes as the Montana State Capital. After the election, Clark supporters in Helena placed the body of a mock Daly in funeral garments and paraded the coffin through the streets (p. 118).

Connolly’s history is for the most part told in a good natured and poetic manner, but his hollow depiction of Clark lacks the complexity that Tarbell was able to give to Rockefeller. The article is void of Clark’s perspective, which leaves Clark a greedy, power hungry elitist with few, if any redeeming qualities. Connolly clearly favors Daly, but the support for Daly is implied and not openly justified.

The article is dramatic and entertaining, and clearly written for a common audience and it does educate the audience on Montana politics and mining struggles, but it does not do so in a way that leaves confidence that a full story is being told. Different perspectives are not given a fair chance to represent themselves.

At the time of the articles printing, other readers made similar objections to Connolly’s article. In an editorial from the Great Falls *Daily Leader*, the writer argued Connolly’s series was one-sided and “the facts are distorted to make points for those he favors and against those of the opposite faction” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 102).

Connolly’s series caused more of a stir outside of Montana, than within the states boarders – likely because everyone in Montana was already aware of the controversy (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 102). “Montana had already been demoralized by easy money, open gambling, quick and unearned fortunes, low moral standards in the proletariat, subsidized

In a later series of articles for Collier’s *Weekly*, Connolly, along with Louis R. Glavis and John Mathews (Mathews wrote in *Hampton’s Magazine*) each muckraked the activities of Secretary of the Interior, Richard A. Ballinger, in what became known as “the Ballinger Affair.”

In 1909 Louis Glavis, a Land Office investigator, accused Secretary Ballinger of trying to push through approval of some Alaskan land claims for Clarence Cunningham. Before becoming Secretary of Interior, Ballinger was the legal representative of Cunningham (Connolly, 1961, p. 155). Glavis charged that Cunningham was a representative for J.P. Morgan and the Guggenheims. The land claims sought to buy some of the most valuable copper and coal deposits in the world for $10 an acre.

There was an existing law restricting the amount of land an individual could buy, with the intent of preventing a monopoly of natural resources in the newly purchased Alaskan territories. Cunningham was connected to 33 individual claimants; Glavis suspected that the clients of Cunningham intended to form a trust once they owned the valuable land. Despite his protests, Glavis was told to wrap up his investigation in the next sixty-days (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 147).

Glavis then went outside of the chain of command and took his case to Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot gave Glavis the opportunity to take his evidence directly to President Taft. Upon hearing Glavis’s case, President Taft released a letter to the press (which already had wind of the controversy) defending Secretary Ballinger and recommending the firing of Glavis for “filing a disingenuous statement.” President Taft added that Glavis’s report relied on
“insinuation and innuendo” and “embraces only shreds of suspicions without any substantial evidence to sustain his attack” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 147). Glavis was dismissed.

A few months later, the November 13th, 1909 cover of Collier’s read: “Are the Guggenheims in Charge of the Department of the Interior?” The featured article was from Glavis, and was titled, “The White-Washing of Ballinger.”

The next month, Collier’s ran another article titled, “Can This Be Whitewashed Also?” The article was published anonymously, but it was written by C. P. Connolly (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 150).

Connolly’s article in the December 18, 1909 issue of Collier’s, presents numerous pieces of evidence that demonstrate a history of foul play over the allocation of Alaska’s natural resources. The opening line of the article reads: “That you may better understand how lids exist for the purpose of being sat upon, we shall first summarize a little of the preceding history of Alaska” (Connolly, 1961, p. 150).

In the pages describing the history of Alaska, Connolly then tells the story of the Alaska Gold Mining Company, which filed sham lawsuits against the group of individual Alaskan gold miners of the incredibly rich Nome placer mines. Stock in the Alaska Gold Mining Company had been distributed throughout Washington (p. 151) and when Judge Arthur Noyes denied the appeal of the independent miners, the miners were out of options. With the support of Federal troops, the Alaska Gold Mining Company was allowed to strip the Nome mines of their gold while the legal owners of the mines looked on helplessly (p. 151).

Eventually, the San Francisco Court of Appeals found some members of the Alaska Gold Mining Company, as well as Judge Noyes, guilty. They served a fraction of their given
sentences, because of the support of their political allies, writes Connolly. As for the independent miners, it was too late - the gold was gone (p. 151).

Senator Stewart of Nevada tried to expose the entire scheme, but his speech was “expunged by ‘Senatorial courtesy” from the Congressional Record (p. 151). Writer Rex Beach told this story of the Alaska Gold Mining Company and used the facts in his novel The Spoilers. This did not mean the story had been exposed; Beach remarked of the Alaska Gold Mining Company controversy: “You haven’t heard of it? Of course not. When the scandal came out, it was smothered, and the public kept in ignorance. Criminals were pardoned, records expunged, thieves exalted to new honors” (p. 150).

Connolly told the story of the Alaska Gold Mining Company, as a backdrop for the current controversy. Connolly poses the question to readers: “Is there another Alaska conspiracy, this time to control the copper and coal? Will the public remembering the past, be satisfied with star-chamber answers to this question?” (p. 151-152)

For the most part, Connolly’s article is a fairly straightforward presentation of facts that individually and collectively raise deep suspicions about the legitimacy of the Cunningham claims. Connolly spends most of the article telling of a conspiracy is that dummy investors are pretending to represent themselves, but are really working for the Guggenheims, who Connolly says are aligned with J. P. Morgan and James J. Hill. Connolly draws on the documents seized from Cunningham to show that Cunningham was representing a conglomerate of interests. In Cunningham’s seized records, Connolly points out the entry for $1,359.60 with the note, “The above sum was received from Daniel Guggenheim, in full for expenses incurred on account of the examination of coal lands on his account” (p. 152).
Connolly also points out that the Guggenheims are constructing a railroad in Katalla, Alaska where the Cunningham claims are located. The Guggenheims also had an ad in the newspapers of Portland, Oregon, with a job posting for 2,000 men to go to Katalla, Alaska and work for the Guggenheims (p. 152). Connolly leaves the meaning of this information to the inference of the reader, but it is strongly implied that the railroad and workers fit in with the charge that the Guggenheims are taking control of Alaskan resources. Connolly doesn’t provide alternative perspectives from the Guggenheims or others, to counter this implication.

At times Connolly relies on speculation, as when he states that Glavis’ was not removed from the investigation right away “because it was feared he would do just what finally he did – go elsewhere for justice” (p. 156). Connolly statement remains an implication that isn’t backed in the article by any specific evidence.

At another point, Connolly states that there is another conspiracy that connects the Guggenheims with the J. P. Morgan and the railroad interests of James J. Hill. This conspiracy, writes Connolly is “common knowledge throughout Alaska and the West” (p. 152). Unfortunately, Connolly doesn’t provide evidence for this conspiracy and thus the claim relies on the unsupported backing of “common knowledge.”

In Cunningham’s seized records, an additional piece of the possible conspiracy was revealed through a note stating that Senator Hepburn of Idaho would receive 160 acres “in the coal, free of cost to him, and he agrees to do all our legal work in procuring titles, etc., free of expense to us.” It was against the law for a Senator to act as legal representative for persons urging claims before a government department. Senator Hepburn had previously tried to pass a bill in the Senate that would have made the Cunningham claims legal (p. 154).
Connolly does provide a statement from Senator Hepburn, in his own defense. This statement came after Cunningham’s records were seized. In a 185 word letter from Senator Hepburn to Cunningham, Senator Hepburn says four different ways that he is uninterested in the coal lands of Alaska and “does not desire to participate in, or be interested in any manner, directly or indirectly, in acquiring public lands” (p. 155). Connolly submits the question: “was this letter written after Glavis got possession of Cunningham’s records?” In the end, Senator Hepburn’s nephew, John P. Gray was hired to represent the Cunningham claimants (p. 155).

As for Secretary of Interior Ballinger, before he became Secretary of Interior, Ballinger represented Cunningham and was working to get the land claims approved; this fact, Connolly argues, was downplayed after Ballinger became Secretary of Interior. President Taft had previously stated that Ballinger had conducted only minimal work for a single claimant.

Connolly then quotes from multiples sources and letters from members behind the Cunningham claims saying that Ballinger represents them in gaining title to the coal and copper reserves (p. 155-156). There is even a letter from six weeks after Ballinger became Secretary of the Interior that seems to indicate that Ballinger still represents the Cunningham claims.

Connolly writes of these letters: “This disposes of the question of Ballinger’s single employment by one claimant, so innocently stated by President Taft” (p. 156). Connolly goes on to say: “Out of over a possible thousand lawyers in Seattle, Ballinger seems to have had a monopoly of syndicated Alaskan coal clients” (p. 156).

Connolly also argues that Secretary Ballinger appeared before the House Committee on Public Lands and “urged passage of the Cale bill, which would have made the Cunningham claims legal” (p. 152).
To close the article, Connolly poses a final question: “Will President Taft consider the facts, “or are the above circumstantially narrated events also nothing but ‘shreds of suspicion?’” (p. 157)

Another Connolly article appeared in the March 26th, 1910 issue of Collier’s. The cover of Collier’s featured an illustration of an indictment bill issued by the “Court of Public Morals” in the case of “The American People against Richard A. Ballinger” (Filler, 1976, p. 336). Inside, Connolly wrote the article, “Ballinger-Shyster” (Filler, 1976 p. 336). Secretary Ballinger was reportedly furious about the article and called Connolly a “yellow journalist and a coward who had deserted a ship in distress” (this last point was the result of Connolly being confused for another Collier’s writer, James Brendan Connolly) (Filler, p. 1976, 336).

Historians Arthur and Lila Weinberg write “the Glavis article stirred the country to demand a Congressional investigation, the Connolly article [“Can This Be Whitewashed Also?”] forced the investigation” (1961, p. 148). Louis Filler also credits Connolly with bringing about the Congressional investigation (Filler, 1976, p. 334).

Connolly’s style of journalism is akin to the style of a lawyer who sticks closely to the facts, but tells a slightly one-sided narrative, and disguising that lopsided narrative by claiming he is presenting the full truth. Connolly’s style is subtle and is more a result of omission as opposed to any blatant attacks against his target, like Lloyd or Lawson. Connolly excludes Secretary Ballinger’s perspective, as well as the perspective of the Guggenheims. Connolly excludes Clarke’s perspective, in “The Story of Montana.”

These omissions are similar to Baker’s exclusion of union worker’s perspective in his article, “The Right to Work.” A key difference between Connolly and Baker, is that Baker made clear he was treating a limited aspect of the overall worker strike; Connolly was treating the
central issue at hand. In fact, through Sam McClure’s introduction to Connolly’s article on Montana, the reader expects to read “fully and accurately” the story of Montana (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 102).

The story of Secretary Ballinger, the Guggenheims, and the Cunningham Claims, continues in the next chapter with a different muckraker, John L. Mathews, who applied a different journalistic approach in exposure of the Ballinger affair.
CHAPTER 7 JOHN MATHEWS

_Hampton’s Magazine_ added to Collier’s exposure of the Ballinger affair, with John L. Mathews article “Mr. Ballinger and the National Grab Bag.” Mathew’s article appeared in the December 1909 issue of _Hampton’s Magazine_.

Mathews begins his methodical article of over 6,000 words by presenting two differing ideological perspectives on land use. In a fashion reminiscent of Baker, Mathews begins by circling wide around his target, as opposed to striking directly.

Mathews central target is Ballinger and the Cunningham land claims in Alaska, but he begins by describing of the potential financial value of the Des Chutes River for the state of Oregon. The Des Chutes is perfect for hydro-electric power. It could provide Oregon thirty-million dollars a year in electricity and provide for the people of Oregon and Washington State power at half the current price (Mathews, 1961, p. 159). Even this would not exhaust the waterpower of the Des Chutes, writes Mathews; with the remaining waterpower, 400,000 acres the desert of Oregon could be irrigated, which would “produce not less than $80,000,000 annually in crops,” writes Mathews (p. 159). Mathews does not explain how he arrived at these vast numbers, thus the epistemological justification remains hidden in this instance.

Within three weeks of becoming Secretary of the Interior, Ballinger opened the banks of the Des Chutes River to the railway lines of James J. Hill and his competitor, Edward H. Harriman. By allowing railway lines to be built along the banks of the Des Chutes, it would prevent a damn from being built to harness the waterpower.

Mathews does not shy away from telling the reader what these facts mean: “Ballinger was custodian of the banks of the river. He gave away this valuable property in such way that its use will wreck the great heritage of the people of Oregon” (p. 162).
Mathews uses this economic description of the Des Chutes to illustrate the powerful potential of the Public Domain, and to give insight into Secretary Ballinger’s approach to managing the public’s natural resources. At the same time as sharing his own opinion, Mathews gives Ballinger an opportunity to respond:

These railroads are necessary to the country. And more than that, this whole big domain is a blanket – it is oppressing the people …. In my opinion the proper course to take with regard to this domain is to divide it up among the big corporations and the people who know how to make money out of it and let the people at large get the benefit of the circulation of the money. (Mathews, 1961, p. 162)

Instead of labeling Ballinger as corrupt, Mathews clarifies that he and Ballinger simply have a difference in opinion on Public Domain land-use. Mathews writes:

It is not probable that he [Ballinger] is corrupt, in the sense that a bribe could induce him to defraud the government. Mr. Ballinger is primarily an attorney who has received his training in representing large business interests, and it is entirely natural that his sympathies should be found on the side of corporations and capitalists. (Mathews, 1961, p. 162)

Mathew’s then tells his readers some of the broader history of Public Domain, which had its birth following the Revolutionary War when Eastern States started laying claim to land stretching west to the Mississippi (or all the way to the Pacific). Maryland argued that these lands should belong to the nation as a whole and persuaded other states to relinquish their land claims. Because of Maryland, Public Domain was born (p. 163).

Then, after the Louisiana Purchase the U.S.:

started the most amazing campaign of expansion … the world has ever seen. All the people of the world were invited to take up the farming land of the great West and become disciples of liberty…. It was this that made America, but it was inevitable that this giving away of a great continent should excite the rapacity, the selfishness of many men who had no need for new homes, but who saw in the untellable areas opportunities for what they grew to call “development.” (Mathews, 1961, p. 163)

Those who had the drive and the means to exploit the Public Domain achieved tremendous fortunes off of the great forests of Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin, the coal of
Western states, and the vast grazing land of the middle states, writes Mathews. These fortunes bought the best lawyers, as well as the ability of the new found rich “to dominate socially” and to win the early support of public opinion (p. 164). Mathews writes that the rich, who gained their wealth from land that was once held in the Public Domain, used their influence to advocate for more Public Domain lands to be opened up for exploitation. More land for exploitation meant new mines, capital, lumber, and prosperity (p. 164).

But as fortunes swelled and land was exhausted, Mathews says that a “revolution” of public opinion took place. The public wanted Public Domain land to be protected from private exploitation and “should not be ridden over rough shod, or evaded by clever lawyer tricks. The Domain should not be a grab bag” (p. 164).

After laying out the broad ideological debate between public ownership and private ownership of Public Domain land, Mathews then turns his attention to Alaska. Alaska, which was purchased for $7.5 million is the:

best bargain Uncle Sam’s family has ever obtained. Its wealth is beyond computation. In gold a hundred million – two hundred million – no man can estimate it; the value may be two billion dollars. In timber, in agricultural land, in copper, the values run into the hundreds of millions of dollars. In coal the value is uncountable; it probably amounts to billions of dollars. (Mathews, 1961, p. 165)

While Mathews typically writes in a calm and unemotional manner, at times he is not against stirring the passions of his readers; he follows this description of vast Alaskan wealth, by saying: “To grab this vast treasure has stirred the pirate blood in many of our money kings” (p. 165).

The Guggenheims, J. Pierpont Morgan and the Rockefellers gained claim to $500,000,000 in copper deposits. Initially, Rockefeller’s Standard Oil fought the Guggenheim/Morgan copper interests in Alaska, and gangs of workers “spent much of their time
stalking and shooting their rivals,” but eventually Rockefeller’s Standard Oil and the Guggenheim/Morgan partnership, as well as Amalgamated Copper “signed a treaty of peace and directed their united energies toward grabbing everything of value in Alaska” (p. 161).

Mathew’s then turns to the career of Secretary Ballinger. Ballinger was an attorney who represented the Alaska Petroleum and Coal Company (p. 168); Ballinger also represented Standard Oil interests in the Northwest, and numerous other energy corporations (p. 169).

A key difference between Mathews and Connolly, is Mathews attempt to honestly share Secretary Ballinger’s perspective, including positive aspects of Ballinger’s career and personality. Mathews’ writes: “Ballinger adds an agreeable personality to a keen knowledge of the law. He had been Mayor of Seattle and by a war on slot machines had made something of a reputation as a reformer” (p. 169).

As a result of these accomplishments, as well as Ballinger’s accomplishments as a lawyer specializing in Public Domain issues, President Roosevelt made Ballinger the Commissioner of the General Land Office.

Mathews makes clear that Ballinger was a capable and well-qualified candidate, but “The unpleasant significance of this lies in the fact that Mr. Ballinger was thus in charge of the department which could refuse or consent to patent the claims of his [former] clients” (p. 169).

While Ballinger did not directly grant his clients land claims, he did appear before Congress and advocated for companies to be allowed to buy much larger tracts of land than they previously were allowed to buy. “Mr. Ballinger’s friends … could see nothing improper in his pushing the claims of his former clients, nor in his 155,000 shares of the Alaska Petroleum and Coal Corporation,” writes Mathews (p. 170).
Mathew’s style is straightforward and educational, and he spends numerous pages going over the history or describing the natural resources of Alaska in a clear and un-flashy manner. There is far more specific evidence and context in Mathew’s article, than there was in Connolly’s articles on Ballinger.

Mathews describes the land laws governing the United States (including Alaska), and then he uses this description of the law to show how the law was subverted. The Alaska Petroleum and Coal Company got around the legal limit on land claims of 160 acres per person, by using “dummy entries,” which once granted, were transferred to a trust company (p. 167).

Mathews finally brings the story back to the controversy over the Cunningham claims. After Ballinger resigned from the Land Office, he “became immediately involved in another group directly concerned with the Morgan-Guggenheim-Standard Oil combination and with the exploiting of Alaska” (p. 171). These interests were represented by prospector Clarence Cunningham who was filing the claims for the combination.

Mathews points out there exists a law that outlaws government official from representing any claimants who had claims pending while the official was part of the government department, for two years. “Nevertheless, Attorney Ballinger soon appeared before his successor [at the Land Office] and pleaded to have the Cunningham claims passed to entry and patent” (p. 171).

While Ballinger was acting as the private council, trying to clear the Cunningham claims, President Taft was elected and Ballinger was appointed Secretary of Interior. Mathews comments: “I charge no corrupt motive in Mr. Ballinger’s appearance in Washington. That is, no corrupt motive in his mind or the Presidents” (p. 172).
Mathews even defends Ballinger and the Guggenheims on the claim that the Guggenheims lobbied the President and Congress to appoint Ballinger to Secretary of Interior. The charge lacks evidence and appears to be “partisan political gossip,” writes Mathews (p. 172).

Mathews summarizes his opinion on Ballinger:

Unquestionably Mr. Ballinger has strong political influences back of him …. But this would not prove that Mr. Ballinger was corrupt. As I have said, his talents as a lawyer have ever been employed by corporations or individuals who believe that the treasures of the Public Domain should become their private property. Mr. Ballinger is undoubtedly sincere and honest in his desires to further what he believes to be the legitimate interests of his clients. His point of view may be old-fashioned, but it is not likely that he can be proved guilty or corrupt acts. (Mathews, 1961, p. 172)

Mathews direct and nuanced presentation of facts about Secretary Ballinger, Alaska, and the broader issues of Public Domain and land ownership, is multi-sided and appears fair to all parties. Like Tarbell, Mathews is able to present complicated issues in a clear and straightforward fashion and give a fair hearing to a number of different perspectives. Also like Tarbell, Mathews makes brings out ethical issues of fairness and justice, without moralizing. Mathew’s didn’t demonize Ballinger - he just disagreed with him. Mathews also helps the reader understand Ballinger’s perspective by providing a full description of Ballinger’s career and capabilities.

Mathews was more willing than Tarbell to share his personal opinion, as he was explicitly in favor of land being publicly held, but he doesn’t label alternative perspectives as morally corrupt or indefensible. Mathews shares his opinion, but he doesn’t try to disguise opinion as fact, and doesn’t muddle the two like Connolly did.

Mathews also parallels Baker’s style of approaching a big issue in an indirect manner; Mathews spent pages describing Public Domain laws, which helps the reader place the immediate controversy within the broader ideological debate about land use and public versus
private ownership. This context makes Ballinger’s perspective intelligible and a matter of differing ideological values, as opposed to dishonesty and blatant corruption.

Mathews, like Baker and Tarbell, supplies ample context and evidence before he gets to the central issue. Mathew’s style of journalism seeks to first understand the issue at hand through a multifaceted presentation of facts, and then to make the various ideological perspectives on the issue clear. Then Mathews shares his own opinion. A reader who disagreed with Mathews personal opinion, would likely still be able to learn from Mathew’s clear presentation of facts, supportive context, and his fair characterization of different ideological perspectives. This makes Mathews’ style of journalism more in line with Tarbell and Baker, than with Lloyd, Lawson, or Connolly.
CHAPTER 8 LINCOLN STEFFENS

After Lincoln Steffens becoming an editor at *McClure’s*, the story goes that Sam McClure told him: “You may be an editor. But you don’t know how to edit a magazine.” When Steffens asked him how he was to learn to be an editor, McClure told him:

You can’t learn to edit a magazine here in this office … Get out of here, travel, go – somewhere …. Buy a railroad ticket, get on a train, and there, where it lands you, there you will learn to edit a magazine. (Steffens, 1931, p. 364)

After going to Chicago and then to St. Paul, Minnesota, where Steffens had an illuminating off the record conversation with the lumber baron, Friedrich Weyerhauser, Steffens was given a tip to go see the St. Louis Circuit Attorney Joseph W. Folk. “He is raising a deuce of a row about bribery in the board of alderman. We get the dust of it in the papers but no clear idea of just what it’s all about,” wrote Steffens (Steffens, 1931, p. 368).

The next day, Steffens not only had a scandalous story about graft in St. Louis, but he also had, in Folk, a protagonist who wanted to work with Steffens to publicize his fight against the corrupt businessmen and politicians of his city. Steffens hired local newspaper reporter, Claude H. Wetmore to write the article, but on completion, Steffens felt the article was too cautious, so he rewrote certain sections and added additional information comparing the political machine of “Boss” Tweed in New York to the corruption in St. Louis (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 120).

“Tweed Days in St. Louis,” which was the first installment in the legendary muckraking series and book, *Shame of the Cities*, begins with some general conjecture that St. Louis is announcing to the world: “that it is the worst-governed city in the land” and “that it wishes all men to come there and see it” (Steffens & Wetmore, 1961, p. 122). Steffens often begins his
articles by putting forth his own unique conclusion or personal theory on the phenomena he is writing about, before he presents evidence.

After this opening statement, Steffens says that St. Louis is actually not the worst-governed city in America – Philadelphia is the worst. Philadelphia is never mentioned again in the article and no evidence for the statement is provided. One of Steffens’ theories of graft (he had multiple theories) was that old governments and cities were more corrupt than new governments and cities (Steffens, 1931, p. 464); thus, Philadelphia as one of America’s oldest cities would be worse than St. Louis, which was relatively new.

Later on page one of “Tweed Days in St. Louis,” Steffens states: “The corruption of St. Louis came from the top. The best citizens – the merchants and big financiers – used to rule the town …” (Steffens & Wetmore, 1961, p. 122). Again, this conclusion is stated before any evidence is mentioned.

After a few paragraphs of theorizing and considering graft and corruption as a universal happening, Steffens begins to document St. Louis’s digression, starting in 1890 with public franchises and contracts being exploited by private interests. Corrupt assemblymen “sold the city – its streets, its wharves, its markets, and all that it had – to the now greedy businessmen and bribers.” Steffens adds, “In other words, when the leading men began to devour their own city, the herd rushed into the trough and fed also” (p. 123).

Steffens then describes Circuit Attorney Joseph Folk: “There is one man at work there, one man, working all alone” (p. 122). When Folk was nominated for Circuit Attorney, he declined the nomination, and when he was asked again he warned that if he accepted the job he would have to punish any and all lawbreakers. “The committeemen took such statements as the conventional platitudes of candidates” (p. 126-127), but after the election, Folk (himself a
Democrat) prosecuted election fraud of both Democratic and Republican leaders without bias. An old political boss exclaimed after meeting with Folk, “‘Damn Joe!’ He thinks he’s the whole thing as Circuit Attorney” (p. 127).

Folk noticed a “ten-line newspaper item” reporting there was a large amount of money being held at a local bank that was to be used to bribe Assemblymen in order to pass a street railroad bill. This minor newspaper blurb spurred Folk to send out close to 100 subpoenas to politicians and the directors of the Suburban Railway Company (who were believed to be doing the bribing). At first Folk’s vigor was laughed at. His investigation was thought of as a “huge joke,” and in deed, at first Folk knew nothing, but “he saw here and there puffs of smoke and he determined to find the fire,” writes Steffens (p. 127).

In a meeting with the Suburban Railway Corporation, Folk bluffed and said he had sufficient evidence and the executives were going to be brought before the grand jury and prosecuted to the full extent of the law. The only thing that could keep them out of jail was to admit all they knew and expose the whole corruption ring – Folk gave them three days (p. 128).

Folk’s bluff was successful and the Suburban Railway executives unfolded to reveal the corruption plot. Folk then went after the material evidence – the money in the safety deposit boxes at the banks. The bankers told Folk it was “impossible” to see the contents of the safety deposit box. Folk told the bankers “a crime has been committed, and you hold concealed the principal evidence thereto.” Then Folk issued another threat: “In the name of the State of Missouri I demand that you cause the box to be opened. If you refuse, I shall cause a warrant to be issued, charging you as an accessory” (p. 130). The safety deposit box was opened and $75,000 was found.
At the second bank, another $60,000 was uncovered in a similar fashion. “Consternation spread among the boodle gang. Some of the men took the night trains for other states and foreign countries” (p. 131).

A meeting of the bribe-givers and bribe-takers was held to make a plan to combat Folk; “the total wealth of those in attendance was $30,000,000,” writes Steffens (p. 131). They decided to go after Folk with threats and bribes. Detectives were hired to investigate Folk and witnesses were paid to leave town until after the grand jury had been dismissed (p. 131).

Folk didn’t fold under the pressure, and the “boodlers” began to suspect each other. One boodler from the House of Delegates:

became so frightened while under the inquisitorial crossfire that he was seized with a nervous chill; his fake teeth fell to the floor, and the rattle so increased his alarm that he rushed from the room without stopping to pick up his teeth, and boarded the next train. (Steffens & Wetmore, 1961, p. 132)

Steffens’ primary evidence for telling this story is drawn from the transcripts of Folk’s grand jury, which boldly states:

Our investigation, covering more or less fully a period of ten years, shows that, with few exceptions, no ordinance has been passed wherein valuable privileges or franchises are granted until those interests have paid the legislators the money demanded for action …. So long has this practices existed that such members have come to regard the receipt of money for action on pending measures as a legitimate perquisite of a legislator. (Steffens & Wetmore, 1961, p. 124)

Corruption was so unabashed that a legislator tried to hire a lawyer to sue for uncollected bribes (p. 124). Steffens then itemizes the high cost the city has paid for this corruption: a road that was paid for but never finished, the streetcar franchise that was practically given away (minus the cost of bribery), illegal saloons, prostitution houses and so on. “It made a difference in the price [of the bribe] if there was opposition, and it made a difference whether the privilege asked was legitimate or not. But nothing was passed free of charge,” writes Steffens (p. 124).
The evidence for these stories of corruption are backed up by specific grand jury testimony: “A member of the House of Delegates admitted to the grand jury that his dividends from the combine netted $25,000 in one year; a councilman stated that he was paid $50,000 for his vote on a single measure” (p. 125). $300,000 was used to buy off the legislature to pass the Central Franchise bill on behalf of private interests, who then turned around and sold the franchise rights to “eastern capitalists” for $1,250,000 (p. 132).

To make sure a bought politician voted the way he was bribed to vote and didn’t succumb to moral pressure, the bribers paid crowds to fill the legislative hall to cheer for the corrupt politicians as they cast their corrupt votes (p. 132). Steffens excels at highlighting the contrary and morally absurd. As opposed to the citizenry shaming the corrupt votes of their legislature, the people, corrupt themselves, validate their representatives corruption.

As Folk and the grand jury built their case, “terror spread” amongst the boodlers “and the route was complete” (p. 135).

To close his article, Steffens restates his theory on graft and makes a subtle call for action:

In all cities, the better classes – the businessmen – are the sources of corruption; but they are so rarely pursued and caught that we do not fully realized whence the trouble comes. Thus most cities blame the politicians and the ignorant and vicious poor. Mr. Folk has shown St. Louis that its bankers, brokers, corporation officers – it businessmen- are the sources of evil…. The problem of municipal government in America has not been solved. The people may be tired of it, but they cannot give it up - not yet. (Steffens & Wetmore, 1961, p. 136)

The article was a sensation. Folk went on to be elected Governor of Missouri, largely on the strength of his graft prosecutions and the publicity of Steffens’ article.

Steffens seems good-natured while he tells his story of bad-natured businessmen and politicians. Like Tarbell, Baker, Mathews and Connolly, there is no bitterness or anger detected
in Steffens words, and possibly a bit of glee in telling of the audacity of the grafters; this good-
nature stands in contrast to the resentful, or even spiteful tone of Lloyd and Lawson. Steffens
differs from Tarbell, Baker and Mathews by the prominence he gives his own theorizing.
Tarbell and Baker release a cascade of facts to tell there stories, where Steffens puts forth his
theory and then supplies the facts that support his theory.

Steffens second article in the Shame of the Cities series, appeared in the landmark
January 1903 issue of McClure’s Magazine, along side one of Tarbell’s articles on Standard Oil
and Baker’s article on labor violence at the anthracite coal mines. Steffens’ article tells the story
of Minneapolis Mayor “Doc” Ames and his administration, as they made pacts with gambling
rings, conmen, prostitution houses, illegal saloons and thieves in order to collect graft for the
Mayor and his underlings.

The article runs over 6,000 words and while it contains a similar brand of Lincoln
Steffens theorizing about the nature of municipal government and the character of the American
people, it is largely the story of a half-dozen characters from the corrupt Mayor’s administration
and how they squeezed the city to quench their personal thirst for wealth.

As a young doctor, “Doc” Ames was “Skillful as a surgeon, devoted as a physician, and
as a man kindly, he increased his practice till he was the best-loved man in the community. He
was especially good to the poor” (Steffens, 1961, p. 7). If a patient could not afford to pay him,
the merciful doctor would say, “Richer men than you will pay your bill” (p. 7).

Steffens takes this characterization of Mayor Ames to draw a wider theory: “there was a
basis for his ‘good-fellowship.’ There always is; these good fellows are not frauds – not in the
beginning” (p. 7). But Doc Ames was also a comfort to the criminal class – if a man had stolen
something, “the Doctor helped to get him off. He was naturally vain; popularity developed his love of approbation” (p. 7-8).

Years later, Doc Ames turned that popularity from the poor and criminal class into political power, which eventually propelled him to Mayor of Minneapolis. This is where Steffens’ story of a city government working closely with a city’s criminals takes off. To tell this story, Steffens again draws on grand jury testimony taken from convicted criminals and from various members from Mayor Ames’ administration who had turned state evidence.

After becoming Mayor, Doc Ames dismissed 107 out of the 225 police officers – “the 107 being the best policemen in the department from the point of view of the citizens who afterward reorganized the force” (p. 10). Steffens does not provide an alternative perspective from the Mayor’s administration on why these 107 police officers were laid off. Nor does Steffens say how he knows the 107 were the best policemen.

Steffens then details the Mayor’s numerous schemes and the precise dollar amounts of the payoffs: two-hundred slot machines around the city which paid the Mayor $15,000 per year (p. 10-11); a police baseball team that grafters were required to buy, dozens or even hundreds of tickets to the police baseball games, for the privilege to continue to criminally operate (p. 11); mandatory visits by the city’s physicians to prostitution houses at the cost of $5 to $20 per prostitute, for the sole purpose of collecting the payout (p. 11); and the con-men who swindled unfortunate “suckers” with the backing of police protection for a cut of the con – these “suckers” were known by the dollar amount they were tricked out of, for example, a man who lost $35 was a “$35 man” (p. 12). These detailed claims are the result of grand jury testimony and the “big mitt” ledger - the backroom accounting book that recorded the payoff each member of Doc Ames’ administration received. Everyone involved was listed in the “bit mitt” ledger, from
specific detectives to the police chief (the Mayor’s brother, Fred Ames) and on up to the Mayor himself. A photo of actual pages from the “big mitt” ledger were found on the title page at the opening of Steffens’ article.

Parts of “The Shame of Minneapolis” read like a gangster novel, full of drama, two-faced criminals versus the heroic leader of the grand jury, Hovey Clark, who refuses to be bought off with a $28,000 bribe or intimidated by a “slugger who was hired to come from Chicago” and dispose of Clarke (p. 16).

When Clark faces down Mayor Ames at City Hall, Steffens uses exciting dialogue, quoting Clark:

Doc Ames, I’m after you, … I’ve been in this town for seventeen years, and all that time you’ve been a moral leper …. Now I’m going to put you where all contagious things are put – where you cannot contaminate anybody else. (Steffens, 1961, p. 17)

After the Mayor’s brother, Police Chief Fred Ames, was sentenced to six and a half years in prison, Mayor Doc Ames fled on a night train and was seen:

sitting up at eleven o’clock in the smoking room of the sleeping car, an unlighted cigar in his mouth, his face ashen and drawn, and at six o’clock the next morning he was still sitting there, cigar still unlighted. (Steffens, 1961, p. 18)

The city was without a mayor!

Like “Tweed Days in St. Louis,” “The Shame of Minneapolis” goes beyond a story of shocking corruption, and begins and ends with Steffens philosophy of graft. The opening of “The Shame of Minneapolis” states:

Whenever anything extraordinary is done in American municipal politics, whether for good or for evil, you can trace it almost invariably to one man. The people do not do it. Neither do the “gangs,” “combines” or political parties. These are but instruments by which bosses (not leaders; we Americans are not led, but driven) rule the people, and commonly sell them out. (Steffens, 1961, p. 6)
Later in the opening paragraph, Steffens outlines his classifications of autocracy: “One is the organized majority … where the boss has normal control of more than half the voters. The other is that of the adroitly managed minority” where a boss has a minority following, but a large enough minority to tip an election to either party (p. 6).

Steffens closes “The Shame of Minneapolis” by discussing the difficulties the interim Mayor has had in governing without making some sort of deal with the corrupt; Steffens poses the somewhat contrarian question about the nature of municipal government: “Can a city be governed without any alliance with crime?” (p. 20)

“The Shame of Minneapolis” has three distinct features: the first comes from Steffens himself, in the form of theories, classifications and what appear to be Steffens casual thoughts about the subject - in his philosophizing, Steffens is similar to Henry D. Lloyd. The second source of content comes from sworn grand jury testimony and the “big mitt ledger,” both of which detail the specific charges of corruption with individual names, precise amounts and the detailed structure of the crime. The third feature is the use of dramatic narrative elements, which Steffens’ draws from interviews with the head of the grand jury, Hovey Clarke and from others. In his use of evidence and of dramatic narrative elements, Steffens is a muckraker in the stratum of Tarbell, Baker and Connolly.

Steffens does include some redeeming qualities of Doc Ames, like his generosity to the poor as a young doctor, but with that one exception, the article is lacking any response from Doc Ames or anyone from his administration or any attempt to explain the guilities side of the corruption charges. Steffens does not spend near the time helping the reader understand Doc Ames as Tarbell spent sharing the Standard Oil and the railroad perspective. Thus, Doc Ames and the other antagonists, come off as single sided and simple.
Steffens succeeds at educating the audience on the specific nature and structure of graft in city governments and his theorizing starts the discussion of what it all means. This combination of specific evidence along with theorizing is not far from Henry D. Lloyd’s muckraking, but Steffens theorizing is playful and fun; Lloyd was angry, preachy and went on for dozens and dozens of pages. Where Lloyd was emotion, Steffens’ seems to be more interested in the structure and character of the corruption, as opposed to being angry about it. This amiable attitude in the face of injustice is reminiscent of Baker’s attitude upon witnessing stark poverty and inequality. Both Baker and Steffens can come across as good-natured, and somewhat aloof investigators - not angry or crusading partisans like Lloyd.

Steffens went on to investigate corruption in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and investigate corruption at the state level. In 1904 a compilation of Steffens articles was released in the book, Shame of the Cities. In the books intro Steffens sums up his thoughts on graft: “The misgovernment of the American people is misgovernment by the American people” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 120).

Steffens’ dramatic flair, as well as the scandalous subject matter made Steffens famous and his articles became widely known by the general public. Once while Steffens was giving a speech, a priest asked him what was the source of corruption? Steffens replied, using the biblical story of original sin:

Most people… say it was Adam. But Adam… said it was Eve… And Eve said no, no, it wasn’t she; it was the serpent. And that’s where you clergy have stuck ever since. You blame the serpent, Satan. Now I come and I am trying to show you that it was, it is, the apple. (Steffens, 1931, p. 574)
CHAPTER 9 WILL IRWIN

In Will Irwin’s autobiography, he reports, “I went to Chicago, established that the collectors for the First Ward machine were shaking down the department stores, the office buildings, the saloons, the gamblers, the madams of the bawdy houses, even the small prostitutes of the cribs – everyone who needed influence or ‘protection’” (Irwin, 1942, p. 156-157).

“The interests,” as he called the corrupt businessmen, paid for their influence, not by under the table kickbacks like officials Steffens had exposed in St. Louis and Minneapolis, but by buying tickets to the First Ward Ball – a fundraiser of sorts, thrown by city councilmen Michael “Hinky-Dink” Kenna and “Bathhouse John” Coughlin. The annual ball raised upward of $60,000 for the two councilmen (Irwin, 1961, p. 142). Irwin’s article, “The First Ward Ball” appeared in the February 6th, 1909 issue of Collier’s. Irwin recounts, he “visited this cheap orgy and described it without comment in all its frowsy detail” (Irwin, 1942, p. 156-157).

From the beginning of the article, it is apparent that Irwin did not simply report “without comment” what he saw at the ball; the first sentence is a description of “Bathhouse John” looking out over the floor of the Coliseum at the “moral sewers of Chicago” (Irwin, 1961, p. 139). The rich held balcony boxes looking out upon the mass of drunken people on the Coliseum floor, all wearing face masks to disguise their identity.

Scattered amongst the masses are the floor managers of the ball, “selected either from the powers which rule in Chicago or the powers which rob Chicago – one does not know in which division to place many of them,” writes Irwin (p. 139). The crowd is made up of:

women of the half-world and of no world, all in the cheapest, dirtiest and most abbreviated costumes … scruffy little boys of the slums, … pickpockets, refraining, by the truce of the Devil which reigned that night, from plying their trade; scarlet women and the yellow men who live from and by them. (Irwin, 1961, p. 139)
Irwin goes on to include a more neutral description of the crowd as “bartenders; professional repeaters; small politicians’ prosperous beggars; saloon bouncers; prize fight promoters; liquor salesmen; police captains; runners for gambling houses” (p. 139-140).

As opposed to presenting the attendees’ perspective, or simply describing what he has seen “without comment,” Irwin labels the crowd as “dirty puppets of First Ward politics” (p. 144). Irwin continues his commentary:

They are not here strictly for the joy of it, these greasy revelers …. “Bathhouse John” Coughlin and “Hinky-Dink” Kenna, aldermen of the First Ward, need money to pay repeaters, colonizers, district leaders, and heelers – more for all the expenses of keeping in line this, the richest graft district in the United States. The annual ball is their way of collecting that money. (Irwin, 1961, p. 140)

Irwin is critical of the way the guests dress as well as the way the women walk, describing the women’s clothing as “greasy” and “of those who do wear skirts, many walk with a free stride which betrays their sex” (p. 143).

Irwin chronicles the night as champagne corks “fly to its zenith, and fall” (p. 142). Irwin describes: the first drunken fight, a woman passed out “over the edge of her box, like a clothes line” (p. 144). Another woman who “has gone clean mad with liquor, as women do” is “shouting loud obscenities to the crowd.” Irwin comments, “she bears a fearful resemblance to one of those furies of the French Revolution” (p. 144).

Irwin not only doesn’t approve of the crowds behavior, but he reports to know how they feel. Instead of describing the guests as having an indulgent good time, he sees: “Ten thousand ‘revelers’… getting joylessly drunk on champaign; five thousand spectators, come to see how the other half thinks it lives, looking joylessly on!” (p. 143)

As the bacchanal gets out of hand, a floor manager “comes through with a chair, and beats his constituents into order” (p. 143). Another bouncer, whose conversation is interrupted
by a “little scruffy boy,” punches the kid in the stomach; the boy “shoots back like a cannon ball and brings up sprawling on the floor, where he lies kicking” (p. 144). The bouncer, completely unconcerned with the boy’s wellbeing, goes back to his conversation. Upon witnessing a man hit a woman with a flying champagne bottle, a policeman grins and says in response to onlookers, “Oh, that’s all right … Can’t you see he’s drunk” (p. 145).

Irwin concludes the article by writing:

I who had watched this for five hours, jostled to the door over drunken men, past drunken women … clear of the parasites upon parasites …. The first breath of clean air struck me: I raised my face to it. And suddenly I realized that there were stars. (Irwin, 1961, p. 145)

While Irwin, doesn’t launch into long moral tirades like Henry D. Lloyd, his disapproval of the entire screen is clearly displayed in his word choice, describing the crowd as “greasy”, “dirty,” “cheap,” “dirty puppets,” “women of the half-world and of no world,” and women who “betray their sex.” While Irwin writes disgustingly of the crowd, he seems less hostile to the corrupt alderman, describing “Bathhouse John” as a “bull-necked Irishman” who is “the kind of Celt whose spirit responds, as a flower to rain, to polite public ceremonial” (p. 139).

While the article provides copious amounts of specific evidence, it is far from multifaceted or balanced. Irwin’s article is one-sided in its factual description and in the perspectives that are shared. The article is most reminiscent of Lloyd in his use of passionate and poetic language; if Lloyd wrote about the First Ward ball, one can imagine a similar deluge of description and sharply toned commentary, but Lloyd would also likely add philosophical commentary. In Irwin’s article there are no lengthy discussions of Christian ethics or critiques of Adam Smith’s principles of economic self-interest. Instead Irwin’s article is rich in details of the debauchery and full of shocking stories that likely appealed to a more general audience than Lloyd’s Wealth Against Commonwealth.
Irwin’s article mixes facts and values, creating an epistemological cocktail that muddles vivid description of the First Ward ball, with potent opinions about ball and the attendees. This combination is likely to provoke moral outrage in the reader. Irwin doesn’t offer solutions, but his description is so devoid of any redeeming qualities of the revelers, that his readers are left with little space to form their own opinions about what it all means.

Will Irwin’s best remembered muckraking series was *American Newspaper* (1911), a fourteen part series for *Collier’s* that placed his investigative eye on the newspaper industry. Irwin also wrote a biography of Herbert Hoover, and a number of successful plays. While Irwin’s poetic and descriptive writing creates a vivid picture of the First Ward Ball, his passionate valuation of event places Irwin as more of an editorialist trying to persuade the audience, than a maker of understanding.
CHAPTER 10 DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

The idea to muckrake the U.S Senate was originally conceived by the journalist Charles Edward Russell (covered in Chapter 15), while he was looking out over the Senate chambers and had the thought that almost every member of the Senate had no reason to be there except for “valeting for some powerful interest.” Russell continued, “we had no Senate; we had only a chamber of butlers for industrialists and financiers” (Russell, 1933, p. 142-143). Russell pitched the idea of a magazine series exposing corrupt Senators to William Randolph Hearst, who had just bought *Cosmopolitan*. Hearst liked the idea, but by the time he had agreed to the series, Russell had lost interest and had gone on to work for *Everybody’s Magazine*, so Hearst recruited the famous novelist/journalist David Graham Phillips. The “handsome and meticulously dressed” Phillips agreed to write the articles if historian Gustavus Myers did the research (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 68).

*The Treason of the Senate* began to run in Hearst’s *Cosmopolitan* in March of 1906, and opened with a frontal attack:

Treason is a strong word, but not too strong, rather too weak, to characterize the situation in which the Senate is eager, resourceful, indefatigable agent of interests as hostile to American people as any invading army could be, and vastly more dangerous: interests that manipulate the prosperity produced by all, so that it heaps up riches for the few; interests whose growth and power can only mean the degradation of the people, of the educated into sycophants, of the masses toward serfdom ….. The Senators are not elected by the people; they are elected by the interests. (Phillips, 1961, p. 69)

The March 1906 “Treason” article, which had the subtitle “Aldrich, the head of it all,” starts out by making some general assertions of Senator Aldrich’s guilt. “The combination of bribery and prejudice is potent everywhere” (Phillips, 1961, p. 72) and “for the organizer of this treason we must look at Nelson W. Aldrich, senior senator from Rhode Island” (p. 71). Phillips then raises the question of Senator Aldrich’s daughter, Abby, and her recent marriage to John D. Rockefeller’s son, John Jr. Without pointing to any specific facts of corruption, Phillips condemns the marriage:

The chief exploiter of the American people is closely allied by marriage with the chief schemer in the service of their exploiters. It is a political fact; it is an economic fact. It places the final and strongest seal upon the bond uniting Aldrich and “the interests.” (Phillips, 1961, p. 73)

The majority of Phillips’ attack does not go far beyond generalizations and does little to educate readers of his claim that Senator Aldrich exploits the American people. With a sweeping pen and scant evidence, Phillips condemns the Senate as representing a single interest, which he calls the “System” or “the interests” or some other dubious name: “Various Senators represent various divisions and subdivisions of this colossus. But Aldrich, rich through franchise grabbing, the intimate of Wall Street’s great robber barons, the father-in-law of the only son of the Rockefeller – Aldrich represents the colossus” (p. 74).

Phillips then directly tells his readers, not what they should think about the Senate, but what they do think:

Your first impression of many and conflicting interests has disappeared. You now see a single interest, with a single agent-in-chief to execute its single purpose – getting rich at the expense of the labor and the independence of the American people. And the largest head among the many heads of this monster is that of Rockefeller, father of the only son-in-law of Aldrich and his intimate in all the relations of life! (Phillips, 1961, p. 74)

From Phillip’s perspective, Aldrich is guilty by association – association as an in-law of John D. Rockefeller and his association with the Senate. Phillips blames Aldrich and the rest of
the Senate for the inequality in America at the beginning of the 20th century, stating the Senate had:

so legislated and so refrained from legislating that more than half of all the wealth created by the American people belongs to less than 1 per cent of them; that the income of the average American family has sunk to less than six hundred dollars a year; that of our more than twenty-seven million children of school age, less than twelve millions go to school …. And the leader, the boss of the Senate for the past twenty years has been Aldrich. (Phillips, 1961, p. 74-75)

Instead of taking the reader step-by-step through the specific details of corruption, as Lincoln Steffens’ did with numerous city governments in his series The Shame of the Cities, Phillips uses most of his article to make the same grand and damming accusations again and again. The laborious process of documenting and presenting facts, as Steffens did and as Tarbell did in The History of the Standard Oil Company (Tarbell’s articles filled over 900 pages when it was compiled in a fat two-volume book), was uninteresting for Phillips. Phillips exempts himself from this hard work and justifies his lack of specific evidence by blaming the public’s attention span, writing:

To relate the treason in detail would mean taking up bill after bill an going through it, line by line, word by word, and showing how this interpolation there or that excision yonder meant millions on millions for this interest, millions on millions less for the people as merchants, wage or salary earners, consumers …. Few among the masses have the patience to listen to these dull matters – and so, ‘the interests’ and their agents have prosperity and honor instead of justice and jail. (Phillips, 1961, p. 76)

It is unclear whether Phillips style is a result of his own single-sided view of the Senate or if he thinks the public can be convinced of his conclusion with more expediency by using fiery language and repetition, as opposed to “dull” evidence and cultivating the “patience” that is required to become educated on a topic.

Even William Randolph Hearst who was known as one of the “yellowest” of publishers, is said to have stopped the presses of Cosmopolitan after reading “Treason of the Senate” and
said: “Windy vituperation is not convincing. I had intended an expose. We have merely an attack. The facts, the proof, the documentary evidence are the important thing” (Mott, 1957, p. 492).

While the majority of Phillip’s 5,000 plus word article is full of emotional and far-sweeping platitudes, Phillips does eventually begin to hone in on a specific issue – the tariff. During the 1890 tariff debate, Phillips claims Aldrich changed the language of a bill to enrich the sugar trust’s tariff schedule, which “gave the trust a loot of sixty cents the hundred pounds, of three million dollars a year over and above the high protection it already had” (p. 77).

The most striking evidence of the article comes in the closing pages when Phillips shares the testimony of Senator Bacon from Georgia who in 1903 called for an investigation into why U.S. goods were one quarter to one hundred percent more expensive abroad than in the U.S. (p. 81). Senator Aldrich moved Senator Bacon’s resolution to his committee where it sat for a year and was meant to die (p. 82). Then Senator Bacon reintroduced the resolution and came prepared with specific evidence showing:

how “our” sewing machines sell abroad for fifteen dollars and here for twenty-five dollars; how “our” borax, a Rockefeller product, costs seven and a half cents a pound here and only two and a half cents abroad; how “our” nails, a Rockefeller-Morgan product, sell here for four dollars and fifty cents a keg and abroad for three dollars and ten cents; … how Schwab … said that, while steel rails sold here at twenty-eight dollars a ton, he could deliver them in England for sixteen dollars a ton and make four dollars a ton profit; how the beef trust sold meat from twenty-five to fifty per cent dearer in Buffalo than just across the Canadian line; how the harvester trust sold its reapers cheaper on the continent of Europe than to an Illinois farmer coming to its main factor at Chicago; how on every article in common use among the American people of city, town and country, “the interests” were boldly robbing the people. (Phillips, 1961, p. 82)

Senator Aldrich responded to Senator Bacon’s charges by dismissing them out of hand and refused to acknowledge the Department of Labor figures. In these few pages, Phillips presents convincing evidence that the “Interests” that Aldrich is protecting are costing the
American people dearly, but this sort of specific evidence is like a tasty desert, while the main course of Phillip’s article is far flavorful.

The article makes little attempt to understand Senator Aldrich’s perspective. When Phillips’ does try to explain Aldrich’s perspective he seems entirely disingenuous, as he imagines Aldrich “must laugh as he watches the American people meekly submitting to this plundering through tariff and railway rates and hugely overcapitalized corporations” (p. 80). Phillips closes the article by making a one-sided personal attack on Aldrich’s intellect, followed by an attempt to prod the reader’s anger:

Has Aldrich intellect? Perhaps. But he does not show it … No, intellect is not the characteristic of Aldrich – or any of these traitors, or of the men they serve. A scurvy lot they are, are they not, with their smirking and cringing and voluble palaver about God and patriotism and their eager offerings of endowments for hospitals and colleges whenever the American people so much as looks hard in their direction! … He must laugh at us, grown-up fools, permitting a handful to bind the might of our eighty millions and to set us all to work for them. (Phillips, 1961, p. 83)

The difference between a muckraker like Phillips and a muckraker like Tarbell is the difference between a passionate editorial and a scholarly investigation. Both journalists have gone down in history under the muckraking label. Both are credited with a role in reform, as Tarbell is recognized as helping bring about the 1911 court ordered dissolution of the Standard Oil Company and Phillip’s “Treason of the Senate” is credited as a major influence that brought about the passage of the 17th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which required the election of Senators by popular statewide vote, instead of by appointment by the State Legislature (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 70).

When Cosmopolitan began running “Treason of the Senate,” it was both highly profitable and highly criticized. Collier’s denounced “The Treason of the Senate” as making “reform odious” and represented:
sensational and money-making preying on the vogue of the ‘literature of exposure,’ which had been built up by the truthful and conscientious work of writers like Miss Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens and Ray Stannard Baker …. Mr. Phillip’s articles were one shriek of accusations based on the distortion of such facts as were printed, and on the suppression of facts which were essential. (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 70)

Phillip’s series is also at least partially responsible for bringing about the term “muckraker.” President Roosevelt told Lincoln Steffens that he decided to give his muckraking speech in response to “Treason of the Senate” (Steffens, 1931, p. 581). Roosevelt also wrote in a letter to George Horace Lorimer, editor-in-chief of the widely circulated Saturday Evening Post:

I do not believe that the articles that Mr. Phillips has written … do anything but harm. They contain so much more falsehood than truth that they give no accurate guide for those who are really anxious to war against corruption, and they do excite a hysterical and ignorant feeling against everything existing, good or bad. (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 70)
CHAPTER 11 WILLIAM HARD

In strong contrast to the sour tone of Phillip’s *Treason of the Senate* articles and Will Irwin’s “First Ward Ball,” William Hard’s article, “‘Uncle Joe’ Cannon” is good natured and full of specific and personal details about the “Czar” of the House, Speaker Joe Cannon. Instead of portraying a greedy and ghoulish swindler that no one could relate to (as Phillips did with Senator Aldrich), Hard creates a portrait of Speaker Cannon that is nuanced and even likable, yet ultimately Cannon is anti-reform and reactionary.

Speaker Cannon’s power in the House was so great, that he had the ability to appoint “every member of every committee” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 84). *Collier’s, American Magazine, Cosmopolitan, and Success* all muckraked against “Cannonism” with Mark Sullivan (Chapter 12) taking the lead in his regular editorial in *Collier’s* titled: “Comments about. Sullivan, seeking an ally against Cannon, approached William Hard and suggested Hard also write about Cannon (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 85).

“‘Uncle Joe’ Cannon” appeared in the March 30th, 1908 issue of *Collier’s*. In the article, Hard makes clear that Joseph Cannon of Illinois got to his unmatched power in the House through his unmatched understanding of the finances of the federal government. “That persistent industry and that patient pursuit of financial facts, which gave him his unrivaled knowledge of the money side of the national government” was a primary source of Cannon’s power (Hard, 1961, p. 88). Another source of Cannon’s power was the House rules.

Hard disagreed with Cannon and felt the House rules which gave Cannon so much power were undemocratic. Nevertheless, Hard was willing to represent Cannon’s perspective. Cannon was conservative and believed (in Cannon’s own words): “the function of the Federal
government is to afford protection to life, liberty, and property. When that is done, then let every
tub stand on its own bottom, let every citizen ‘root hog or die’” (p. 96).

Cannon opposed almost every piece of new legislation that was introduced, seeing
everything as “a mere opening wedge” which would inevitably lead to the need to greater
expenditures and more federal involvement (p. 91). Cannon’s opposition to change included an
objection to the Reclamation bill of 1902 that “began the creation of … a new empire in the arid
districts of the Rocky Mountains” and, in Hard’s opinion, “was one of the few fundamentally
important bills of the last quarter-century” (p. 91). Cannon’s opposition to federal regulation and
influence is evident in his appointments to committees; for example, Cannon appoints men to the
Committee on Public Lands who “hates the public development of public lands” (p. 96).

Hard writes that Cannon’s time in Congress and his philosophy of private control over
public control coincided with a period in United States history where “the national government
first began to be submerged by private interests” (p. 95). The “Pennsylvania Railroad Company
became more important than the State of Pennsylvania,” writes Hard (p. 96).

But Hard makes clear that he disagrees with those who view Cannon as a tool of private
industry – this sort of criticism “puts the cart before the horse. Organized wealth finds Mr.
Cannon acceptable because he is instinctively against all new propositions” (p. 92). Hard
demonstrates this by pointing out that Cannon still opposed legislation that had wide support
from private industry, such as the bill to establish national reserve forests in the Appalachian and
White Mountains (p. 92). “In Joseph G. Cannon of Illinois the United States possesses the most
stationary political object ever exhibited within its boundaries. Not reactionary. That implies
movement. Just stationary, fixed, embedded, like a rock in a glacier” (p. 95).
Hard points out signs of possible Cannon corruption; a short lived bill that extended streetcar franchises beyond the previous maximum was passed in the Illinois Legislature and before public anger quickly caused the bill to be repealed, Joe Cannon’s brother Bill was able to get an extension of his streetcar franchise. Speaker Cannon’s brother Bill Cannon, was the only streetcar owner in the entire state of Illinois to get an extension. The state representative who introduced the unpopular streetcar franchise extension bill was from Cannon’s district (p. 96).

Hard closes his article with a description of Cannon’s face as a sort of poetic symbol for the secrecy of Cannon’s political career. “No face makes you want to know more. No face tells you less” (p. 97). Hard focuses on the eyes:

And the eyes! They are the most knowing eyes in any human head. But equally the most unspeaking. No reporter has ever got from them an even momentary flicker of self-revelation. They might as well have been forged at Pittsburgh out of real steel. (Hard, 1961, p. 97)

Hard continues his description of Cannon, writing his eyes are “tender” or even “sad” (p. 97). “They gaze at the world like two women from the deep recesses of fortress windows. Or, better, since there is nothing feminine about them, like two wounded soldiers, sick unto death” (p. 97).

But Hard doesn’t claim to understand the reason for Cannon’s secrecy: “All that the reporter can see is the ‘Joe’ Cannon who walks up and down the aisle of a campaign car singing camp-meeting hymns at the top of his voice, who stops to tell an indescribably filthy story…” and then ends with “apparent deep reverence;” Cannon ends his dirty story (a story that Hard doesn’t recount) with the statement: “God bless the 80,000,000 people who constitute the Republic” (p. 98). Cannon attacks reformers with a smile and by likening them to a disconcerted donkey of who “it was impossible to say whether they were braying because they were kicking,
or kicking because they were braying” (p. 98). Hard closes his article by commenting on Cannon’s donkey quote, writing:

The more that remark is considered, the funnier it grows. But when the laugh of it has died away, the pathetic though remains that a humorous derogatory simile is the greatest encouragement Mr. Cannon has given to the reforms of the last decade or of any other decade since he entered public life. (Hard, 1961, p. 98)

Hard appears to be far more interested in understanding Cannon, than in persuading his readers that Cannon is a force for evil. Like Tarbell, Hard is successful at helping the reader understand Cannon’s perspective and Cannon’s admirable qualities, as well as his more inexcusable qualities. Hard’s perspective is clear, but he doesn’t demonize Cannon like Irwin did with Chicago city councilman, “Hinky-Dink” Kenna and “Bathhouse” John Coughlin, or like Phillips did with Senator Aldrich. Hard’s tone is similar to Steffens, who approaches exposure with a sense of humor, but Hard’s article is less of an exposure than a good natured, if critical character sketch. Hard succeeds at providing an entertaining description of Cannon that also informs readers, by providing a multifaceted and nuanced picture of Cannon.
CHAPTER 12 MARK SULLIVAN

In 1901, after four years as a small town newspaper man, and then a Harvard Law student, Mark Sullivan wrote what he would argue was the first muckraking article, “The Ills of Pennsylvania.” Sullivan’s article was published by the Atlantic Monthly, one of the most distinguished literary magazines in the country, but because Sullivan was an obscure Harvard student, his name was left off and instead was signed simply: “A Pennsylvanian” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 166).

In the article Sullivan (who grew up in Pennsylvania) wrote a firsthand account of widespread corruption amongst the Pennsylvania party machines and the voters; he told the story of a wealthy farmer who owned two hundred acres free and clear and had thousands of dollars in the bank, but insisted on five dollars to deliver his families vote. Sullivan wrote of a “voter strike,” when the townspeople held out for more money from the political bosses. In response, the bosses got together and made a pact to not raise their prices, and half an hour before the polls closed, the voters caved in and settled for the typical bribe and went to the polls. After the polls closed, one of the bosses reached in his pockets for the few remaining dollars and said to Sullivan, “Here,” putting forward a handful of bills, “I had a little more than enough, you take it, a young fellow at college can use a few dollars” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 164-165).

In the article Sullivan detailed numerous instances of fraud, but he also cast his moral judgment on whole of the state of Pennsylvania, declaring it “politically the most corrupt state in the union.” Philadelphia was “the arch-hypocrite of cities; you are virtuous in Philadelphia by appearing so, not by being so; appearances are everything, respectability is the thing wholly divorced from conduct,” wrote Sullivan (Sullivan, 1938, p. 167). Sullivan charged that
Philadelphia had a cast system that other large cities didn’t have, and asserted that Pennsylvania citizens were particularly snobbish and gossipy (Sullivan, 1938, p. 167-168).

“The Ills of Pennsylvania” caused a stir, and prominent Pennsylvanians wrote angry letters, denouncing the anonymous author who had “fouled his own nest” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 170). In Sullivan’s autobiography, he recounts how a proud and distinguished Pennsylvanian judge named Samuel Pennypacker wrote a scathing critique of the article and a passionate defense of Pennsylvania. The state republican boss, Senator Quay made Judge Pennypacker his nominee for Governor and Pennypacker was elected. In Pennypacker’s autobiography he credited his response to Sullivan’s article as giving him recognition that helped elevate him to a recognizable position. Pennypacker writes:

There appeared in the Atlantic Monthly a paper upon “The Ills of Pennsylvania.” It was published anonymously and was sufficiently dull and stupid…. Indignant that the Atlantic Monthly should do anything so indecent, I wrote a historical parallel upon Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, pointing out the great comparative importance of the former in American affairs. It was published in many shapes and I really believe had an influence in giving me a representative position among the people of the state. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 170)

Years after the publishing of “The Ills of Pennsylvania,” Sullivan would look upon his own article with some hesitation; the article was:

a tour de force in malediction. It excoriated not only Senator Quay but the whole people of the state. Much of what I said was true and penetrating – but much of it was farfetched and distorted. It was my first attempt at a magazine article and I was overeager to make it arresting. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 170)

S. S. McClure of McClure’s Magazine took notice of the “Ills of Pennsylvania” and he sent a scout to find Sullivan and write up a report on the anonymous author. Then, in 1904, after Sullivan had graduated from Harvard Law school and years after the “The Ills of Pennsylvania” was published, Sullivan got a letter from Edward Bok, the editor of one of the most popular magazines of the time, the Ladies Home Journal. Bok’s letter said that he would like to call on
Sullivan at a particular time and date and told Sullivan he only needed to write back if he wouldn’t be in.

Sullivan writes that to get a letter from Bok “was an event” in itself and “to call upon a young journalist instead of asking the journalist to call on him was certain to give the occasion an emphasized impressiveness and cause the younger man to have an especial regard for the older one” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 183). When the famous editor arrived at the New York YMCA where Sullivan was living, Bok said he needed a journalist that had legal training (Sullivan had just graduated from Harvard Law school). Bok had been given Sullivan’s name by S. S. McClure. McClure had never met Sullivan – his recommendation was based on Sullivan’s article, “The Ill’s of Pennsylvania.”

For years Bok had led a campaign in the Ladies Home Journal against the patent medicine industry. Bok refused to take patent medicines advertisements and advocated for legislation requiring all ingredients of patent medicines to be listed on the bottle. Bok had undertaken his own investigation into the formula of various patent medicines and had published the finding that Dr. Pierce’s Favorite Prescription contained 16% morphine; in this particular case Bok was wrong; the patent medicine did not contain any morphine and he was being sued for libel. Sullivan agreed to help with the exposure of the patent medicine industry and Bok gave him a generous salary and expense account. Sullivan set out to investigate the patent medicine industry.

Sullivan writes, “The sleuthing I had to do came to have zest for me, for as I probed into the patent medicine business I found many to be nests of reeking charlatantry” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 185).
While Sullivan was investigating the patent medicine industry, the industry began investigating him; two men began hanging around at the YMCA where Sullivan was living and asking questions about Sullivan and his investigation.

By modern journalistic standards, some of Sullivan’s investigatory tactics would be looked down upon. He created a fake job advertisement and posed as the legal counsel of a recent heir to a large patent medicine company that was looking to expand; staff from patent medicine companies all over the country answered his add. In their ambition for new and improved employment, job interviewees told Sullivan secrets about their present employers. Sullivan used this hearsay evidence, as a guide to collect solid evidence which would be the “exhibits and illustrations” of his article (Sullivan, 1938, p. 187).

The article he wrote was over seven thousand words and full of long quotes from legal contracts and from the minutes of the Patent Association of America trade meetings. Bok was impressed by the article, but he did not think it was appropriate for the Ladies Home Journal, whose longest articles were typically around two or three thousand words (Sullivan, 1938, p. 191). Bok still wanted to see Sullivan’s article published, so he sold it to Collier’s Weekly for $700. Sullivan’s article, “The Patent Medicine Conspiracy Against Freedom of the Press” appeared anonymously in the November 4th, 1905 issue of Collier’s.

Sullivan begins the article by describing a colorful debate in the Massachusetts legislature that was considering a bill that would require every bottle of patent medicine to list its ingredients. It was an active and lengthy debate, with drama and humor - the legislatures took sips from a bottle of “Preuna” and described it as a “cheap cocktail.” Sullivan writes, “the debate was interesting and important, two qualities which invariably insure big headlines in the daily newspapers”(Sullivan, 1938, p. 190).
The Massachusetts papers were silent; in fact, they were almost always silent when it came to covering anything that reflected negatively on the patent medicine industry. Sullivan charged that the dearth of coverage on patent medicine exists all across America and it is not by accident.

Accusing the press of collectively censoring itself and stifling free discussion, is a damning charge and not one to be made lightly; Sullivan recognizes this and advises his readers that unless he can present concrete facts backing up the claim, he should be “be smiled at as an intemperate fanatic” (Sullivan, 1961, p. 179-180).

The first line of attack is built on the $40,000,000 in patent medicine advertising that goes to thousands of daily newspapers each year. This amount of money represents influence, but Sullivan is clear that this alone proves little. “Have patience” he pleads, “I have more to say than merely to point out the large revenue which newspapers receive from patent medicines, and let inference do the rest. Inference has no place in this story. There are fact aplenty” (p. 180-181).

Sullivan was looking for a much stronger connection between the patent medicine advertising and the press’s unwillingness to cover the controversy around patent medicine. He found that evidence in the advertising contract between the patent medicine companies and the newspapers they advertised in. Sullivan received a copy of one of these contracts by the renowned Kansan editor of the Emporia Gazette, William Allen White (Sullivan, 1938, p. 189).

The contract states:

"In case any law or laws are enacted … harmful to the interests of the J. C. Ayer Company [a patent medicine company], that this contract may be canceled …. It is agreed that the J. C. Ayer Company may cancel this contract, … in case any matter otherwise detrimental to the J. C. Ayer Company’s interests is permitted to appear in the reading columns or elsewhere in the paper. (Sullivan, 1961, p. 180)"
Sullivan found another important piece of evidence in the minutes of a meeting of the Proprietary Association of America (PAA) (the trade organization of the patent medicine companies). In the minutes of the trade associations meeting, the PAA president Dr. F. J. Cheney explained how the conspiracy to manipulate the press took shape:

We have had a good deal of difficulty in the last few years with the different legislatures of different States…. I believe I have a plan whereby we will have no difficulty whatever with these people…. I, inside of the last two years, have made contracts with between fifteen and sixteen thousand newspapers, and never had but one man refuse to sign the contract…. [William Allen White refused to sign the contract] My point is merely to shift the responsibility. (Sullivan, 1961, p. 183)

Then the PAA President tells the story of the Illinois Legislature that had taken up anti-patent medicine legislation. The PAA President wrote to approximately forty Illinois papers and said:

Please look at your contract with me and take note that if this law passes you and I must stop doing business, and my contracts cease. The next week every one of them had an article [against the legislation]…. It throws the responsibility on the newspapers. (Sullivan, 1961, p. 186)

Following the PAA President’s speech, another member of the PAA got up at the meeting and said:

Will it not be now just as well to act upon this, each and everyone one for himself, instead of putting this on record?… I think the idea is a good one, but really don’t think it had better go in our proceedings. (Sullivan, 1961, p. 186)

Sullivan does not rely solely on the transcripts of the PAA meetings; he documents a case of a businessman who tried to reprint an editorial written by Edward Bok that was critical of patent medicines. The businessman tried to reprint the article as a paid advertisement in every newspaper in the U. S. – all but a few papers refused to take his advertising money (p. 183).

More than two thousand words into the article, Sullivan directly states his main argument: the united $40,000,000 in advertising can be used to suppress negative coverage of
patent medicines and make almost every newspaper in America “an active lobbyist for the patent medicine association” (p. 187).

Sullivan then asks, what has been the result of this collective effort to turn America’s newspapers into patent medicine lobbyists? Quoting from the minutes of another PAA meeting, Dr. V. Mott Pierce said, “The American Publishers’ Association has rendered us valued aid through their secretary’s office in New York, and we can hardly overestimate the power brought to bear at Washington by individual newspapers” (p. 187).

In the case of the Massachusetts legislation that was being considered at the beginning of the article, PAA president Cheney says he sent to every Massachusetts newspaper a letter reminding them of their contract; “the fruit which that letter bore: a strong editorial against the anti-patent-medicine bill, denouncing it and its author in the most vituperative language a marked copy of which was sent to every member of the Massachusetts Legislatures” (p. 189-190).

Another newspaper publisher sent a telegram to numerous legislatures and a personal letter to his representative asking this representative to “use his influence against the bill” (p. 190). In the annual report to the PAA on the state of New York, Dr. Mott Pierce explains:

We are happy to say, that though over a dozen bills were before the different State Legislatures last winter and spring, we have succeeded in defeating all the bills which were prejudicial to proprietary interests without the use of money, and through the vigorous cooperation and aid of publishers…. The only small exception was the Evening Star of Poughkeepsie, New York, the publisher of which, in a very discourteous letter, refused to assist us in any way. (Sullivan, 1961, p. 191)

Another rebellious paper came up at the PAA meeting; the Cleveland Press “indulged in a tirade against the so called ‘drug trust’” (p. 191). Within two days, six patent medicine manufactures had canceled over $18,000 in advertising to the paper. The Cleveland Press is a syndicate of the Scripps-McRae League. Instead of standing up for the Cleveland Press’s
independence, Scripps-McRae sent the patent medicine manufacturer a letter of apology, stating: “Scripps-McRae papers will contain no more such as Cleveland Press published concerning the medicine trust…. I am sure that in the future nothing will appear in the Cleveland “Press” detrimental to your interests” (p. 192).

Sullivan documents how state press associations have taken their own steps to protect the patent medicine industry. The Wisconsin Press Association passed a resolution to appoint five members to oppose all anti-patent medicine legislation (p. 193).

Sullivan does express his personal opinion in the article, but he uses the first person to emphasize that he is sharing his own opinion, separating it from the tone of the rest of his article. For example, Sullivan writes: “this seems to me a shameful thing – that a Massachusetts newspaper of apparent dignity and outward high standing should jump to the cracking whip of a nostrum-maker in Ohio” (p. 190).

Besides isolated papers scattered around the country, the one exception is the press in North Dakota. Sullivan hails the press of North Dakota for standing up to the “cracking whip” of the patent medicine industry. When the North Dakota legislature passed a bill requiring all patent medicine bottles to print on their label the contents of the bottle and the percentage of alcohol or morphine and the North Dakota newspapers didn’t object, the PAA voted to withdraw all advertising from North Dakota as a “warning to other states” (p. 193).

In the closing paragraphs, Sullivan commends the North Dakota press writing, “let the newspapers of North Dakota know that they have the respect and admiration of all decent people” (p. 194). Sullivan ends with a warning - “any newspaper which carries a patent medicine advertisement knows what it is doing.” And when a legislature states:
“this label bill seems right to me, but I can not support it; the united press of my district is opposed to it” – when that happens, let every one understand the wires that have moved “the united press of my district.” (Sullivan, 1961, p. 194)

In his autobiography, Sullivan writes that the style of the article was particularly appealing to the Collier’s editor, Norman Hapgood, who “had a special appreciation of any writing about a public matter that was austere and factual, which made its effect not by emotion but by massing of facts” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 191).

Before Collier’s published Sullivan’s article, Hapgood and the publisher Robert Collier took Sullivan out to lunch at “The Players” restaurant; Sullivan writes: “The two belonged in the very highest journalistic level … I was extremely impressed.” Hapgood and Collier were looking for “a younger journalist with the obvious bent for digging that my article reflected,” writes Sullivan. Hapgood and Collier offered Sullivan a full time position on Collier’s staff for $7,500 a year – more than three times his previous salary (Sullivan, 1938, p. 192).

Sullivan wanted to accept their offer, but he had just begun to work for McClure’s and was in the middle of a number of projects and didn’t want to offend S. S. McClure, who had originally connected Sullivan to Edward Bok (who passed Sullivan’s article on to Collier’s). Robert Collier told Sullivan that he knew Sam McClure and after some time had passed, he would “arrange with McClure for a friendly divorce” for Sullivan (Sullivan, 1938, p. 193).

At McClure’s, Sullivan did not write any articles and instead worked primarily as a researcher on articles about Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, and on C. P. Connolly’s “Story of Montana” about the copper kings and the fierce competition of mine owners. Sullivan thought highly of Connolly: “his fineness of character, intellectual integrity and exactness of mind were so readily apparent as to leave me little to do beyond a nominal
search of the court records and other documents upon which his book was irrefutably based” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 202).

Sullivan also did research for Lincoln Steffens and his “Shame of the Cities” articles. Sullivan was sent to Louisville, Kentucky to follow up on the numerous letters from citizens who “clamored” for Steffens to expose their city. “Expose us next!” they wrote; many letters also included leads to help with the investigation.

Sullivan spent three weeks in Louisville, following up on leads. “The shame was there, as it was in practically every American city; whether Louisville’s was more gross or less so than that of other cities … was a matter of comparison and journalistic judgment” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 203).

Sullivan thought highly of most of the McClure’s staff; he described the reporting of Tarbell and Baker as “restrained, unexcited, soberly factual” and their writing style as “simple, direct and unpretentious” and their temperament as “kindly, tolerant, modest, gently humorous” (p. 200). However, Sullivan did not think highly of Lincoln Steffens:

He [Steffens] was called a great reporter. In his younger, obscure newspaper days he may have been, but in his better-known writings I rarely saw a paragraph that I would have called great reporting. Hardly would I have called it reporting at all. Some of the articles that made him famous, his accounts of political corruption in cities, seemed to me to be primarily not reporting at all, and not objective at all, but at once psychic and subjective. He probed into, or surmised, the inner mind and motives of a mayor or a boss; then he wrote what Lincoln Steffens thinks about what Lincoln Steffens conceives to be the mind of the mayor of Minneapolis, or Philadelphia, or wherever. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 200)

But Steffens was famous and his writing had perked the interest of many young writers and activists; Sullivan writes:

His long tenure on fame was due, I think, to the fact that he was a radical, and, living into a period in which much of the writing was done by radicals…. To the younger generation of literary radicals who succeeded him, Steffens was the old master and they celebrated him. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 200)
To Sullivan, Lincoln Steffens seemed to be playing a part in a drama as an actor who would rather deceive than give an honest attempt to explain himself. Sullivan’s personal interactions with Steffens felt shifty and disingenuous: “I felt that when one tried to hold him down to any orderly sequence of logical argument he took refuge in some evasive, grinning paradox.” Sullivan recalled witnessing someone thrust an accusatory question at Steffens: “Are you a Communist?” Steffens replied, “Oh, much worse – I’m a Christian.”

As a whole, Sullivan viewed Steffens personal philosophy as fatalistic and intellectually defeatist.

It is difficult to discern whether there is really as great a gulf in journalistic approach between Steffens and other McClure’s journalists, or if Sullivan’s harsh judgment of Lincoln Steffens was the result of two personalities rubbing each other the wrong way. Sullivan grew up a poor farm boy, who did farm labor before and after school and all day in the summers; as a child Sullivan had so few days off from farm work that he can remember the handful of days off - he was once allowed to go to a baseball game with his older brother and another time he got to pick blackberries instead of doing farm work.

Steffens, on the other hand, grew up wealthy and had freedom from a young age - he was given a horse and allowed to ride as far as the horse could take him. Sullivan worked as a small town reporter and wrote articles to fund his way through Harvard and Harvard Law. Steffens father paid for a private tutor, a college education at Berkley, and then more studies in Germany. With more than a little spite, Sullivan recounts Steffens sitting at a restaurant “talking revolution and blood – and sucking the guts out of a chocolate éclair impaled on an upright fork” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 200).
Sullivan’s verdict of the renowned publisher and editor of *McClure’s Magazine*, Sam McClure, was one of respect and bewildered fascination. Sullivan writes that McClure was the:

pre-eminent magazine genius…. [and] the intensity of his preoccupation with ideas, his helplessness to resist his own impulses – impulses which were the very yeast of magazine genius, but which tumbled out over each other in such profusion that often they crowded each other out of life. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 194)

Sullivan writes that Sam McClure was:

not a great editor … for editing implies patient sitting at a desk, minute reading and emendation of manuscripts. That McClure could never do…. But as a geyser of ideas, as a sensitive barometer of the moods of the time he lived in, as a supernatural sensor of what people felt and thought … [McClure’s was unrivaled]. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 194)

McClure’s was eccentric. Sullivan and McClure once took a trip down the Mississippi River together and out of no where, McClure stuck his finger between the buttons in Sullivan’s shirt and then jumped back, “Ha” he said, “I supposed so: you’re wearing an undershirt; no one should ever wear undershirts.” Nothing more was said on the subject. Sullivan reflects in his autobiography, “McClure was a queer bird, but a lovable man and a great one.” Journalistically, McClure was an idea-man and a businessman, but not an investigator, nor a writer. Sullivan found it strange that McClure was not a writer, as he was a dynamic talker - McClure once talked for seventeen hours straight with Kipling (Sullivan, 1938, p. 198).

After less than a year at *McClure’s*, Sullivan left to join *Collier’s* (Sullivan, 1938, p. 201). Peter Collier, like Sam McClure, came to the United States from Ireland poor (“twenty-five cents in his pocket”) and ready to make his fortune. Both men coincidentally worked as Bible salesmen and did other odd jobs to pay their way through school; McClure at Knox and Collier at St. Mary’s Seminary in Cincinnati, where Collier was studying to be a priest (Sullivan, 1938, p. 204). McClure made his fortune by setting up a syndicate that sold serialized fiction to hundreds of newspapers all over the country. Peter Collier became rich by the use of the
installment plan, where he would sell a $1.00 Bible to someone who only had $.10 and then the buyer could pay the rest of the cost in installments (Sullivan, 1938, p. 204). This opened up the book market to the poor. In 1879, Peter Collier started a printing plant to cut down on his costs and in 1888 he started Collier’s Weekly, which was an imitation of some of the other popular magazines of the day, like Harper’s and Leslie’s (Sullivan, 1938, p. 204).

By 1889, Peter Collier’s son, Robert J. Collier had finished his degree at Georgetown and a year of study at Oxford and he was given control of Collier’s Weekly. At first the magazine reflected his highly sophisticated disposition. He printed covers using Greek text and serialized Henry James’ The Turn of the Screw, which is a highly difficult and abstruse text (Sullivan, 1938, p. 204). Robert Collier also sought out the best artists of the times and hired them for top dollar, and let the public know the large amount of money he was paying (Sullivan, 1938, p. 206).

Robert Collier once paid the artists Charles Dana Gibson $1,000 a drawing for 100 drawings – an absurd price for a time when people were still working for dollars a day. Robert Collier then reprinted Gibson’s terms and acceptance letter and circulated the contract all over the country, and sent Gibson on a speaking tour to publicize the magazine. Robert Collier did the same thing with literature – he serialized Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories; he paid Richard Harding Davis $1,000 a week to report on the Russo-Japanese War (Sullivan, 1938, p. 207).

Robert Collier not only wanted the best art and the best literature, but he wanted “the best editorials in America” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 204-207). He consulted Finley Peter Dunn, the “humorous philosopher” who was writing editorials for the Chicago Evening Post along with his “Mr. Dooley” column. Dunn suggested Norman Hapgood, who had worked with Dunn at the
Chicago Evening Post, before going to New York and writing for the *New York Evening Post*. Hapgood had also worked as a theater critic, before leaving newspaper work to write biographies of Washington, Webster, and Lincoln.

When Robert Collier found him, Hapgood was in Italy embarking on a “life of leisurely, scholarly writing” (Sullivan, *The Education Of An American*, 1938, p. 208). Without having met Hapgood, Robert Collier sent off an enthusiastic cable to Rome offering him the editorship at a price of $25,000 a year – for that price, he wanted “the most distinguished editorials in America” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 209).

“What we set out to do, we did” writes Norman Hapgood. “In the publicity field we led the fight for the Pure Food and Drug Act. We gave the patent medicine business a blow so solid that it has not recovered. We led the conservation fight to such an extent that we drove Secretary Ballinger out of President Taft’s Cabinet, for giving away our natural resources” (Hapgood, 1930, p. 168).

Norman Hapgood is a unique character in the history of muckraking; he’s intellectual, but not elitist; an opinionated editorialist, but not emotional. Hapgood was a self described “intellectual adventurer” and believed in the open intellectual battle of ideas and argument. Hapgood writes, “If criticism is the adventure of a soul among masterpieces, there is perhaps a word for the adventures of a mind in search of ideals” (Hapgood, 1930, p. ix).

Hapgood’s intellect was pointed both inward at his own thoughts and outward at the ideas held by both elites and public opinion. Hapgood writes, “what has held me with most firmness have been the rovings, combats, triumphs, and confusions of the mind – my own, the minds of leaders in action and in thought, and the mind also of the general public” (Hapgood, 1930, p. 3).
The Collier’s editorial pages consisted of up to twelve editorials of 500 words or less residing in the first two pages of the weekly – this went against the common conventions of the time, which favored long editorials located towards the end of the magazine. Hapgood did the writing and set the intellectual tone of the editorials, but Robert Collier instilled an enthusiasm and confidence that gave the editorials prominence in the magazine. Robert Collier also wrote the occasional striking headline or added a choice sentence to Hapgood’s editorials (Hapgood, 1930, p. 175-176). Hapgood writes that with the Collier’s readers:

there is no question that brevity was a popular aspect. Not only were the readers pleased to have huge subjects compressed into five hundred words, but departures to longer units were resented. This shortness also made it possible to give a larger variety of topics, and we treated ten or twelve editorials as an artistic sequence, carefully thinking out the order in which they ranged ... from a sharp summary of the basic issue of a campaign, through a picture of a great artist just dead, along through notes on events in many states and many lands, to a shading off to a disquisition on the tastes of women or the undeserved obloquy of stewed prunes. (Hapgood, 1930, p. 177)

When Hapgood joined Collier’s, the magazines 300,000 readers was largely the result of Peter Collier’s book agents giving away a magazine subscription as a perk to book buyers. Robert Collier brought in Hapgood to gain both a wider influence and more recognition as an elite publication.

This recognition and influence came to Collier’s in an unforeseen way. One day, Robert Collier picked up a copy of the widely read society gossip magazine Town Topics, which wrote a scandalous account of President Roosevelt’s daughter, Alice Roosevelt. Robert Collier told Hapgood to write an editorial on Town Topics and he did, labeling Town Topics as the “most degrading paper … in the US” and a “sewer-like sheet” and advocated readers and advertisers to boycott the “coarse and leering” magazine. Robert Collier added a line about the Town Talk editor having a standing “somewhat worse than that of an ordinary forger, horse thief, or second-story man” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 210-212).
This editorial brought a libel suit, as well as a criminal suit against Norman Hapgood even though Robert Collier wrote the most libelous line. The trial was covered on the front pages of newspapers and Collier’s received much publicity and praise for doing the worthy job of defending the President’s daughter “with courage, celerity and artistic thoroughness” said the New York Sun. By the end of the trial, the public had taken notice of Collier’s and it was on its way to becoming one of the most influential magazines in the country (Sullivan, 1938, p. 219).

According to Mark Sullivan, Robert Collier and Norman Hapgood were distinctively different personalities and Sullivan saw himself as the buffer and the glue that held the trio together. Collier had “instinct and emotion” where Hapgood used “slow deliberation” and logic (Sullivan, 1938, p. 228). Sullivan writes, “Collier was a true journalist…. Hapgood was not a journalist at all, he was an essayist” but it was Hapgood that gave Collier’s “the highly civilized touch that distinguished it” from other magazines. “Hapgood’s only passion was to be dispassionate” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 229).

Sullivan began contributing editorials to supplement Hapgood’s regular columns; this eventually led to Sullivan’s regular, signed editorial section “Comment on Congress,” which became Sullivan’s most recognized contribution as a muckraker.

In his autobiography, Sullivan writes of “Comment on Congress:” “With appalling casualness – as I see it now – I went about unhorsing two out of the three most powerful political figures in the United States – no less than that!” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 242) His first target was Speaker of the House, Joseph Cannon.

Speaker Cannon was known as the “Czar” of the House because the House rules allowed him to appoint every member of every committee in the House. On top of that, Cannon was
utterly unwilling to put any check on the power of corporations. Sullivan’s first step was to educate his audience on the undemocratic nature of the House rules:

To explain these rules to the public and to make clear how they worked was the first step in my campaign against Cannon. I must make the explanation so simple that the average man could understand it. I could, of course, just rail at Cannon, throw bricks at him…. I did some of that too, but only after I had carefully explained that Cannon was only a symbol. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 248)

Sullivan recognized that to explain the House rules to average American’s was a difficult task – “parliamentary rules are not appetizing to readers,” Sullivan remarked. To aid in his writing, Sullivan imagined he was writing to a druggist from Oklahoma. “He was a wholly imaginary character; he existed only in my mind, but he was an important figure in my campaign against Cannon,” wrote Sullivan (1938, p. 248-249). In an early “Comment on Congress,” Sullivan starts his article by writing:

If you are a citizen of the United States, if you take an interest in the government at Washington, if you, or your family, or your business is affected by a tariff, by the Pure Food law, by any of the laws that Congress passes or declines to pass – then this article is of great importance to you. Please read it. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 249)

In the article, Sullivan goes on to sketch a line connecting an individual voter’s intentions and the House rules that impede those intentions. Sullivan writes:

You sent John Smith to Congress from your district. You sent him, let us say, because you believe in an income tax and John Smith believes in an income tax. So John Smith introduces an income tax bill. Introducing it is the simplest thing in the world. He takes a sheet of paper, writes at the top, “Sixtieth Congress, Second Session.” Below he writes out the bill. Then he fold the paper, walks up the aisle, and places it in a small square basket on a desk close by the right hand of J. Cannon, Speaker. That is all. The bill is introduced. Now what next? In a moment of leisure, Cannon takes that basket full of new bills and runs through them hastily. Each one he sends to a committee. What thought Cannon may think, what smiles he may smile, when he runs across John Smith’s income tax bill, are matters of speculation, which belong in the uncertain field of other men’s motives. But any Member of Congress will tell you that John Smith’s income tax bill will be sent to the Judiciary Committee – the safest of all Cannon’s safe committees. Cannon appointed that committee, and he made it iron-bound, bomb-proof, and water-tight. It is called “Cannon’s morgue.” Not a Republican on that committee but has an understanding
with Cannon, express or implied, that the committee will report favorably only such bills as Cannon desires.

Congressman Smith’s bill is now in the Committee on Judiciary. What, now, can Congressman Smith do? Smith can do, literally, nothing whatever….

John Smith is the choice of 200,000 people; the income tax bill may be earnestly desired by 300 out of the 391 members of Congress, each in turn representing 200,000 people, every one of whom wants an income tax law – all told, they are as impotent as an ant in the Capital basement. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 249-250)

After focusing on the House rules, Sullivan set out on his crusade to prevent Cannon’s re-election as Speaker of the House and to make the House rules more democratic (Sullivan, 1938, p. 250).

In “Comment on Congress,” Sullivan praised the twelve “insurgent” Republican’s, including Charles Lindberg Sr. of Minnesota and George Norris of Nebraska. The insurgents stood up to Speaker Cannon and supported changing the House rules. Sullivan profiled a different insurgent each week and listed the counties who elected each insurgent. Sullivan then commended the voters from those counties and labeled them as superior to the rest of the country, in an attempt to goad voters from other areas to elect independent and honest Representatives.

Sullivan also asked his readers to send their representative a letter asking them if they would support a rule change and if they would support Cannon for Speaker of the House at the next election. Collier’s then reprint the response of the representatives, and paid tribute to those who pledged to oppose Cannon and attacked those who stood by Cannon, or were non-committal. “I was blatantly partisan,” reflects Sullivan. “Whatever Cannon and the standpatters did was evil; whatever the insurgents did was good” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 254-255).

“Comment on Congress” were almost always short editorials of three or four hundred words and despite the serious and inert atmosphere of his topic, Sullivan’s editorials were often light-hearted. The March 8th, 1909 “Comment on Congress” was titled “Books for an Old Man,”
which was a satirical article creating a reading list of books that a certain seventy-four year old man may like to read in retirement. The seventy-four year old man was of course Speaker Cannon and the reading list was to humorously induce Cannon to “recall long-forgotten aspirations for the charm of cultivation and learning” and to “escape to quiet retirement and indulgence in those pleasures of taste to which he has long denied” (Sullivan, 1961, p. 99). The reading list was also poking fun at Cannon’s known disinterest in reading and books. In another “Comment on Congress” from June 12th, 1909, Sullivan wrote about the pleasant climate of Japan, where “air is shot through and through with perfume; the very pores drink it hungrily in, and a cracked and grizzled old skin would assume again the soft pliancy of youth” that a “man of seventy-four, at the end of a long life filled with fighting and scheming” would desire (Sullivan, 1961, p. 101).

Other of Sullivan’s comments were less humorous – “Again, 304 Days” which appeared along side “The Climate of Japan” on June 12th, 1909 “Comment on Congress,” made a straightforward argument that the unpopular Cannon should step down as Speaker because he would hurt his Republican party in the upcoming election (Sullivan, 1961, p. 100). Another of Sullivan’s submissions on July 3rd, 1909 was a simple five line comment that there were 283 days before the “day when any American citizen will have the opportunity to cast his ballot for a Member of Congress pledged to vote against CANNON for Speaker” (Sullivan, 1961, p. 101).

In the midst of Sullivan’s campaign against Speaker Cannon, one of the insurgents, Congressman Norris had drafted a bill proposing to change the House rules and limit the Speaker’s power. He kept this bill folded up in his pocket, waiting for the right time to introduce the bill. On March 16th, 1910 a Cannon ally opened debate in order to extend the House rules; Congressmen Norris used the opportunity to gather the insurgent Republicans who joined
Democrats to introduce Norris’ bill. The debate was furious and the closing speech was given by Congressmen McCall from Massachusetts - a Cannon supporter. McCall said:

This movement [to change the House rules] does not originate in the House of Representatives… you [opponents of Cannon] are about to do the behest of a gang of literary highwaymen who are entirely willing to assassinate a reputation in order to sell a magazine. (Sullivan, 1938, p. 261)

The insurgent Republicans and the Democrats were successful in changing the House rules. Following this success, the next “Comment on Congress” led with the title “Next Aldrich!” and the subtitle, “The Boss of the Senate.”

Sullivan began his campaign against Senator Aldrich’s heavy-handed tactics. But before the public debate over Aldrich and the direct election of Senators could reach its crescendo, Senator Aldrich announced that he would not seek re-election, and said that he saw that the direct election of Senators would succeed (Sullivan, 1938, p. 263).

Mark Sullivan does not fit in neatly as an ideological muckraker like David Graham Phillips or Henry D. Lloyd, or as a neutral and multifaceted muckraker like Ida Tarbell.

For much of his career, Sullivan wrote editorials, which likens him to Henry Demarest Lloyd, and both Lloyd and Sullivan had law degrees. Despite these similarities in training, Lloyd’s signature piece of muckraking, Wealth Against Commonwealth was a 500 plus page moral argument reinforced with copious amounts of evidence. This makes it difficult to draw too close a likeness to Sullivan’s short, simple, educational and sometimes humorous editorials, or his longer, less opinionated magazine investigations. Lloyd also had much more literary flair in his writing. Additionally, Sullivan sought to make the House rules understandable to the average American, where Lloyd’s writing was aimed at elites and was challenging, legalistic and philosophical.
Sullivan also can’t be considered an even-handed muckraker who simply sought to understand his subject. Sullivan’s writing does not show the same effort to unravel numerous sides of an issue, as Tarbell’s writing does. Where Tarbell shared Standard Oil and the railroad’s perspective, Sullivan provided little space for the patent medicine industry or Speaker Cannon to defend themselves. Instead, Sullivan actively sought to poke holes in the patent medicine industry. He also directly advocated for the downfall of politicians and tried to educate and organize his readers to change the political structure. This sort of overt political action is something Tarbell or Baker would never do.

Collier’s was also more highbrow than McClure’s, as well as most other muckraking publications. This is likely due to the influence of Norman Hapgood and Robert Collier, as opposed to Sullivan, who clearly made an effort to reach everyday Americans (i.e. he wrote for his imaginary pharmacist in Oklahoma).

A muckraker like Thomas Lawson (“Frenzied Finance”) or David Graham Phillips (“Treason of the Senate”) played heavily to the public’s popularly held beliefs about greedy businessmen and corrupt politicians. Sullivan, like Lawson and Phillips, tried to persuade the public and move readers to action, but Sullivan did so by educating his readers, not by provoking their emotions and popular prejudices. Sullivan and Collier’s, were crusading and combative, but they were distinctly different from the crusading of David Graham Phillips. Where Phillips was emotionally combative, Sullivan was intellectually combative.
CHAPTER 13 SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

Another muckraker, Samuel Hopkins Adams wrote about the patent medicine industry for *Collier’s*. In his series, “The Great American Fraud,” Adams wrote eleven articles exposing the industries slippery and distorting relationship with the truth. Adams exposure began a month before *Collier’s* printed Mark Sullivan’s article, “The Patent Medicine Conspiracy Against Freedom of the Press.” Along with Adam’s first article in the series, an introduction was printed in *Collier’s* in the September 30th, 1905 issue:

> These articles, which have been written … after an investigation lasting several months, will not only describe the methods used to humbug the public into buying patent medicines through fake testimonials and lying statements published in the newspapers, but will show that a large number of so-called “tonics” are only cocktails in disguise, and that many of the nostrums are directly responsible for the making of drunkards and drug fiends. (Adams, 1961, p. 177)

Hopkins begins his October 28th, 1905 article of “The Great America Fraud” with a “distinguished public health official” describing to Adams the contents of a typical patent medicine like Peruna, which is essentially alcohol, water, a flavoring and burnt sugar for color. Peruna claims to cure catarrh. “What is catarrh?” Adams asks. Catarrh is:

> whatever ails you. Pneumonia is catarrh of the lungs …. Dyspepsia is catarrh of the stomach. Appendicitis – surgeons, please note before operating – is catarrh of the appendix …. Heart disease is catarrh of the heart. Canker sores are catarrh of the mouth. (Adams, 1961, p. 196)

The danger in a cocktail being mistaken for a cure, is not only could the sick delay going to a doctor, but in the making of “drunkards,” writes Adams. To demonstrate the fraudulence in patent medicines like Peruna, Adams draws on testimony from a wide variety of imprecisely identified sources, including a “well-known authority on drug addictions,” the Acting Commissioner to the Indian Department, a “special investigation,” “a druggist in a southern ‘no-license’ town,” “southern newspapers,” a “Minnesota druggist,” “Chicago drugstores,” and US
District Attorney Mallette (p. 197-199). The above list of sources is wide, but not always authoritative and sometimes vague, as in the case of “Chicago drugstores” or a “special investigation.”

In the age of localized prohibition, some states like Main and Kansas, as well as no-license counties in the South, inadvertently allowed the consumption of alcohol through patent medicines, and did so without levying the higher alcohol tax. Adams writes, “the drinker of Peruna doesn’t want to get drunk; at least she doesn’t know that she wants to get drunk (p. 199). He then tells the story of a woman from the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, who can’t get by without a bottle of “Kilmer’s Swamp Root” (p. 200).

Adams references a story from the Journal of the American Medical Association, where a priest suffered from chronic alcoholism, even thought he claimed to have “never drank a drop of liquor in his life” – he was a regular Peruna drinker (p. 200).

After early articles of Adam’s series were printed, the patent medicine Warner’s Safe Cure sent Collier’s a stern warning against attacking Warner’s. In this article, Adams tells his readers about the threat and responds that “I have no intention of ‘attacking’ this company or any one else, and they would have escaped notice altogether, because of their present unimportance, but for their letter” (p. 202). Adams then goes on to tell readers that Warner’s Safe Cure is “leased, managed, and controlled by the New York and Kentucky Distilling Company, manufactures of standard whiskeys which do not pretend to remedy anything but thirst” (p. 202).

Further on in the article, Adams lists the alcohol content, “according to an official state analysis,” of various patent medicines; Hostetter’s Bitters is 44%, Lydia Pinkham is 20%, Hood’s Sarsaparilla is 18%, Burdock’s Blood Bitters is 25%, Ayer’s Sarsaparilla is 26%, Paine’s Celery Compound is 21% (p. 202).
Towards the end of the article, Adams takes on a new argument, writing: “If this class of nostrum is so harmful, asks the attentive reader of newspaper advertising columns, how explain the endorsements of so many people of prominence?” (p. 202) Adams analyzes thirty-six patent medicine endorsement letters and found that “in twenty-one of the thirty-six there is no indication that the writer has ever tasted the remedy which he so warmly praises” (p. 203).

Adams details one such case, where a quote from an Admiral was used in an advertisement for Peruna. After the advertisement was circulated far and wide, the Admiral later denied giving permission to use the endorsement (p. 203). Adams first includes the endorsement by Admiral Schley, which appeared in Peruna advertisements: “I can cheerfully say that Mrs. Schley has used Peruna, and I believe, with good effect” (Signed) W. S. Schley.” (Adams, 1961, p. 203)

Adams then includes a letter from Admiral Schley, in which Schley says: “The advertisement of the Peruna Company … is made without any authority or approval from me” and “the advertisement was offensive and must be discontinued” because it “is an infringement of my rights as a citizen” (p. 203).

Instead of taking Admiral Schley’s denial as a sign of fraud, Adams points out that Admiral Schley’s disavowal has “no explicit denial of … [Schley’s original] testimony.” Adams says that he has seen both letters “similarly signed” and “interlined in the same handwriting.” Adams writes that Admiral Schley “seems to have appreciated that this use of his name was detrimental to his standing” and then sought to distance himself from his original endorsement (p. 203).

Adam’s critique of Admiral Schley’s ambiguous denial of his earlier endorsement shows a commitment to a well rounded truth. It would have been easy for Adams to use Schley’s
denial as a sign of fraudulent advertising by Peruna. Instead, Adams tests the sturdiness of Schley’s denial, and in the process indicates how patent medicine companies, in coercion with the paid endorsements of publicly known figures, mislead the American public. This is a more complicated argument that avoids simply labeling the patent medicine companies as liars, and instead uncovers the basic outline of the deceit.

Adams closes his article by restating his argument that the government should tax patent medicines at the higher rate of alcohol, rather than the lower rate of medicine and the public has the right to know the percentage of alcohol in these so called medicines, so:

the innocent clergyman who writes testimonials to Duffy, and the W.C.T.U member who indorses [sic] Peruna… will know when they imbibe their “tonics,” “invigorators,” “swamp roots,” “bitters,” “nerve-builders,” or “sprint medicines,” that they are sipping … what the town tippler takes across the license-paying bar. (Adams, 1961, p. 204)

Adams, like Mark Sullivan presents an unemotional evidence based argument against patent medicines. The series is a direct attack on the patent medicine industry, but Adams does not take cheap shots or distort the evidence, nor does he goad his audience to anger. He also doesn’t present a completely multifaceted account, as there is little defense of the patent medicine industry or alternative perspectives. Adams represents a journalist in the vein of Mark Sullivan: calm but combative, argumentative but thoughtful, organized but predominantly one-sided.
CHAPTER 14 CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL

Charles Edward Russell was “the most single-minded, the most dedicated of the muckrakers,” wrote muckraker historian Louis Filler (1973, p. 27). Where Mark Sullivan, Norman Hapgood, Samuel Hopkins Adams, and other Collier’s muckrakers were argumentative and slightly one-sided, they did so in a non-emotional, somewhat sophisticated, even restrained way. Comparatively, Charles Edward Russell was emotional, impulsive and prone to exaggeration.

Lincoln Steffens once said of Charles Edward Russell:

He was the most earnest, emotional, and gifted of the muckrakers. There was something of the martyr in him; he had given up better jobs to go forth, rake in hand, to show things up; and he wanted them to be changed. His face looked as if he had suffered from the facts he saw and reported. (Steffens, 1931, p. 632)

Russell wrote for Hearst’s Cosmopolitan, and for the department store magnate, John Wanamakers’s, Everybody’s Magazine (which also ran Thomas Lawson’s “Frenzied Finance”); If Collier’s represented the more highbrow muckraking publication, then Cosmopolitan and Everybody’s represented the lowbrow.

From a young age Russell was trained as a journalist by his father who ran a newspaper in Davenport, Iowa. The Gazette spoke out against the “tyranny” of the railroads and the newspaper was denied coal to run their printing presses; Russell’s father had to take his wagon to “a spot in our county where a think vein of nearly worthless coal came near the surface and dig up the fuel to keep his presses going” (Russell, 1933, p. 58).

Even as a youngster, Russell’s brash style of journalism is evident. One morning, around four o’clock, Russell was running the printing press. Just after the press had started printing the outside pages of the four page paper, he and another employee decided to play a practical joke on the sleeping print supervisor, and they painted the bottom of his shoes with printing paste. The
print supervisor awoke and sent a kick towards Russell’s co-schemer. The kick missed its target and sent the paste brush flying into the whirring printing press and destroyed a section of type on Russell’s father’s lead article. Russell then proceeded to write his own text to fill in the missing section. “Leave it to me,” said Russell with “airy confidence. ‘I know what my father thinks about this business. Get me some paper” (Russell, 1933, p. 6). The next day, two libel suits threatened the newspaper. “I had … not spared the epithets. ‘Thieves’ and ‘scoundrels’ rang through my stickful of type with the emphasis of an awakened righteousness” (Russell, 1933, p. 7). Russell was removed from the commercial side of his father’s paper, and was transferred to the editorial side.

Eventually, Russell was sent to boarding school at St. Johnsbury Academy, in St. Johnsbury Vermont. The town of St. Johnsbury was dominated by the Fairbanks family who employed 600 townspeople in their factory. “The town was a barony, and so far as autocratic rule was concerned, reproduced neatly the status of a Rhine village in the Middle Ages…. Members of the Fairbanks family were the barons; in effect their word was law,” wrote Russell (1933, p. 15). This radicalized Russell from a young age: “The whole thing struck my Western soul into dismay and then into rebellion.”

The Fairbanks family also ran St. Johnsbury Academy. The “smug religious formalism” of St. Johnsbury drove Russell “into violent revolt” (p. 14). “My soul yearned for a protest,” writes Russell (p. 14). As a student, Russell’s revolt led him to the lecture platform where he argued in support of free-trade and against protectionism and the tariff (p. 23). Russell writes in his autobiography, Bare Hands and Stone Walls (1933) that he participated in the public debates “to ease my burdened chest with winged words conveying to my fellow me the glad tidings of emancipation” (p. 23). Russell charged into the anti-tariff fight: “To my fevered vision, the
redemption of the West was clearer than crystal, and simply the remedy for all our ills. Abolish the tariff and the whole thing was done,” writes Russell (p. 24).

Russell came to this conclusion after reading Henry George’s Progress and Poverty (1879): “that settled my case. Infallibly I conceded the voice of ultimate wisdom, and saw in Henry George the apostle of a new gospel. Poverty was not normal but abnormal, poverty came because some men had too much and others therefore too little” (p. 24).

After school, Russell worked for newspapers in seven different states, and then decided to leave journalism entirely in an idealistic pursuit to follow up on an idea of Theodore Thomas, the “father of American orchestra” music. “Some casual remarks of his led me to the conclusion that what we call the separate arts of music and poetry are really but one, and I now conceived that with a piano, my Swinburne, and some sheets of music paper I could demonstrate this priceless fact to a palpitating world,” writes Russell (Russell, 1933, p. 136).

This seemingly impulsive decision to change his life is also evident in the way Russell became a socialist. He hadn’t read Das Kapital and knew little about Marx and Scientific Socialism, but out of impatience for the slow pace of social change, Russell became a socialist (Russell, 1933, p. 193). Russell was drawn to the Socialist party’s dissent from the status quo: “the part represented a protest and the biggest protest then in sight” (p. 193).

As Russell was embarking on his musical-poetry quest, his good friend Erman J. Ridgway, editor of Everybody’s Magazine, asked Russell to recruit the railroad expert, J. W. Midgley to write an exposé, since both Russell and Midgley were living in Chicago. Midgley refused to write the article for Everybody’s. Russell writes, “I reported this to Ridgway and retired to the piano and sheets of paper” (Russell, 1933, p. 137). Ridgway wired Russell asking him to write the exposure article. Russell writes:
I had not the least disposition to do so, except only that Ridgway was my friend and I wanted to oblige him. I thought I could get together enough material to meet the requirements of the case and return to my real employment [showing that poetry and music were one and the same]. The next thing I knew a muck-rake was put into my hand and I was plunged into the midst of the game. (Russell, 1933, p. 137)

Russell wrote the articles for Everybody’s, and then went on to write a muckraking series on the “Beef Trust.” Russell writes that even before his series on the Beef Trust was completed, he was getting ready for another muckraking series: “Indeed, we were all up and away, full of the pleasures of the chase, I suppose, or something of the kind, and all that business about poetry and music sheets forgotten. It was exhilarating sport, hunting the money octopus” (Russell, 1933, p. 139).

In February of 1905, Charles Edward Russell’s series on the “Beef Trust,” began appearing in Everybody’s Magazine along side Lawson’s “Frenzied Finance.” Russell’s articles on the meat packers were eventually compiled into a book titled The Greatest Trust in the World (1905). The Greatest Trust in the World opens with a radical comparison:

In the free republic of the United States of America is a power greater than the government, greater than the courts or judges, greater than legislatures, superior to and independent of all authority of state or nation. It is a greater power than in the history of men has been exercised by king, emperor, or irresponsible oligarchy. In a democracy it has established a practical empire … In a country of law, it exists and proceeds in defiance of law. (Russell, 1975, p. 1)

From the opening of Russell’s articles, he is framing the Beef Trust as a dangerous and abusive power. Before Russell has even identified the meat packers, Russell tells his readers how to see the packers and makes a wide-reaching moral judgment, in a tone reminiscent of Henry Lloyd:

We have grown familiar in this country with many phases of the mania of money-getting, and the evil it may work to mankind at large…. Names change, details change; but when the facts are laid bare it will puzzle a thoughtful man to say wherein the rule of the great power now to be described differs in any essential from the rule of a feudal tyrant in the darkness of the Middle Ages. (Russell, 1975, p. 1-2)
Russell continues his condemnation of his unnamed foe (also reminiscent of Lloyds refusal to name Rockefeller and Standard Oil): “Three times a day this power comes to the table of every household in America, rich or poor, … it comes and exhorts its tribute” (p. 2). This power “controls prices and regulates traffic, … it builds up and pulls down industries; it makes men poor or rich as it will; it controls or establishes or obliterates vast enterprises across the civilized circuit” (p. 3-4).

Russell fills pages with description of the “remorseless, tireless, greedy, insatiable” trust that has achieved an “absolute monopoly” that “terrorizes great railroad corporations” and fixes prices for “the farmer of the West” and the “butcher of the East,” the “fruit grower of California” and the “cotton grower of Georgia,” along with the “price the laborer of New York shall pay for his breakfast” and the food expenses of “every household in America” (p. 2-4). This still unnamed force “destroyed millions of investments, caused banks to break and men to commit suicide, precipitated strikes, and annihilated industries” and is such a “terror” that “multi-millionaires, railroad magnates, and captains of industry quail before it” (p. 4).

Russell was writing at a time when the glow of Ida Tarbell’s History of the Standard Oil Company was still generating heat. In his autobiography, Russell acknowledges that he read both Tarbell and Lloyd. Almost in response to the sensation of Tarbell’s articles on Standard Oil, Russell writes:

We are accustomed to think that the Standard Oil Company is the ultimate monopolistic achievement; here is something compared with which the Standard Oil Company is puerile; here is something that affects thousands of lives where the Standard Oil Company affects one; here is something that promises greater fortunes and greater power than ten Standard Oil Companies. (Russell, 1975, p. 5)

To call Standard Oil “puerile” and to say Standard Oil affects only one life is a clear puffery. At this point, still in the opening pages of the series, Russell is swinging wildly, making
claims that are obvious distortions. Russell doubles down on his exaggerations (which is also the first time he identifies the beef trust in the text of the article):

I am quite well aware that my words may seem extravagant to the generality of readers; to those who know the history and actual operations of the American Beef Trust they will appear an understatement of galling and humiliating truths. (Russell, 1975, p. 5)

Five pages into the article, Russell does pull back on the reins of his damnation: “The fact that should make us all stop and think” is that the men in charge of the Beef Trust “are not bad men; as the world goes, they are very good men” who are “kindly, generous, and upright” (p. 5). Where Tarbell made John D. Rockefeller into a multi-sided character, by drawing on his work ethic and religious beliefs, as well as his charitable giving, Russell makes the claim that these are “not bad men,” but doesn’t back that general statement up with any specific information which demonstrates their character. For Tarbell, telling a well-rounded story was her mission; for Russell, his platitudes about the good character of the Beef Trust men is almost a throwaway line because it goes against pages of moral admonishment.

Russell then begins the difficult task of fleshing out the monster he has so vehemently sketched. Like Tarbell did with Standard Oil, Russell tells a fairly straightforward narrative of the forming of the Beef Trust, but where Tarbell was measured, subtle and nuanced in her storytelling - Russell is prone to exaggeration.

Russell immediately identifies the source of the Beef Trust’s great power, which is “so small and simple, so obvious and apparently so easy to eliminate” - the trusts capacity to dominate both industry and government “rests solely and squarely upon the railroad rebate, and upon nothing else” (p. 6).

The secret railroad rebate was the same tool that Standard Oil used to dominate the oil industry. Also, like Lloyd, Russell can’t seem to let the facts speak for themselves. Russell
comments on this likeness: “is it not strange that having seen on Old Man of the Sea rise from this source and be saddled upon us, we allow the same cause to produce another” (p. 6).

Railroad rebates had already been outlawed by the Interstate Commerce Act, but through a “gentlemen’s agreement” the railroads pay the beef trust $25,000,000 per year in rebates (p. 7).

Russell then lays out the purpose of his articles: “In the succeeding chapters of this narrative I hope to tell the whole amazing story of these illegal operations” (p. 8).

The story begins in 1874 with the invention of the refrigerator freight car, which allowed meat, fruit and vegetables to be transported across the country. Suddenly, “households in New York were as well supplied with subtropical products as households in New Orleans” (p. 8). According to Russell, this new technology produced an “astonishing transformation” in agriculture; instead of cattle being shipped to butchers in the East, Chicago became the “slaughter-house of the continent,” with the number of cattle slaughtered rising from 21,712 in 1874 to 2,206,185 in 1890 (p. 10).

Four men came to dominate the meat packing: P.D. Armour, Gustavus F. Swift, George H. Hammond and Nelson Morris - all of whom had “commanding intellects and natural ability” and “all were bitter and unresting competitors” (p. 10). Once control of the industry had been centralized, the four dominant companies stopped competing and began to cooperate “on the primary basis of a harmony of interests” (p. 10). The few remaining independent slaughterhouses who couldn’t be bought out were dealt with as Rockefeller dealt with his competitors; they “seized exactly the same club to beat their way through it,” writes Russell (p. 11). The railroads were induced to give the Beef Trust a kickback on all refrigerator car traffic, and to charge every meat packing company that was not part of the trust a higher freight rate.
Russell sometimes gets ahead of himself, and his conclusions often come before the evidence. For example, Russell writes:

The packers instantly produced what may be called the Big Pistol. That is to say, they had a weapon so full of peril to any reluctant railroad that no manager or president could contemplate it without abject terror. The nature of this weapon is too complicated to be explained in detail here; I need only to say that its first shot would mean comparative ruin to the freight business of any road it happened to hit. (Russell, 1975, p. 12)

In this section, Russell shares his thoughts about the consequences of something he has provocatively labeled, but has not described.

Like Tarbell, Russell chronicles specific financial transactions of the railroad rebate, which in the case of the Beef Trust was a 3/4 of a cent kickback for each mile the railroads hauled the beef trusts refrigerator cars (p. 12). The Beef Trust could dictate terms to both ranchers and butchers. The Beef Trust “raked off profits at every stage of the decline of the price of cattle and at every stage of the ascent of the price of meat” (p. 14). The price ranchers received for whole cattle dropped from $6.00 per hundred pounds in 1899 to $4.50 per hundred pounds in 1904 (p. 16).

The Beef Trust began to squeeze every industry that relied on the refrigerator car to bring their goods to market. On a car-load of fruit transported from Michigan to Chicago, the beef trust got a kickback as great as the total freight bill (p. 16).

At times Russell is detailed in his descriptions of the structure of the Beef Trust and how it has skirted the law. The trust was able to get around the Interstate Commerce Act, which outlawed railroad rebates, by getting its refrigerator-cars exempt from “common carrier” status in a clause of the Elkins bill (p. 18).

At other times, Russell makes bold claims without telling the history or describing the evidence. For example, Russell first describes how some state and municipal governments
passed laws to stop the beef trust from “doing certain specific things” (p. 17). Russell then simply says the Beef Trust “has continued to do those things six days in every week since” the laws were passed. Russell brushes off the Beef Trusts brazen disregard for local law with a vague and slight description. This treatment does little to educate his readers, but likely angers readers who are convinced by Russell’s generalities.

Still in the first article of the series, Russell then turns his attention to the heads of the Beef Trust, and describes the further consolidation of power. Both P.D. Armour and Gustavus F. Swift died. “Advancing age began to tell upon Mr. Morris and the great Hammond interests were bought by the Armour estate” which was now controlled by heir of the Armour estate: J. Ogden Armour. Of the new head of the Beef Trust, J. Ogden Armour, Russell writes: “No more extraordinary figure has ever appeared in the world’s commercial affairs, no man, not even Mr. Rockefeller, has conceived a commercial empire so dazzling” (p. 18).

Russell begins to draw his first article to a close by describing how the Armour trust now “owns, controls, or dominates every live-stock yard in the United States except two” (p. 19). Of the two, one is in Kansas City. Russell shrugs off the the Kansas City slaughterhouse: “The Kansas City people will have to submit gracefully” (p. 19). The other slaughterhouse is in Chicago and is owned by “powerful Vanderbilt and Morgan interests. They purpose to fight for one of the most profitable of their possessions” (p. 19).

In the final paragraph of the opening article, Russell resorts to the sweeping exaggerations that uncorked the series. Russell writes, the young J. Ogden Armour:

holds now in the hollow of one hand the grain market of the United States…. His possible profits seem limited for the future chiefly by his will. No reason appears why he should not amass in a few years the most colossal fortune in the world, why he should not gather to himself such a power as no other man has ever had; for who has ever controlled the food supplies of on hundred million people? (Russell, 1975, p. 20)
The second installment of *The Greatest Trust in the World* is titled, “The Great Yellow Car - The Bandit of Commerce” and contains more specific detail and less expansive and moralistic language, than Russell’s first chapter.

Russell starts by detailing the great importance of the railroads: “You that live in the cities and know of railroad operations only what the newspapers tell you, can have scant idea of the importance of this curious vehicle” (p. 21). When the refrigerator car was first developed by Nelson Morris in 1874, it made the economy more efficient and lowered the price of goods, but it also created a bottleneck which commerce had to pass; the reliance of the railroad opened commerce up for manipulation and control by anyone who could monopolize refrigerator cars (p. 22).

Gustavus Swift, took great risk and invested heavily in refrigerator cars before they had proven their worth or before he knew if easterners would buy frozen meat butchered and shipped in from the West (p. 24).

By 1880, Swift’s experiment was an “indubitable success” and the “great economy of the new process brought saving to the consumer and profit to the producer, and the new order began to work vast and unforeseen changes in the life and customs of the nation” (p. 25). Russell describes the great reworking of agriculture in all regions of the country from North Carolina strawberries to Florida tomatoes; the nations food production became “segregated” (p. 26). “The nation turned one month to one spot for its food and the next month to another” (p. 26).

Before 1883, the railroads did not charge any extra price for hauling refrigerator cars over standard railway cars (p. 28), and the “packers were content with the profits from their legitimate business, which was selling meat,” writes Russell (p. 26).

This contentment did not last. Russell adds his moral to the story:
in all the sordid game that was to follow, the root of every injustice, every extortion, every oppression is to be found in somebody’s desire to augment a private fortune unjustly, to take an undue advantage for personal profit, to trick, outwit, and deceive, to be over “smart” and over-cunning. At the bottom there is always somebody’s private graft. (Russell, 1975, p. 26-27)

In the remainder of the second article, Russell tells a short history of the railroad rebate, which was developed in the 1870s. George Pullman further developed the railroad rebate by charging the railroads rebates for hauling Pullman cars. Pullman was able to achieve this feat by letting certain railroad directors in “on the ground floor” of the Pullman Corporation (p. 28).

Russell also reveals the previously alluded to “Big Pistol,” which is essentially the threat of shippers to pull their freight from one railroad line and transport it on a competitor’s line. “By threatening to divert all their enormous freight traffic to one line, they forced, one after another, every railroad in the country to yield to their demands and surrender” (p. 29).

In this article, Russell draws on is only one small example of the Big Pistol ever being put to use, and it appears to be of minor importance. When the New York Central didn’t comply with the packers, 150 cars a week were diverted to other railroads. Russell speculates, “the whole great New York Central organization still quakes at the mere mention of the Beef Trust” (p. 32).

Because the four big meat packers, Armour, Swift, Hammond and Morris, had the most refrigerator cars, they were in the best position to exploit the railroad rebate. Smaller firms who didn’t own refrigerator cars soon saw the last of their profits thaw, like melted ice dripping through the floorboards of an Armour Line refrigerator car. “In some instances ‘icing’ and ‘freight-rates’ together were actually more than the value of the goods, and left the producer in debt for his shipment” (p. 32).
Russell closes the chapter by looking forward to the next installment of *The Greatest Trust in the World*. The Beef Trust began renting out their refrigerator cars to the fruit and vegetable industry, as well as to poultry and dairy producers. The Trust then began to make “exclusive contracts with certain railroads and to establish practical control of every important fruit-producing region in the United States” (p. 33).

Chapter three of *The Greatest Trust in the World* tells the story of the California fruit trade and the Earl Fruit Company. The Earl Company, which was one of the California’s biggest fruit producers, approached the shipping company they used, Hutchins Refrigerator Car Company, and asked Hutchins to pay Earl a ten-dollar rebate on every car of fruit. At the time, the Early Company’s fruit was three quarters of the Hutchins Company’s freight. When the Hutchins Company refused to give the kickback, the Earl Company made an exclusive deal with the Armour Car Line; the Hutchins Company soon went out of business (p. 37-39).

Then Armour tried to buy out the Early Company and when Early refused, Armour made a secret deal with the other large California fruit company, Porter Brothers. “The exact nature of this alliance has been made a great mystery,” but in any case Porter Brothers undercut the Early Company, and this time it was the Earl Companies turn to go out of business (p. 41). “Thereupon the conqueror [Armour] must have reversed the rebate process, for after a time Porter Brothers went into bankruptcy, and the Armour Company succeeded to the monopoly of the California fruit business” (p. 41).

This part of Russell’s story, resembles Tarbell’s storytelling, when she wrote of the economic drama of the Standard Oil Company cutting down the independent oil producers. In this section of the series, Russell’s storytelling is primarily driven by events, and not by his editorializing about the events.
In the next part of Russell’s story, he slips back into Lloyd’s style of muckraking, where he tells readers what the evidence means, as opposed to letting the evidence speak for itself. Russell quotes from an Inter-State Commerce Commission investigation, where the investigator asks the general manager of the Armour Car Lines, “What other lines are there that can operate in competition with your line? Suppose a railroad wanted a line of refrigerator cars, what line could it go to besides the Armour Line?” The Armour general manager replies, “The Swift people and the California Fruit Transportation Company” (p. 42).

Russell adds, the Armour man:

said this with the air of a man reading the funeral service, but the effect on his auditors was very different. Some gasped, and some wanted to shriek with laughter. The delicate point … can be appreciated only by understanding that to all intents and purposes Swift is Armour, and the California Fruit Transportation is Swift … and the Beef Trust is one and all of these together, and there is no more chance for anyone to compete with the Beef Trust in the California fruit trade than there is to get the average railroad traffic manager to admit the truth about rebates. (Russell, 1975, p. 42-43)

Russell does write that at first the Beef Trust “maintained a show of competition,” but even this presentation of competition ended after they formally created the Beef Trust under the name: “National Packing Company” (p. 43).

Then Russell provides a list of all the names of companies controlled by the Beef Trust that give the appearance of competition. Armour owns ten companies, Swift owns four, Morris owns four, and Hammond owns three (p. 43-44). Russell doesn’t state how he knows these different companies are owned by the Beef Trust, he just states it as fact. To sum up what control over the nations refrigerator cars means, Russell writes:

Now you begin to see why your household expenses have so much increased since the Beef Trust commenced operations. Ninety per cent. of the vegetables and fruits sold daily in all Northern cities have been transported on railroads; seventy-five per cent of these have been transported in refrigerator cars. With practically all such cars under its control, the Trust has the produce trade by the throat. (Russell, 1975, p. 44)
There is no reference for where these figures came from or how they are justified.

Russell does provides a number of specific examples illustrating how the Beef Trust’s control of refrigerator cars increases the cost of food. A tomato shipper used two refrigerator cars to move their product from Humboldt, Tennessee to Chicago. The tomato shipper was given a $74 freight bill for each car and additional $84 for the use of each refrigerator car, for a total bill of $316. Of this $316, after taking out $30 in expenses for the cost of ice, the Beef Trust got $138, plus another $16 the tomato shipper had to pay for returning the Trust’s empty cars. A refrigerator car costs $900 to build (p. 45).

At the end of this section, there is an asterisk, where Russell explains that “These are conservative estimates. Nobody knows the exact figures and nobody is likely to know. The railroads and the Trust refuse to give detailed information on this subject.” (p. 45).

Russell gives a handful of other detailed examples, but it is unclear where the figures come from, though the Inter-State Commerce Commission is referenced once (p. 46).

To close the third installment of *The Greatest Trust in the World*, Russell returns to dramatizing (perhaps justifiably) and editorializing:

A more extraordinary situation has never been known in this country. The railroads have been driven to abdicate their own legal and indubitable rights to assist the banditti of an enjoined combination.

If you multiply the instances I have given, and which I shall support hereafter with additions and documents, into all the perishable products that are carried in refrigerator cars to all the markets of the country from ocean to ocean, and from Canada to Mexico, you will have some conception of the relations of the Beef Trust to your daily affairs.

But only in an inadequate conception, for in ways that you probably never heard of and on things that escape your attention, constantly you pay your tribute to the greatest Trust in the world. (Russell, 1975, p. 47)

Twelve more chapters in *The Greatest Trust in the World* follow these first three chapters.
In some respects, Russell is like a more emotional and opinionated Ida Tarbell. Russell's use of historical storytelling has strong parallels to Tarbell’s historical narrative about Standard Oil, but Russell states his conclusive thoughts before he shares tells the story and his thoughts about the evidence often overshadow the evidence itself. In this way, Russell has a tendency (especially in the opening of the series) to slip into moral tirades, resembling Henry D. Lloyd’s style in *Wealth Against Commonwealth*.

Russell differs from Lloyd, in his intended audience: Russell was trying to reach the mass public who read *Everybody’s Magazine* – a general interest publication; Lloyd wrote for fellow elites and the structure of his exposure resembled a legal prosecution that drew on moral philosophy. Russell’s literary style, and frequent exaggeration and generalization may be closest to that of David Graham Phillips and Thomas Lawson - both of whom were accused of dumbing-down muckraking (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 70 & p. 263).

While there are similarities between Russell and muckrakers like Tarbell and Baker, in the use of historical evidence and narrative structure, Russell’s style of muckraking is closer to an activist purposefully attempting to stir his audience to action. Tarbell and Baker wanted to understand, and help their readers understand an issue - Russell wanted to fight. “Wherever an exploiter showed his head we were ready with a brick to heave at it,” remarks Russell (Russell, 1933, p. 140).
CHAPTER 15 UPTON SINCLAIR

Upton Sinclair may be the most peculiar of all the muckrakers. His approach to muckraking is something of an outlier amongst his contemporaries. Sinclair was less of a reformer than a dreamer - at times a desperate dreamer. His personal values, emotional intensity and his upbringing are also an oddity compared to the mainstream, middle class values that most of the muckrakers represented. Sinclair writes in his autobiography, the “dominant fact in my life has been that I have to be emotionally interested, before I can write at all” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 81). These factors, emotion, personality, and childhood, are particularly relevant in understanding the muckraking of Upton Sinclair.

Before *The Jungle* (1906), Sinclair was a poor and unknown socialist author, whose six novels (two of which were unpublished) had made less than $1,000 in sales in the previous four and a half years.

From the start of Sinclair’s life, he was surrounded by emotion, drama and contrast between social classes. From a young age, he was prone to extremes. Sinclair’s father was an alcoholic and as a child, Sinclair would search the saloons for his father: “I would find him, and there would be a moral battle. I would argue and plead and threaten; he would weep, or try to assert his authority…. I would get him to bed, and hide his trousers so that he could not escape” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 61).

His father’s alcoholism continued to get worse and his father’s shame would lead Sinclair further from the family home: “I would walk for hours, peering into scores of places, and at last I would find him sunk into a chair or sleeping with his arms on a beer-soaked table. Once I found him literally in the gutter” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 62). Sinclair’s experiences with his father made him “prematurely serious” (p. 63).
Searching for his father brought the young Sinclair into many of the Tammany owned saloons, and he began to blame his troubles on the Tammany political machine. As a young man, Sinclair wrote that if he encountered Tammany Hall boss, Richard Croker, “I would be willing with my own hands to spear him on a pitchfork and thrust him into the fires of hell” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 63). This was a formidable time for Sinclair; he would later write:

Human beings are what life makes them, and there is no more fascinating subject of study than the origin of mental and moral qualities. The drinking of my father accounted for … my eccentricities…. The sordid surroundings in which I was forced to live made me into a dreamer. (Sinclair, 1932, p. 11)

Sinclair escaped into books. He devoured his uncle’s entire collection of both Shakespeare and John Milton during a two week Christmas vacation: “literature had become a frenzy. I read while eating, I read lying down, sitting, standing and walking, everywhere I went – and I went nowhere except to the park to read on sunshiny days. I averaged fourteen hours a day” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 75).

Later, Sinclair turned his excessive nature towards music, and would wake up early and hike into the woods and play the violin the entire day (Sinclair, 1932, p. 79). As a young author, he would write his books in a similar obsessive fashion.

Sinclair’s immediate family was poor due to his father’s alcoholism, but his Aunt had married one of the richest men in Baltimore. Sinclair’s young life was a contrast of impeccable white linen, silver spoons and country clubs when he was staying with his Aunt and frantic middle of the night searches for bed bugs in dingy boarding houses when he went home (Sinclair, 1932, p. 4). “No Cophetua or Aladdin in a fairy-lore ever stepped back and forth between the hovel and the palace as frequently as I,” wrote Sinclair (Sinclair, 1932, p. 13). This contrast shaped Sinclair’s literary career, “I have one favorite theme, the contrast of the social classes” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 12).
Sinclair began writing stories as a young lad out of begrudging imitation for his classmate who had one of his stories published: “Straightway I was stirred to emulation,” wrote Sinclair. “If Simon could write a story, why could not I? Such was the little acorn which grew into an oak” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 47).

Sinclair’s first story was about a bird that proves the innocence of an African American boy who is accused of arson; the story was accepted by one of Frank Munsey’s magazines, *Argosy* (Sinclair, 1932, p. 47).

By seventeen, Sinclair was supporting his family by writing jokes - a dollar a joke. Sinclair wrote other stories for *Argosy* and for *Munsey’s* and he and Simon Stern (the classmate who prompted Sinclair to try his own had at writing) wrote a novel together, *The Prairie Pirates* (Sinclair, 1932, p. 58).

To put himself through the City College and Columbia College, Sinclair wrote “hack” fiction in large quantities. His writing production peaked during the Spanish-American War, when Sinclair would pump out 8,000 words a day of war stories; all while attending morning lectures at Columbia. This proliferation taught Sinclair to shape a story, but, he also admits, he developed the habit of using “exaggerated phrases and clichés,” something he has fought against ever since, “not always successfully” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 73).

As a young man, Sinclair also learned about “honest graft” through his uncle’s bonding business – Sinclair’s uncle hired a Tammany man to head the New York office and gave Tammany boss Croker a large block of stock in the company, and as a result, his uncle’s company got all the City of New York’s bonding business.

Sinclair would later write in his autobiography:

That pattern which my uncle gave me in youth served for the arranging of all the facts I later amassed. I have never found anything different … it is so that big business deals
with government at every point where the two come into contact…. The fact that the man from whom I learned this secret was one of the kindest and most generous persons I have ever known, ought to have made me merciful in my judgments. With the wisdom of later years, I know that the business men who finance political parties and pull the strings of government cannot help what they do: they either have to run their business that way, or else give place to somebody who will run it no differently. The blame lies with the system, in which government for public service is competing day by day with business for private profit. But in those early days I did not understand any of this; I thought that graft was due to grafters, and I hated them with all my Puritanical fervor. (Sinclair, 1932, p. 91)

Sinclair worked for reform political candidate William Travers Jerome, who once elected “did absolutely nothing, and all forms of graft in New York city went on just as they always had” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 94). In another early political effort, Sinclair collected around 700 signatures in an attempt to improve the vermin infested student housing at Columbia College (Sinclair, 1932, p. 57).

Sinclair writes that he had an “advanced case of delusion of grandeur, messianic complex, paranoia, narcissism… and extreme idealism” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 64). An editor once told him, “it was not normal for a youth to be so apocalyptic and messianic” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 69).

In Sinclair’s autobiography, he writes of a revelation of “genius” that struck him when he was 18 or 19 - a vision of the Prince of Denmark and Don Quixote and the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley began speaking to him. Sinclair writes that he was in the hands of a force outside of himself:

Without trace of a preconception, and regarding the thing as objectively as you know how, the feeling is that something is taking hold of you, pushing you along, sweeping you away. To walk in a windstorm, and feel it beating upon you, is a sensation of the body no more definite and unmistakable than this windstorm of the spirit which has come to me perhaps a hundred times in my life…. You may call this force your own subconscious mind, or God, or the Cosmic Consciousness, I care not what fancy name you give; the point is that it is there and always there. (Sinclair, 1932, p. 77)
Sinclair would frequently get this feeling when he was surrounded by nature. He describes another instance when he came over a ridge and was swept away by a valley of clover. “I wanted to behave like a lunatic, and yet not have anybody think me one,” wrote Sinclair (1932, p. 78).

Sinclair continued to write books and poetry in a frenzied and unhealthy manner. He would isolate himself and write for 14 hours a day and after a few months, he would emerge weak and sick, his stomach in a not and his body and mind destroyed (Sinclair, 1932, p. 123). His books continued to receive little attention.

Sinclair married at a young age and not to long after, his wife gave birth to a son. Fatherhood seemed to have little effect on Sinclair and with a wife and a two-year old boy, the family found themselves living in a sixteen by eighteen foot cabin a few miles outside of Princeton, New Jersey. Money was tight, and when Sinclair’s wife purchased a thirty-cent red table cloth to brighten up their home, Sinclair made her return it. The winter was long and harsh, and they were frequently snowed in and isolated.

One night, in the midst of winter, Sinclair awoke to find his wife sobbing with a revolver in her hand: “she had been trying for hours to get up the courage to put a bullet into her head, but did not have that courage,” writes Sinclair. Sinclair would later write of the ordeal, “all such scenes were practice for the future writing of *The Jungle* (Sinclair, 1932, p. 137).

Sinclair wrote with the belief that poetry and literature could save the world. He left his wife and son in the care of his family and he set out for the wilderness to write alone: “it was my purpose to write the much talked-of ‘Great American Novel’” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 99). Sinclair writes:
I faced our civilization of class privilege absolutely alone in my own mind; that is to say, whatever I found wrong with this civilization, I thought that I alone knew it, and the burden of changing it rested upon my spirit. (Sinclair, 1932, p. 143)

In 1902, after another commercially disappointing novel about the Civil War and slavery, Sinclair was in New York City and a friend gave him some socialist pamphlets and a copy of the socialist magazine, *Wilshire’s*:

It was like the falling down of prison walls about my mind; the most amazing discovery, after all these years – that I did not have to carry the whole burden of humanity’s future on my two frail shoulders! There were actually others who understood; who saw what had gradually become clear to me, that the heart and centre of the evil lay in leaving the social treasure, which nature had created, and which every man has to have in order to live, to become the object of a scramble in the market-place, a delirium of speculation. The principal fact which the Socialists had to teach me, was the fact that they themselves existed. (Sinclair, 1932, p. 143)

Sinclair began writing for the socialist magazines and wrote, “Toy and the Man” for *Wilshire’s*, making fun of America’s materialism. Sinclair wrote an article in the non-socialist *Collier’s*, trying to explain to the public what socialists’ believed. When the 20,000 striking workers of the Chicago stockyards were defeated, Sinclair made a direct address to the workers in the socialist magazine, *Appeal to Reason*, challenging them, “You have lost the strike, and now what are you going to do about it?”

The editor of *Appeal to Reason*, Fred Warren had read Sinclair’s novel, *Manassas*, about slavery and he suggested Sinclair write a similar novel about “wage slavery.” He offered to pay Sinclair $500 to live in “Packingtown” on the outskirts of Chicago and write a novel about the meat packers. Sinclair wrote of his reporting:

I set out for Chicago, and for seven weeks lived among the wage slaves of the Beef Trust … I went about, white faced and thin, partly from undernourishment, partly from horror. It seemed to me I was confronting a veritable fortress of oppression. How to breach those walls, or to scale them, was a military problem. (Sinclair, 1932, p. 154)
Before writing his book, Sinclair took his findings to a slaughterhouse expert Aldolph Smith who reviewed his facts: “when I wondered if possibly my horror might be the oversensitiveness of a young idealist – I would fortify myself by Smith’s expert, professional horror” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 155).

On Christmas day of 1904 cooped up in a small cabin with his wife and child, Sinclair began writing The Jungle:

For three months I worked incessantly. I wrote with tears and anguish, pouring into the pages all that pain which life had meant to me. Externally, the story had to do with a family of stockyards workers, but internally it was the story of my own family. Did I wish to know how the poor suffered in the winter time in Chicago? I had only to recall the previous winter in the cabin, when we had had only cotton blankets and had put rugs on top of us, and cowered shivering in our separate beds. It was the same with hunger, with illness, with fear. (Sinclair, 1932, p. 158)

The Jungle follows the life of the Jurgis, a Lithuanian immigrant who arrives in America strong, smart and ambitious, but is ground to a pulp at the Chicago stockyards and other industrial jobs. In the end, Jurgis discovers socialism and recognizes the reason for his failures - a corrupt capitalist system. The urban laborer and the ills of the capitalist system are Sinclair’s primary focus; the purity of the nations meat and the adulterated process of meatpacking is a distant second, and makes up only a small fraction of the book. Sinclair also takes on a host of smaller issues, including: political corruption, dishonest banking, predatory lending, substandard housing, immigration, family struggles, woman’s rights, child labor, alcohol addiction, patent medicine, inequality between rich and poor, settlement workers, crime, and prostitution. For Sinclair, these ills of society are all the dirty byproduct of capitalism.

Examining the a serialized installment of The Jungle that appeared in the April 29th, 1905 Appeal to Reason, Sinclair describes in graphic detail diseased meat being packaged and sold to consumers:
carcasses marked with red tags: “U.S. Condemned.” These hogs have been found to be tuberculous, which means that the flesh had ptomaines in it. These ptomaines are deadly poisons – and not germs which cooking can kill, but poisons, which will remain and be fatal, no matter what may be done to the meat. The government requires that these carcasses be “tanked,” that is destroyed and turned into fertilizer… And with these laws before them… the condemned meat… was made into sausage… Jurgas met man after man who had seen this done with his own eyes and some who had helped to do it. (Sinclair, 1961, p. 207)

Sinclair “found that knowledge of it [selling condemned meat] was an everyday, matter-of-fact thing among the men,” but none would testify because they were sure to be “blacklisted, loose their job and never be hired in Packingtown again” (p. 207).

Sinclair charged that government inspectors who were supposed to inspect every package of meat before it was approved were ignoring the law - employees of the meat packing plant claimed to have “never seen that law complied with once in all time” (p. 208).

The best meat was sent to Europe, which had a functional meat inspection process and diseased meat would not be accepted (p. 209). The most diseased cattle, “worth while for a Dante or a Zola” were canned – the boils covering their body would “burst and splash foul-smelling stuff into your face” (p. 209). Sinclair tells of “potted chicken,” “potted ham,” and “deviled ham” filled with chemicals and dyed offal. The “embalmed beef” killed “several times as many United States soldiers as all the bullets of the Spaniards” in the Spanish American War (p. 209).

In this few page segment of The Jungle, Sinclair also made specific charges about the working conditions in Packingtown. There were the men in the pickling rooms whose fingers would become pickled and the joints eaten away by the pickling liquid (p. 210). There were also the sheep’s wool pullers without any fingers at all, because the acid that was put on the hides to loosen them from the carcass would slowly eat away at the flesh of the workers who day after day pulled hides from carcasses (p. 210). And the unfortunate souls who fell into vats of
rendering lard and were turned into “Anderson’s Pure Leaf Lard” and whose bones were ground into fertilizer (p. 211).

The book ends with a red faced bellow that presented Sinclair’s solution to the problems of industrialization and inequality that he presented throughout the book. The socialist zeal borders on religious devotion.

A broken and homeless Jurgis wanders into a socialist meeting to get out of the cold, and after a few hours of trying to sleep while looking like he was not sleeping, a woman’s voice appeared in his ear, “gentle and sweet,” telling Jurgis, “If you would try to listen, comrade, perhaps you would be interested” (Sinclair, 2003, p. 320).

The humanity of the woman calling him “comrade” stirs Jurgis, and when he turns his attention to the speaker, “It was like coming suddenly upon some wild sight of nature - a mountain forest lashed by a tempest, a ship tossed about upon a stormy sea.”

Jurgis was awakened from his slumber, both literally and metaphorically. He sat “motionless and rigid, his eyes fixed upon the speaker; he was trembling, smitten with wonder” (p. 323).

The speaker, a young man, tall and bearded, with a voice “deep, like an organ” who spoke “with emotion, with pain and longing, with a burden of things unutterable” (p. 321), addressed the crowd:

Workingmen, workingmen - comrades! Open your eyes and look about you! You have lived so long in the toil and head that your senses are dulled, your souls are numbed, but realize once in your lives this world in which you dwell - tear off the rags of its customs and conventions - behold it as it is, in all its hideous nakedness! Realize it, realize it! (Sinclair, 2003, p. 324)
The young socialist’s message was to realize there are millions around the world “living in misery and squalor,” who are waiting for death to take them from the “monotony and wariness” of wage slavery (p. 325 - 326). Realize:

masters of these slaves … do nothing to earn what they receive…. They live in palaces, they riot in luxury and extravagance … they spend millions for horses and automobiles and yachts …. Their life is a contest among themselves for supremacy in ostentation and recklessness, in destroying of useful and necessary things, in the wasting of the labor and the lives of their fellow creatures, … the sweat and tears and blood of the human race! …like fierce wolves they rend and destroy, like ravenous vultures they devour and tear! … They own not merely the labor of society, they have bought the governments; and everywhere they use their raped and stolen power to intrench themselves in their privileges, to dig wider and deeper the channels through which the river of profits flows to them. (Sinclair, 2003, p. 326)

The young socialist’s speech culminates with a question for the audience: “is there a man among you who can believe that such a system will continue forever” (p. 327). Change will eventually come “in the face of every obstacle that wealth and mastership can oppose - in the face of ridicule and slander, of hatred and persecution, of the bludgeon and the jail” (p. 328).

Change will come:

by the power of your naked bosoms, opposed to the rage of oppression! But the grin and bitter teaching of blind and merciless affliction! By the painful gropings of the untutored mind, by the feeble stammerings of the uncultured voice! By the sad and lonely hunger of the spirit; by seeking and striving and yearning, by heartache and despairing, by agony and sweat of blood! It will be by money paid for with hunger, by knowledge stolen from sleep, by thoughts communicated under the shadow of the gallows! (Sinclair, 2003, p. 328)

Change will come when:

The voice of Labor, despised and outraged, a mighty giant, lying prostrate - mountainous, colossal, but blinded, bound, and ignorant of his strength…. stirs, and a fetter snaps - and a thrill shoots through him, to the farthest ends of his huge body, and in a flash the dream becomes an act! He starts, he lifts himself, and the bands are shattered, the burdens roll off him, he rises - towering, gigantic; he springs to his feet, he shouts in his newborn exultation. (Sinclair, 2003, p. 328)
With that, the young socialist’s voice falls silent. The crowd erupts and Jurgis is cheering with the crowd, “shouting to tear his throat, shouting because he could not help it, because the stress of his feeling was more than he could bear.” Jurgis was overcome with emotion and new hope:

There was an unfolding of vistas before him, a breaking of the ground beneath him, an upheaving, a stirring, a trembling … The sentences of this man were to Jurgis like the crashing of thunder in his soul; a flood of emotions surged up in him - all his old hopes and longings, his old griefs and rages and despairs. (Sinclair, 2003, p. 328-329)

In Jurgis’ moment of revelation, of purpose, of awakening to socialism:

There was a falling in of all the pillars of his soul, the sky seemed to split above him - he stood there, with his clenched hands upraised, his eyes blood-shot, and the veins standing out purple in his face, roaring in the voice of a wild beast, frantic, incoherent, maniacal. And when he could shout no more he still stood there, gasping, and whispering hoarsely to himself, “By God! By God! By God!” (Sinclair, 2003, p. 329)

By 1905, Appeal to Reason was publishing The Jungle serially and with the magazines 500,000 subscribers, Sinclair was reaching the biggest audience of his life and Sinclair was getting letters from all over the county.

David Graham Phillips wrote Sinclair, saying, “I’m afraid to trust myself to tell you how it affects me” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 158).

Sinclair began trying to sell The Jungle to book publishers, but it was rejected by the first five publishers he took it too. They didn’t like the ending which was a blatant promotion of socialism and they wanted him remove some of the gory details – “nothing so horrible had ever been published in America – at least not by a respectable concern” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 162).

Sinclair asked Lincoln Steffens for advice on toning down some of the gore; Steffens replied: “It is useless to tell things that are incredible, even thought they may be true” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 162). Sinclair decided not to listen to the publishers, nor to Lincoln Steffens: “I had to
tell the truth, and let people make of it what they could.” Sinclair decided to self-publish the novel.

Then the famous author, Jack London wrote an enthusiastic appeal to his fellow Socialists asking them to support Sinclair’s book, which he said was: “the Uncle Tom’s Cabin of wage-slavery. It is alive and warm. It is brutal with life. It is written of seat and blood, and groans and tears” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 162).

Sinclair started selling prints of The Jungle and had made around $4,000 before the publisher Doubleday, Page & Company became interested. Before they would publish it, they asked the managing editor, James Keeley of the Chicago Tribune to look into the validity of Sinclair’s findings.

A thirty-two page report came back dismissing The Jungle as lies. Sinclair lashed out at the investigation and said it was completely biased. He convinced the publisher to send out one of their own lawyers to do an investigation.

When this lawyer arrived at the stockyards, one of the first people he met was a publicity agent of the meat packers, who bragged: “Oh, yes, I know that book. I read the proofs of it, and prepared a thirty-two page report for James Keeley of the Tribune.” The lawyer’s investigation not only denied the previous investigation, but confirmed Sinclair’s findings. In 1906 Doubleday, Page & Company published The Jungle.

The book was a shocking success, a best seller that was translated into seventeen languages (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 205). The New York World wrote that, “Not since Byron awoke one morning to find himself famous has there been such an example of the worldwide celebrity won in a day by a book as has come to Upton Sinclair” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 170).
Sinclair soon found himself advising President Roosevelt, who was getting 100 letters a day on *The Jungle* (Sinclair, 1932, p. 166). Over lunch at the White House, The President remarked, “I bear no love for those gentlemen, for I ate the meat they canned for the army in Cuba” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 167).

Immediately following the release of *The Jungle*, J. Ogden Armour, head of one of the biggest packing companies responded with a series of articles in the widely read *Saturday Evening Post*, which was edited by Armour’s former secretary. Armour didn’t name Sinclair or his book directly, but Armour said the attacks on his noble business were shameless and claimed that the Armour Corporation only produced pure and unblemished products.

Sinclair read Armour’s response on his ride home from New York City:

I was boiling, and automatically my material began to sort itself out in my mind. By the time I got home, I had a reply complete, and sat down and wrote all through the night, and the next morning had an eight thousand word magazine article, “The Condemned Meat Industry.” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 165)

Sinclair took the first train he could get back to New York and went to *Everybody’s Magazine*, which had published Tom Lawson’s “Frenzied Finance,” and asked to speak to the publisher, E. J. Ridgway. Once Sinclair had Ridgway’s attention, Sinclair read the entire article aloud. Ridgway stopped the presses on May 1906 issue of *Everybody’s*. Ridgeway and other editors of *Everybody’s*, along with a group of lawyers, went through the article line by line. After confirming some details, they paid Sinclair $800 and published his article.

Sinclair’s article presented some new material, an affidavit of “a wiled, one-eyed Irishman” who was a former foreman on Armour’s killing-beds and whose sworn testimony told the story of diseased carcasses being taken out of the condemned “tanks” and sold in Chicago as meat.
The Armour Company offered their former employee five thousand dollars to retract his story. He took the money, deposited it in the bank, and created another sworn affidavit, documenting how the Armour Company had attempted to bribe him.

The article in Everybody’s seemed poised to further rock the meat packers. The magazine reached the news stands on April 20th 1906, two days after the historic San Francisco earthquake. The article, was buried, along with 80% of San Francisco and more than 3,000 lives.

After President Roosevelt read The Jungle he met with Sinclair and appointed an independent committee to investigate Sinclair’s findings. The Jungle was validated by the President’s investigation, though the President did not release the findings of his investigation until Sinclair tipped off the New York Times to there existence.

After Sinclair’s leak, the President sent a telegram to Sinclair’s publisher: “Tell Sinclair to go home and let me run the country for a while” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 173).

In the midst of the explosive success of The Jungle, Sinclair set up an “amateur publicity office” and “gave interviews and wrote statements for the press” until he was “dizzy.” Sinclair writes: “It seemed to me that the walls for the mighty fortress of greed were on the point of cracking; it needed only one push, and then another, and another” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 170).

Six months later, “The Pure Food and Drug Act” was signed by President Roosevelt, though the original bill was slightly weakened in the Senate before it reached the President’s desk. Many historians have considered “the law a direct product of muckraking.” Sinclair’s novel, along with articles from Collier’s, Success, and Everybody’s all shared credit for the reform (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 206).

For Sinclair the purpose of his muckraking was less about communicating ideas and information or being a “maker of understanding” (in the words of Ray Stannard Baker) -
Sinclair’s muckraking in *The Jungle* was about the revelation of the truth of the times (as he saw it) and saving souls.

Sinclair’s goal as a muckraker may have been to cut down capitalism and promote socialism, but with a subject as central to a society’s identity, it is little surprise that there was no noticeable effect in this arena. Issues of capitalism and socialism were already thoroughly discussed and debated, so Sinclair’s advocacy was simply another text in an ongoing debate. As Jack London told Sinclair, his years of promotion in support of a socialist revolution “had perhaps brought it ten minutes earlier” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 176).

Sinclair took a more optimistic view of his labors, writing that: “someday we shall … see the sprouting of the seed we have been scattering all these weary years” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 176).

While Sinclair’s promotion of socialism may not have produced the wide and sweeping social and economic change he hoped for, his specific descriptions of the meat packing plants represented new and shocking information that transcended Sinclair’s most passionately stated opinions regarding capitalism. With regards to the production of meat, Sinclair simply presented the conditions in all their shocking detail and moved on to the rest of his story; the conditions of meatpacking were new and shocking; the conditions of capitalism were old and already thoroughly debated. In the end, it was not Sinclair’s utopian socialist vision that stirred the nation - it was his factual statements about the nations meat that produced a tangible change.

As a muckraker, Sinclair can best be understood dualistically; when the subject of his pen was capitalism and socialism, he was a passionate, emotionally charged, ideological and at times imprecise, simplistic and sweeping. But he can also be seen, perhaps secondarily, as a first-class investigator who uncovered specific facts about the meat industry.
The Jungle represents two different muckraking styles (both unique to Sinclair): the passionate revolutionary who prescribed wide-sweeping solutions, and the passionate provocateur-investigator who presented new and specific information to the public about the conditions of the nations meat. Viewed in these terms, the investigator seems to have produced far more change than the revolutionary. In both cases, Sinclair was passionate and indiscriminate, and let his prose splatter on the page with intensity.

Sinclair’s life resembles that of an eccentric artist, more than an investigatory journalist. It was awakening passion and radical transformation that interested Sinclair, not uncovering new information. He was an activist who thought he could change the world through his writing, but not in the legalistic or philosophical style of someone like Henry Demarest Lloyd. Nor was his approach a straightforward, “mudslinging,” political attack in the style of David Graham Phillips.

Sinclair may be the most emotional and eccentric of all the muckrakers, and The Jungle, is arguably the best remembered muckraking text of the era. As a writer of fiction, Sinclair was operating under a different set of conventions and expectations than his fellow muckraker journalists.

In The Jungle, there is no attempt to be objective (though Jurgis does spend a night hanging out with the heir to the meatpacking fortune); Sinclair writes from a place that is unique to him and driven by his personality and values - specific facts are somewhat of an afterthought.

Some muckrakers like Mark Sullivan said The Jungle shouldn’t be considered muckraking, because it was fiction and “did not purport to have any more than the loose standard of accuracy that fiction demands for local color and background” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 205).
Sinclair disagreed with those who dismissed his findings because he was writing fiction: “The Jungle is as authoritative as if it were a statistical compilation,” said Sinclair (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 206). The investigations of Sinclair’s findings by both the publisher and President Roosevelt’s investigator also confirmed the validity of Sinclair’s fact statements about the meat packers.

*The Jungle* was actually offered to *Collier’s* for serialization and both Robert Collier and Norman Hapgood thought that there was a big commercial possibility in *The Jungle*, but Hapgood especially was against running it in *Collier’s*. Hapgood argued (with perhaps a little exaggeration) that *Collier’s* has

a method that is sensation, but it is our own special kind of sensation. It is the sensationalism of telling the exact truth about important things, - as exact as science itself. Sinclair’s sensationalism is of a more familiar type, the sensationalism of exaggeration, of piling on colors, of saying, if there is blood on the floor of a slaughterhouse, that it is an inch thick, when it isn’t. I’m afraid if we start down that path we shall lose the distinct outlines of the character we have built up. (Hapgood, 1930, p. 171)

Though President Roosevelt is reported to have had David Graham Phillips in mind when he gave the muckraking speech, no muckraker fits the description of a “Wild preacher of unrest” more than Sinclair.

Despite Sinclair’s huge success, he still felt he had fallen short of his goal. “I failed in my purpose,” said Sinclair. “I wished to frighten the country by a picture of what its industrial masters were doing to their victims; entirely by chance I had stumbled on another discovery – what they were doing to the meat supply of the civilized world” (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1961, p. 205). “I aimed at the public’s heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach” (Sinclair, 1932, p. 175).
CHAPTER 16 CONCLUSIONS

The numerous variations on muckraking reflect the variety of personalities and backgrounds of the muckrakers. Ida Tarbell and Ray Stannard Baker’s journalism reflected aspects of their personalities. Both considerate of others, including those they disagreed with. Both refrained from jumping to conclusions. They went about their lives and their writing with deliberateness, gentleness and humility. Most of all, they wanted to understand the world and pass that understanding on to others. Where other muckrakers were brash, provocative and quick to jump to a conclusion, Tarbell and Baker sought to gain more information before judging an issue.

Tarbell couldn’t help but question the way she saw the world, and as a result she held her own judgments lightly. Evidence was what was important - not her personal opinions about the evidence. Tarbell’s objectivity went hand-in-hand with her balanced and open-minded personality.

In a similar way, Baker was curious, and always wanted more information. He didn’t charge headlong into battle, but instead muckraked around the edge of issues, approaching the apex with a steady hand and thoughtfulness. He repeatedly clarified a single aspect of a much larger debate.

Baker also took on topics that other muckrakers largely avoided; he muckraked racism by presenting various perspectives without falling into a moral tirade. To stay neutral on a frequently explosive issue like race, underscores Baker’s ability to separate evidence from his opinions about the evidence - to separate facts from values. Baker’s muckraking focused on the nuance and subtlety of a topic, which reflected his gentle and understanding manner.
Based on my analysis of John Mathews’ article, “Mr. Ballinger and the National Grab Bag” in *Hampton’s Magazine*, Mathews appeared to be a similar type of muckraker as Tarbell and Baker - studious, understanding of multiple perspectives, and attempting to help his readers understand the issue. When Baker, Tarbell and Mathews did share their personal opinions, they softened their language and limited their conclusions to encapsulate the specific evidence they had presented.

Henry D. Lloyd, David Graham Phillips, Charles Edward Russell, Thomas Lawson, and Upton Sinclair, constituted a different type of muckraker than Tarbell, Baker and Mathews. Lloyd and company were more ideological and often formed broad conclusions based on their limited set of evidence. They also used explosive language.

Henry D. Lloyd argued the unscrupulousness of Standard Oil represented the unforgivable moral flaws of capitalism as a whole. John D. Rockefeller and the other Standard Oil men are: “Sincere as rattlesnakes, … these men are the touchstones to wither the cant of an age” (Lloyd, 1902, p. 508). For Lloyd, the “corporate Caesars” (p. 6) are merely a byproduct of capitalism, which “colors the modern world as war reddened the ancient world. Out of such delirium monsters are bred” (p. 509).

David Graham Phillips condemned the entire Senate as treasonous and more dangerous than an invading army (1961, p. 69). Charles Edward Russell maintained the Beef Trust was more powerful than any “king, emperor, or irresponsible oligarchy” in the history of the world (1975, p. 1). Upton Sinclair saw the horrendous handling of the nations meat as little more than the excrement of ravenous capitalist vultures who were feasting on the workers of the world (2003, p. 326). These muckrakers were passionate, provocative, and shared their conclusions forcefully.
The background and personality of Lloyd, Russell and Sinclair also seems to reflect these characteristics. Lloyd’s muckraking reflected his legal training and his early years as an editorialist. Russell was bold from a young age - he wrote confident editorials for his father’s newspaper and while still in grade school he stood on stage in a lecture hall and argued against the tariff. Russell was full of rebellion every step of the way. Sinclair, as a youngster, wrote manifestos and recklessly threw himself into music and literature, reading for fourteen hours a day. (David Gram Phillip’s doesn’t have an autobiography, likely due to his sudden death at the age of 44, and I wasn’t able to look into the biographical texts on Phillips). Lloyd, Phillips, Russell, and Sinclair were also socialists.

Lincoln Steffens could fall into this category as well, but Steffens was less emotional and less personally affected by the trouble he uncovered. He took a detached and curious tone, similar to Tarbell and Baker, but then drew philosophical conclusions about the nature of corruption and social interactions. Steffens did become a socialist, but it wasn’t until after his muckraking heyday that he dabbled with socialism. Steffens carefree and inquisitive muckraking also seems to be a product of his carefree childhood, and years of academic study in philosophy and ethics.

Steffens’ philosophizing was also of a different brand than the philosophizing of Lloyd, Phillips, Russell and Sinclair. Steffens was more of a philosophical gadfly, raising provocative questions about the nature of corruption, where Lloyd, Phillips, Russell, and Sinclair forcefully asserted their solutions to the problems of society. Steffens straddles theses first two types of muckraking, by taking the neutral, and curious tone of Tarbell, and the theorizing of Lloyd.

Within this group of ideological muckrakers, Lloyd stands apart because of his elitism and scholarly tone. Lloyd filled his 500+ page treatise, Wealth Against Commonwealth with
hundreds of footnotes and references to ethicists. In contrast, the writing of Phillips, Russell, Sinclair and Steffens was accessible to a general audience. Russell, Sinclair, and Steffens (and to a lesser extent Phillips’ “Treason of the Senate”) told stories with characters and drama. Lloyd wouldn’t even name his characters, and was less of a storyteller and more like a prosecutor making a legalistic moral argument.

The ability of Steffens, Phillips and Russell to appeal to a general audience may have more to do with the medium of the magazine (and the novel for Sinclair), than their individual personalities. Steffens had obscure artistic and philosophical interests; under different conditions it would be easy to picture Steffens writing some arcane moralistic dissertation.

For example, after muckraking St. Louis and Minneapolis, Steffens was interested in developing his theory of graft, but his editor, Sam McClure wanted him to stick to storytelling. “My mind was on my theory, but Mr. McClure’s was on our business,” writes Steffens (Steffens, 1931, p. 392). In the end, they made a compromise, Steffens “was to write little or nothing of … theory” and instead “stick to facts,” and then after that narrative investigation was written, Steffens could turn to his theorizing for a little while (Steffens, 1931, p. 392-393). “Mr. McClure was interested in facts,” writes Steffens. “Startling facts, not in philosophical generalizations. He hated, he feared, my dawning theory” (Steffens, 1931, p. 393).

Like Steffens, Russell could also have easily ended up pursuing his obscure interests; after his newspaper career and before his muckraking, Russell had given up journalism to show how poetry and music were one and the same (Russell, 1933, p. 136). If it wasn’t for Russell wanting to do a favor for his friend who was the editor of _Everybody’s Magazine_, Russell may have wandered down the path of an abstruse musical-poetry theorist.
Similarly, before *The Jungle*, Sinclair’s novels were largely unknown. It wasn’t until he stumbled upon the conditions of the nations meat that he became a well-known author. But exposing the packing conditions of the nations meat wasn’t what Sinclair intended to serve his readers. Sinclair wanted to highlight the disturbing plight of laborers in Chicago’s meat packing plants and to serve up socialism. His exposure of specific problems with the nations meat-packing was little more than seasoning on the steak.

With the exception of Sinclair, who was primarily writing fictional novels, Phillips, Russell and Steffens were all writing for general interest magazines and all had the help of editors to shape their stories for the magazines target audience.

Steffens had the oversight of Sam McClure, whose keen understanding of the general publics’ interests was a vital force behind the accessibility and popularity of Steffens muckraking (as well as Tarbell and Baker’s muckraking). Besides keeping Steffens focused on storytelling and away from theorizing, McClure was constantly interested in whether the public would be entertained by an article.

Once McClure asked Steffens for his opinion on a manuscript; Steffens wrote a “literary criticism” which McClure immediately threw in the wastebasket with no more than a glance at Steffens’ essay and said:

“I want to know if you enjoy a story, because if you do, then I know that, say, ten thousand readers will like it. If Miss Tarbell likes a thing, it means that fifty thousand will like it. … But I go most by myself. For if I like a thing, then I know that millions will like it. My mind and my taste are so common that I’m the best editor.” (Steffens, 1931, p. 393)

After Steffens, Tarbell and Baker left *McClure’s Magazine* and took over *American Magazine*, they were never able to replicate the popularity or commercial success they had while harvesting the seeds of insight from Sam McClure. Tarbell muckraked the tariff for *American
Magazine, but the series was too dry and lacked the storytelling force that propelled her McClure’s articles. Tarbell writes of her tariff series that no matter how hard she tried, “I could not put vitality into my narrative” (Tarbell, 2003, p 271).

Lloyd had no Sam McClure helping him make Wealth Against Commonwealth accessible to a general audience. It is questionable whether Lloyd actually tried to appeal to a wide audience, in the first place. He characterizes his journalistic approach, as a “Fact-Official adjudicated, massed in avalanche” and writes: “I realized thoroughly that I sacrifice literary effect by the method I have pursued” (Jernigan, 1976, p. 64). Lloyd was never a best seller and never reached as wide an audience as the rest of the muckrakers. This may be somewhat due to the fact that Lloyd was muckraking a decade before the rest of the muckrakers (and the muckraking era) and before the rise of nationally distributed general interest magazines. It is also likely due to Lloyd’s style of exposure.

Sinclair stands out from this group of ideological muckrakers not only because he wrote fiction, but also because of his bohemian lifestyle and his emotional extremes. Sinclair’s muckraking was deeply subjective. Far from keeping facts and values separate, Sinclair’s values and emotions were his central inspiration, which gave his facts meaning and purpose. Sinclair was so caught up in his own subjective world that for many years he thought he was the only one to recognize the injustice of the world - it wasn’t until he was given a copy of the socialist publication Wilshire’s, that he realized there were others who saw the world the way he did. Upon reading Wilshire’s, Sinclair writes:

It was like the falling down of prison walls about my mind; the most amazing discovery, after all these years – that I did not have to carry the whole burden of humanity’s future on my two frail shoulders! There were actually others who understood. (Sinclair, 1932, p. 143)
Sinclair’s heartfelt and crusading muckraking is also consistent with his tumultuous upbringing, and his spirited and eccentric personality.

While Sinclair’s muckraking was deeply subjective and his lifestyle and values may have been the least mainstream of the muckrakers, *The Jungle* was one of the biggest commercial successes of the era. People still read Sinclair even if he was something of an anomaly.

Mark Sullivan, Norman Hapgood, Samuel Hopkins Adams, and to a lesser extent C. P. Connolly represent a third type of muckraker; they were argumentative and single-sided, but their muckraking placed evidence ahead of emotion and ideology. They exposed and criticized, but their attacks were more restrained and contained less exaggeration than the attacks of Lloyd, Phillips, Russell, Sinclair and Thomas Lawson. As Sullivan said of his own reporting: “I wish not to make too broad a generalization from a single experience, especially when that experience was my own” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 115).

Before Sullivan joined *Collier’s* he writes that *Collier’s* editor Norman Hapgood and publisher Robert Collier “had a special appreciation of any writing about a public matter that was austere and factual, which made its effect not by emotion but by massing of facts” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 191).

*Collier’s* is the muckraking publication that best represents this argumentative, but factual and sophisticated muckraking style. *Collier’s* editor, Hapgood reflects in his autobiography, “the opportunity to get into a fight has always been one of the temptations most difficult for me to resist” (1930, p. 106).

The *Collier’s* muckrakers were also the most elitist of the muckraking publications. The *Collier’s* trio of Sullivan, Hapgood and R. Collier were all highly educated. Sullivan got both an undergraduate degree and a law degree from Harvard (Sullivan, 1938, p. 138). Hapgood did the
same, and studied closely under pragmatist William James (Hapgood, 1930, p. 60). Robert Collier studied at Georgetown and spent an additional year studying at Oxford (Sullivan, 1938, p. 205).

Before becoming editor of Collier’s, Hapgood had planned a “life of leisurely, scholarly writing” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 208). When Robert Collier took over the magazine from his father, Peter Collier, he set out to have the weekly magazine “reflect his classical education” (Sullivan, 1938, p. 205). Robert Collier paid top dollar to get the best art, literature, poetry and reporting (Sullivan, 1938, p. 206-207). Collier’s was also highly critical of the more sensational muckraking of Sinclair, Phillips at Cosmopolitan and Lawson at Everybody’s.

Will Irwin may fit into this category with the rest of the Collier’s journalists. I wasn’t able to analyze Irwin’s most important muckraking series, “The American Newspaper,” which appeared in Collier’s in 1911. I analyzed one of Irwin’s Collier’s articles, “The First Ward Ball.” That article had a similar tone as the somewhat angry, crusading, hyperbolized muckraking of Lloyd, Phillips, Russell, Sinclair and Lawson, but it was also full of specific description and evidence, and didn’t draw any grand conclusions.

Thomas Lawson is somewhat of an outlier amongst the muckrakers. He exaggerated and bloviated in a manner not totally different from Lloyd, Phillips, Russell and Sinclair, but Lawson was not a socialist, he was a businessman. At times he played the role of the reform businessman, but he also slipped into the role of self-interested publicist. Where Lloyd sought to downplay the importance of the individual, Lawson elevated the personal characteristics of the Standard Oil men to the point where his characterizations were one of the central focuses of his muckraking.
Lawson was not idealistic - he was strategic. He seemed to recognize that he was operating in the realm of publicity and not journalism. His motives also are more perplexing than the motives of the ideological muckrakers. The purpose of Lloyd’s muckraking was clear: he took a swing at Standard Oil and capitalism. Phillip’s purpose was also clear: he wanted to knock out the rafters that were holding up the unelected and corrupt Senate. Critics, like President Roosevelt, questioned the methods that muckrakers like Phillips used, and the soundness of their conclusions, but the ideological muckrakers motives were clear: they were activists who wanted to change the world. Lawson’s purpose and motives were not so clear.

**Academic, Activist, Prosecutor, Philosopher or Artist?**

One way to classify the muckrakers is to sort them by their similarity to various non-journalistic traditions.

The muckraking of Tarbell, Baker, Steffens, and Mathews stayed close to the path of an academic trying to understand an issue. They relied on verifiable evidence to justify the information in their articles. They held their conclusions lightly. They were willing to question their beliefs and they continued searching for new information - all characteristics that are in line with the scientific method and the rigors of historical scholarship.

This scholarly journalism sent Tarbell on a five-year, 19-part, 700+ page investigation. Baker had no single muckraking achievement as exhaustive as Tarbell’s treatment of Standard Oil, but Baker’s biography of Woodrow Wilson gives an indication of Baker’s work ethic and studiousness.

When he agreed to be Wilson’s official biographer, Baker spent months visiting the various places where Wilson had lived, talking with people who knew Wilson in different phases of his life (Baker, 1945, p. 510). Then Baker absorbed rooms full of the former President’s
private correspondences - five tons of documents in all! By the time it was all down on paper, Baker had spent fourteen years writing the Pulitzer Prize winning eight-part biography: *Woodrow Wilson; Life and Letters* (Baker, 1945, p. 512).

The muckraking of Phillips, Russell, Lawson, and Sinclair is closer to the activist tradition than the scholarly, academic tradition. They appealed to their audiences’ emotions. They made sweeping statements that strayed from the evidence. They muckraked to cut down their foes, or as Russell said, “we were ready with a brick” to throw at the heads of their targets (Russell, 1933, p. 140). This strain of journalism has a strong tint of publicity and advocacy. The purpose is to convince readers to adapt a belief and possibly to take an action.

Sullivan, Connolly, Adams, Hard and Lloyd muckraked like prosecutors, making their case based on a presentation of evidence. Their purpose was to convict, so they told one-sided stories. They “threw bricks,” but their bricks were primarily made of facts, not of opinions.

The muckraking of Lloyd and Steffens and to a lesser extent Russell, also drew on philosophical traditions. Lloyd, in particular, made a direct ethical argument much the way an ethicist would do, and mixed his broad ethical argument with specific detailed and documented evidence (in line with a lawyer or a scholar).

Sinclair could also be seen as combining the values and traditions of an artist with that of an activist journalist. He lived more like an artist than a journalist; his art was investigatory and political.

**How have some historians and academics characterized the muckrakers?**

Overlooking the distinction between different muckraking traditions is a common occurrence in historical analysis of the muckrakers. In Fred J. Cook’s book, *The Muckrakers* (1972), he begins by characterizing President Roosevelt’s speech as “charging headlong at the
band of crusading journalists” (p. 9). Cook goes on to say, “with these words the President labeled all of the crusading journalists of the day muckrakers” (p. 10).

Similarly, in the foreword to *Muckraking: Past, Present, and Future* (1973), Irving Dilliard wrote that President Roosevelt’s muckraking speech would “chastise the Tarbells, Bakers, and Steffenses - along with such coworkers as David Graham Phillips and Upton Sinclair, Charles E. Russell and Samuel Hopkins Adams” (p. 1). As I argued, in the introduction, Roosevelt made a distinction between different types of journalism, and did not “label all the crusading journalists of the day muckrakers.” The grouping of all the muckrakers, who had fundamentally different journalistic approaches, obscures their impact on journalism and on society as a whole.

Robert Miraldi writes in the introduction to the book, *The Muckrakers: Evangelical Crusaders*, that the muckrakers were “angry at the problems they found and working with evangelical fervor … to find and expose evil and injustice,” and sought to “institutionalize their moral indignation” (2000, p. xiii). “The muckrakers,” writes Miraldi, were motivated by “a moral, almost religious, belief that the exposure of ills would lead to cures” (p. xiii). Lawson and Phillips may have been angry, and Sinclair may have written with an “evangelical fervor,” and Lloyd may have wanted to “institutionalize … moral indignation,” but this portrayal doesn’t represent Tarbell, Baker, Steffens, or Mathews, who are just as much (if not more) a part of the muckraking movement as Lawson, Phillips and Sinclair.

In the essay, “The Literature of Argument and the Arguments of Literature,” Jay Martin argues:

One need not catalog the muckrakers …, and attempts to categorize their activities have always proved futile - for businessmen and poets alike became journalists; journalists,
novelists; novelists, historians; and historians, socialist educators. But they had in common a passion for dispassionate investigation. (Martin, 1973, p. 103)

Martin is correct in his emphasis on the variety of traditions that were part of the muckraking era, but I disagree that all the muckrakers “had in common a passion for dispassionate investigation.” To say that Russell or Sinclair’s writing was “dispassionate” is imprecise.

In the book *Rendezvous with Destiny*, Eric F. Goldman wrote that the muckrakers were “publicity men for reform” (1952, p. 176). Similarly, Arthur and Lila Weinberg described the muckrakers as the “press agents for the Progressive movement” (1961, p. xviii). “The muckrakers used publicity as an anti-business weapon and industry, in direct reply to the muckrakers, began to feel that if publicity could be used against them, it could also be used for them. Hence the birth of the whole public relations industry” writes Goldman (Weinberg \& Weinberg, 1961, p.xxi).

With a reference to philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau’s “General Will,” which is akin to collective public opinion, J. Herbert Altschull says, the muckrakers “envisaged themselves as radical forces devoted at whatever cost to the good of the General Will” (1990, p. 274). Altschull then describes Tarbell’s articles as an “outspoken blast” at John D. Rockefeller (1990, p. 274), which mischaracterizes her calm, unemotional, and balanced history.

Altshcull does balance his statement about the muckrakers as “radicals,” by writing the muckrakers were “also followers of the more conservative concepts on Milton and Locke, defenders of the idea that truth must be given a free hand to challenge error” (1990, p. 274).
While Altschull described the muckrakers as both “radical” and “conservative,” Louis Filler conversely describes the muckrakers as: “neither radical nor conservative, but as feeding the several social sectors of society with knowledge and understanding” (1976, p. viii). This difficulty in summarizing the muckrakers, highlights the flaw in describing the muckraker’s as a singular force, and amplifies the need to view the muckrakers as having contrasting and contradictory approaches to the literature of exposure.

Altschull does draw a distinction between the “romantic nature” of Upton Sinclair’s writing and the writing of Steffens, Tarbell, Baker and Lawson (1990, p. 275). Though the distinction is more of an aside, and I don’t think it’s accurate to group Lawson with the McClure’s muckrakers. Lawson may not have had Sinclair’s romanticism, but he spit hot-blooded verbiage in a similar style as Sinclair, though perhaps with less sincerity.

In the book *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter goes on to say that the majority of the muckrakers were hired writers and not ideologically or ethically driven; he does single out Sinclair and Gustavus Myers as being exceptions (1985, p. 193). Hofstadter writes, the muckrakers were:

moderate men who intended to propose no radical remedies. From the beginning … they were limited by the disparity between the boldness of their means and the tameness of their ends…. Their chief appeal was not to desperate social needs but to mass sentiments of responsibility, indignation and guilt. (Hofstadter, 1985, p. 195)

After making this summary, Hofstadter goes on to say the McClure’s muckrakers were:

far more akin to the majority of their middle-class audience than was the attitude of the Socialist muckrakers like Gustavus Myers, Upton Sinclair, and Charles Edward Russell, who wanted to push the implication of muckraking discoveries to their utmost practical conclusions. (Hofstadter, 1985, p. 196)
Hofstadter’s analysis of different types of muckrakers with different motivations is far more precise than his summary of all the muckrakers as “moderate men” who proposed “no radical remedies.”

Hofstadter summarizes the ideas of Robert Cantwell, who argued that muckraking was “the journalistic equivalent of the literary realism.” They wrote, “an intimate anecdotal, behind-the-scenes history of their own times” (Hofstadter, 1985, p. 197).

Harry H. Stein and John M. Harrison write that since the muckraking era: “Muckraking is associated with four major press traditions in America. It bears closest resemblance to investigative journalism; less, to advocacy journalism. It has a distant relation to sensationalistic and to yellow journalism” (1973, p. 14). Muckraking “has played and continues to play many roles within the American press and society” (Stein & Harrison, 1973, p. 22).

While some historians have acknowledged the different journalistic approaches amongst the muckrakers, the muckrakers are still most frequently characterized as a unified force. Louis Filler summarizes the muckrakers by writing they:

savagely exposed grafting politicians, criminal police, tenement eyesores. They openly attacked the Church. They defended labor in disputes, … [they] decried child exploitation, wrote pro-suffragist articles, and described great businesses as soulless and anti-social. These writers, using the most sordid details to make their points, shocked and bewildered the conservative reader … [who] preferred to read his magazines for relaxation, not for argumentative lectures. (Filler, 1976, p. 9)


When Filler uses the label, “liberal crusader” he was likely using “liberal” to mean something quite different from the way the word is used today. He meant liberalism as a
political philosophy that stood for democracy and freedom of belief (as opposed to the political philosophy of authoritarianism). This makes his characterization of the muckrakers as “liberal crusaders” more accepting of the wide variety of views the muckrakers espoused. As for the label “crusader,” it fits muckrakers like Russell and Sinclair, but not the likes of Tarbell and Baker, who stated in their autobiographies that they were not trying to persuade or reform society, only revel new information and better understand the world. Tarbell writes that she couldn’t help “questioning” and “qualifying …, which no first class crusader can afford to do” (Tarbell, 1939, p. 399). Baker writes that his purpose was not to reform but, “to become a ‘maker of understandings’ … I was to help people understand more clearly and completely the extraordinary world they were living in – all of it, without reservations or personal prejudices” (Baker, 1945, p. 132-133).

Filler writes “It does no good for us to scorn an Upton Sinclair, a Tom Lawson, a David Graham Phillips, without studying over their words and determining whether we have better ones for comparable situations” (1976, p. xv). Throughout this thesis I have tried to make the argument that there were other words that not only could have been used, but were used to describe comparable situations. Tarbell, Lloyd and Lawson all wrote about Standard Oil, and all used very different words to create a different picture of Standard Oil. Connolly, Mathews, and Lawson all wrote about mining and natural resources with a fundamentally different tone and type of language. Steffens, Irwin, Phillips, Hard and Sullivan all wrote about political corruption, but they took distinctly different journalistic approaches ranging from a narrative drawing on sworn testimony (Steffens), to angry broadsides that questioned the moral character of the target politician (Phillips and Irwin), to humorous and informative characterizations (Hard and Sullivan), to direct appeals to organize and create political pressure (Sullivan).
Filler goes on to write that Phillips was “spared the foolishness which ‘critics’ accorded his work” in “Treason of the Senate,” (1976, p. xv) after Phillips was shot and killed by someone who took issue with his writing. Phillips assassin was a paranoid, ivy-league educated violinist and member of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, who believed one of Phillips' novels had slandered his family (Mencken, 1993, p. 129). I disagree with Filler, that to critique “Treason of the Senate” is a foolish act, for it is in the close examination of the text that we can recognize the distinction between different types of journalism.

While Filler defends and emphasizes the likeness of the muckrakers, he does acknowledge there are different muckraking traditions. In the essay “The Muckrakers and Middle America,” Filler writes, “muckraking’s two old reputations - of significant exposure without fear or favor, on one side, and of shabby and malicious rumor-mongering, on the other - both continue in the present as well as the past” (1973, p. 25). Filler also writes: “there are two ‘muckraking’ reputations, and they have discriminated between that of the cheapjack journals and those which assumed a higher public obligation than merely to meet readers expectations” (1976, p. x).

Filler is correct in this summary, but he classes all the muckrakers covered in his book (which includes all the journalists in this thesis) as being muckrakers of the more respectable variety. While the muckraking of Phillips and Lawson may not be “cheapjack,” their writing (and to a lesser extent the writing of Russell and Sinclair) was closer to the sensational “yellow journalism” than the more measured and studious journalism of Tarbell and Baker.

To Filler’s credit, he doesn’t glance over the differences between the muckrakers. He identifies them as “a varied lot” of writers (1976, p. xvi), but a central focus of his book is to sum up the muckrakers and write about them as a single entity. In the introduction, which has the
title “The way of a crusading liberal: A composite,” Filler creates an imagined fusion of all the muckrakers (1976, p. 3). In this composite character sketch, Filler writes (his italics):

This new America needed description and explanation, and perhaps even reform.... Alert and intelligent, our journalist looked deeper than the ordinary man into these things, read widely to acquaint himself with modern political thought, tried to understand the forces working beneath the exterior of American life.... the young journalist gave himself wholeheartedly to the new movement for exposure and reform ... writing the facts of contemporary life in the style that journalism had developed for him: a clear, bold, straightforward style, concerning itself with facts and figures.... The “muckraker,” for so he soon came to be called, dealt with facts and not with theory. Whatever it was he concluded about business and the theory of capitalism - and he reached various conclusions - he made sure to give the facts and details about his subject.... “The best cure for the evils of democracy,” he used to assert. “is more democracy.” (Filler, 1976, p. 4-5)

Filler does a fine job of encapsulating the wide variety of journalism the muckrakers practiced, into a fusion muckraker, but does it enhance our understanding of the muckrakers to wrap such differing journalistic approaches in a single cocoon?

In the quote above, Filler writes the muckrakers were “concerned with facts and not with theory.” Again, Tarbell may have had little interest in writing about broad theories, but theory was one of the driving forces behind Lincoln Steffens muckraking. Steffens had theories of the criminal justice system (Steffens, 1931, p. 274 and p. 570); theories of art (p. 317), theories of graft (p. 393), theories of ideas (p. 408), theories of reform (p. 409), theory of good will (p. 683), and theories of revolution (p. 717) to name a few. To present Steffens, Sinclair, Phillips, Lawson, Tarbell, and Baker as all practicing the same type of journalism distorts their purpose and their influence on journalism.

In the introduction to the 1976 edition of The Muckrakers, Filler contrasts the journalists and political writers of 1976 with the muckrakers, saying the modern writers “can learn [from the muckrakers] a technique for communication to persuade the reader” that journalists “are not fly-by-night informers, clever word jugglers, and name and data droppers, but rather … have given
every subject thought and hard work” (p. xiii). This statement mixes muckraking traditions. In Phillips’ “Treason of the Senate” and Lawson’s “Frenzied Finance,” their muckraking could be accurately characterized as “clever word jugglers.” The description of a “fly-by-night informer” fits Lawson quite well.

There are valuable lessons that journalists and the public can learn from studying the muckrakers: by recognizing the different types of journalism in the muckraking era, we can better understand the types of journalism that exists today. The style of journalism that was practiced by a Lawson, a Lloyd, a Tarbell, a Sullivan, or a Sinclair all exist today: by recognizing these different journalistic traditions, we can have a more precise and clear debate about what type of journalism we have, and what type of journalism we want.

**Journalism and the public’s epistemology**

The effect of different types of journalism on public opinion is beyond the scope of this thesis, but one theory is that journalists not only pass on information, but also pass on an epistemology. The journalist who makes his or her case by stating a conclusion without sharing the reasoning or the evidence behind the conclusion, is asking readers to accept an epistemology based on faith, not reason or evidence.

The reliance on faith (which is ultimately subjective) could undermine the journalistic ideal of objectivity and the reliance on verifiable evidence. When faith is the epistemological basis for a citizen’s beliefs, then a journalist’s reputation (and the reputation of his or her newspaper or magazine) could be elevated above the evidence.

On the other hand, when a journalist shares facts, as well as how he or she knows the facts are indeed true facts, then the reader has specific knowledge of verifiable evidence. This allows a reader to recognize if a journalist’s conclusion (or a politician’s conclusion) rests on a
single piece of evidence or a multitude of evidence. The difference is a matter of transparency: does the journalist reveal why he or she knows what he or she (thinks he or she) knows? When a journalist is transparent, the reader and other journalists can examine the evidence to test its strength. This is one of the assumptions of democracy; that citizens can alter their conclusions based on the best available evidence.

Journalism has a unique role in a democracy. A journalist’s stories build a bridge between readers and world events. The journalist decides what information gets to cross the bridge and mix and mingle with the thoughts and feelings of readers. The journalist who trusts the public is likely to let more information cross the bridge, and will try not to impose his or her own values on that information. The journalist who does not trust the public is more likely to be strategic, and only allow certain information across; he or she may describe the world on the other side of the bridge with simplified and emotional language. Trust in the public may be the essential philosophical difference between the journalism of an Ida Tarbell and the journalism of a Henry D. Lloyd.

Differences in storytelling, and what facts and opinions are included in a story, frames the picture that forms in a readers mind. When a journalist ferociously attacks the humanity of a businessman for engaging in questionable business practices, it creates a different meaning than when a journalist describes the context of economic survival and competition in which those questionable business practices took place.

Tarbell recognized that a public opinion based on emotional appeals and publicity creates a weak foundation for social change. “In the long run, the public … would weary of vituperation” and if reformers “were to secure permanent results the mind must be convinced”
With deep respect for the power of public opinion and the democratic process, Tarbell beautifully writes that our individual ideas:

must sink or swim in a stream where a multitude of human experiences, prejudices, ambitions, ideals meet and clash, throw one another back, mingle, make that all-powerful current which is public opinion – the trend which swallows, digests, or rejects what we give it. It is our indifference to or ignorance of the multiplicity of human elements in the society we seek to benefit that is responsible for the sinking outright of many of our fine plans. (Tarbell, 1939, p. 400)

Democracy doesn’t place its faith in the rich or in the powerful, nor in the wise or the holy. Democracy places its faith in the collective wisdom of the public - in public opinion. The “all-powerful current,” which Tarbell described, is one of the forces that carves a path into the riverbank of history. When that current is manipulated by “vituperation” (Tarbell, 1939, p. 242) or “hysterical sensationalism” (Roosevelt, 1961, p. 61), and public opinion is convinced without the slow and arduous process of becoming educated, the current may become diverted and undercut the riverbank upon which democracy stands.

It is the job of journalists to provide evidence about the world – to be a “maker of understandings,” in the words of Ray Stannard Baker. Whether journalism succeeds at that task depends on the type of journalism that is practiced.

Journalism can represents the raw materials needed to construct a sturdy public opinion or journalism can represent a cherry picked, strategic construction of reality. Journalism can present evidence about the world, or it can present personal opinions about the world, and be a tool private interests use to manipulate public opinion.

The muckraking era is often described as if it is a single entity, “the golden age of investigative journalism,” but the contrasting approaches of the muckrakers represent distinct types of journalism, which have fundamentally different roles with our democracy.
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VITA

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