**Sara Cho – “The Jungle” Presentation**

General Quick Background:

* Background on Upton Sinclair –Socialist Journalist –“muckraker”
* “muckraker” derogatory - modern term is investigative journalism – Progressive Era period in the early 1900s (eliminating problems caused by industrialization, urbanization, immigration and corruption in government)
* in late 1904, he was sent to Chicago to examine the lives of stockyard workers and spent 7 weeks in the meatpacking industries which led to the book the Jungle.

Characteristics of the book:

Sinclair’s writing

* uses of senses - quite visceral
* smell, sounds, visual, touch
  + “There were cattle, which had been fed on “whiskey-malt,” the refuse of the breweries, and had become what the men called “steerly” — which means covered with boils. It was a nasty job killing these, for when you plunged your knife into them they would burst and splash foul-smelling stuff into your face; and when a man’s sleeves were smeared with blood, and his hands steeped in it, how was he ever to wipe his face, or to clear his eyes so that he could see?”

The book as a movement

* Sinclair realized the power of his book
* Powerful influence on practical affairs
* In the next six decades in over 90 books and countless articles he pushed for progressive causes like “strong trade unions, abolition of child labor, birth control, Prohibition, Socialism, an honest press, vegetarianism, morality in business, education reform”

There are so many themes, motifs, and symbols at work in Upton Sinclair’s novel, but I chose to focus on four major entities at work here. Particularly looking at the American Dream, the Immigrant experience, Packingtown, and “The Jungle” as a novel because of their inevitable connectivity to each other in so many complicated ways.

Hyper-Objects:

“Hyperobjects are objects that have vitality to them but you can’t touch them. Their effects can be experienced even if they cannot be necessarily touched”

Hyperobjects’ connectivity to each other in The Jungle.

American Dream as a hyperobject 🡪 the Immigrant experience as a hyperobject 🡪 Packingtown as a hyperobject 🡪 The Jungle as a hyperobject

Large entities in the work in relation to the character’s experience in the novel but also to Sinclair’s perception of capitalism and socialism

* “American Dream” as a hyperobject
  + American Dream – belief in the ability of the individual to gain a sense of agency and economic or social advancement for themselves in American culture
  + In America we constantly hear about the “American Dream”
    - Has become a sort of polarized entity
    - Symbol of hope but also something that is not readily available anymore
      * “The American dream is dead”
    - has become a slang saying of “making a lot of money for not a lot of effort”
    - An idea created by American society trying to make people believe anyone could be anything
  + Jurgis’s American dream: “Jurgis, too, had heard of America. That was a country where, they said, a man might earn three rubles a day, and Jurgis figured what three rubles a day would mean, with prices as they were where he lived and decided forthwith that he would go to America and marry, and be a rich man in the bargain. In that country, rich or poor, a man was free, it was said; he did not have to go in the army, he did not have to pay out his money to rascally officials – he might do as he pleased, and count himself as good as any other man. So America was a place of which lovers and young people dreamed.”
  + However, with higher wages came more expensive goods, cheaper houses came higher interest rates
  + Sinclair framed it in a way to blame capitalism
    - contrasts between dream and reality throughout the novel
    - Under the capitalist system – the American Dream can only be a fable

The idea of the “American Dream” in the novel then interacts with the concept of the “Immigrant Experience”

* The Immigrant Experience as a hyperobject
  + Power of the American Dream – convinces Ona’s family and Jurgis to immigrate to America
  + In America, they experience the failure of the American Dream – something people hope for but fail to obtain (experience disillusionment)
  + Sinclair does a good job of creating this immigrant family in a manner that doesn’t seem alien to us
    - Emphasizes their values of hard work, family, honesty and thrift
  + Our perception of immigrants today still similar
    - Encountering differences and assimilation
    - Common themes of immigrant experience
      * Hope, disillusionment, difference of culture and language and difficulties that follow
        + EX: the house contract was in English so it was not fully understood when signed
  + Struggle of integrating into American Culture
    - Ona and Jurgis’ wedding ceremony
      * Younger guests dressed very Americanized while many of the older guests dress in the way familiar to Lithuania
      * Narrator describes young people as
        + “most of whom have learned to speak English and to affect the latest style of clothing. The girls wear ready-made dresses or shirt waists, and some of them look quite pretty. Some of the young men you would take to be Americans, of the type of clerks, but for the fact they wear their hats in the room.”
  + Ona and Jurgis’ families emigrate from Lithuania because they hear great things about America.
  + Life in Lithuania was difficult, though not as difficult as life in America as the family found out.
    - People injured while working, children denied education, etc.
    - Everything immigrants seek in American Dream is denied
  + No matter what happens to Jurgis – he vows to work harder – because he is still hopeful that if he works hard, he can attain the American Dream of attaining wealth and a better life
  + Every aspect of family’s experience in Packingtown is a direct counter to American dream
    - Instead of land of acceptance and opportunity, they find a place of prejudice and exploitation
    - Instead of a country where hard work and morality lead to success, they find a place where only moral corruption and cunningness enable one to succeed materially
    - "They were beaten; they had lost the game, they were swept aside. It was not less tragic because it was so sordid, because that it had to do with wages and grocery bills and rents. They had dreamed of freedom; of a chance to look about them and learn something; to be decent and clean, to see their child grow up to be strong. And now it was all gone — it would never be! They had played the game and they had lost."

Packingtown – because of influx of such large populations – becomes a slum filled with disease and poor living conditions.

* In a way Packingtown becomes a hyperobject
  + What makes The Jungle as a novel significant to society is the particular setting in Chicago’s meatpacking factories
  + Sinclair combined his own socialist agenda with descriptions of Packingtown
  + The town represents oppression of the working class
    - Not only were the animals treated mercilessly, but also the people
    - Animal pens and slaughterhouses of Packintown
    - Just as animals were herded into pens, killed mercilessly and made to suffer and given no choice about their fate, so too are the thousands of poor immigrant workers forced to enter the machinery of capitalism
      * Symbolically “grinds them down” and kills them without much choice
    - Waves of animals pass through in constant flow and slaughtered and replaced by more 🡪 generations of immigrants ruined by merciless worked and oppression of capitalism and eventually replaced by more
  + Setting within the novel
    - Packingtown as a living entity
    - Physical living conditions, corruption, the town is morally corrupt
    - Jurgis’ and Ona’s first child, Antanas dies after drowning in a mud pit in the streets
      * Packingtown is so bad someone could literally die from just going outside
    - Almost seems like the town is alive and actively creating suffering
  + Setting’s effects outside the Novel
    - Although Sinclair was just trying to expose bad parts of capitalism, he ended up exposing the unfair business practices of Chicago and Packingtown specifically
    - People all over the country were eating these packaged and processed meats – The Jungle wasn’t just about Jurgis and his life – it’s about all of us and the quality of our food

Which leads to the last idea of “The Jungle” and its lasting significance to society.

* “The Jungle” novel as a hyperobject
  + The Jungle – reminiscent of “survival of the fittest”
    - Competitive nature of capitalism
    - Strong prey on the weak and all living things engaged in fight for survival
  + Linked to Social Darwinism – idea used to justify the abuses of wealthy capitalists
    - Idea that society was designed to reward the strongest while inferior people were kept low
  + Words that come up when you think of a jungle – fear, danger, the unknown, bloodthirsty animals
    - For Sinclair, synonymous to capitalism where only the strong survive
  + Dehumanization of immigrant workers in Packingtown
  + Intended the novel to elicit sympathy for the working class nad build support for Socialist movement
  + The book provoked the passage of The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. 🡪 FDA 🡪 sales of meat to domestic and foreign imports decreased by 50%
    - Upton actually opposed law because he saw it was hugely beneficial for big meat packers but not so much for consumers. Taxpayers paid $3 million for the law to go into effect.
    - Famous quote: “I aimed at the public’s heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach”