**The American Dream**

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The American dream is synonymous with the idea of hope and being justifiably compensated for one’s labor. Immigrants from all over the world have historically flocked to America in search of this dream. In the current political scenario when immigration to the USA is a polarized rallying cry, the themes and characters in Upton Sinclair’s ‘The Jungle’ are increasingly relevant. It is ironic to note that the novel failed to rile up public emotions about the reality of the fragile illusion of an American dream for the people who hope to be a part of it after leaving their home countries. Instead of creating concern about problems faced by the American working class especially immigrants, the book only created buzz in society about unsanitary conditions in the meatpacking business and led to the US Pure Food and Drug Act. It also led to stricter conditions for meatpacking in America. The only thing it did not achieve was its real objective.

Sinclair has used incidents from the real lives of immigrant workers in Chicago to be presented in the form of a fictional character’s story. The fact that the working and living conditions for immigrants as described in ‘the Jungle’ are real, turns the novel’s theme into one that is inherently socialist in nature. The harrowing tale of a Lithuanian family of immigrants tackles the various facades of capitalism in a rapidly industrializing America. There are several passages and quotes in the book that explicitly relate to inhumane conditions in factories that generally employ people who have immigrated to the United States. There is a specific text that significantly captures the extent to which immigrants will go to have a better life. It is a quote from Chapter Nine of the book. It describes the working conditions in excruciating detail by comparing the hunching of workers to ‘walking like Chimpanzees’ and that scarcely anyone did not have ‘a horror on their person’. This is then painfully reinforced by the fact that this quote begins with describing the workplace as where Jurgis’ son had died. (Sinclair) Working and living conditions are further illustrated with Ona’s rape at work and her eventual death while birthing the baby that resulted from the rape.

Other than working conditions, the book discusses various other socialist perspectives in discussing that the American dream was simply a fantasy. One of the basic necessities that can uproot families from their home countries and make them travel to America is safe and feasible housing. In this book, the author repeatedly shatters this dream. He starts this tale with how Jurgis’ family always ends up in debt with their rent despite calculations and careful spending. This segment of the story climaxes with a quote in chapter eighteen where the author claims there is no imagination for the ‘heartbreaking, crushing reality of’ Jurgis losing his home. (Sinclair) This works as a metaphor for the American dream that brought Jurgis to America. It has unfortunately turned into a heartbreaking, crushing reality.

It is therefore quite evident that the book uses metaphors and directly descriptive passages to discredit and expose the idea of American dream in capitalist context. Sinclair effectively unmasks the misleading hope that drove people to immigrate to America. In reality, unfair labor practices, a racially and economically biased legal justice system and a growing disregard for the working class completely eliminates any expectations of a fair and equal chance at success. The system is tilted even further against immigrants. Therefore, the book creates a stark contrast between the expectations and the realities of the American Dream. Since it was initially published bearing the stamp of a socialist political party and also provides an ending with a socialist protest; the intended aim of the book was clearly to provide public awareness about the unbelievable conditions faced by the working class and socialism as a solution for it.

# References

Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. Chicago: Doubleday, 1906. Print.