

## What is a muckraker, what are there goals, where did they come from, and what are some of their accomplishments?

The term muckraker most associated with a group of American investigative reporters, novelists and critics from the late 1800s to early 1900s, who investigated and exposed societal issues such as conditions in slums and prisons, factories, insane asylums (as they were called at the time), sweatshops, mines, child labor and unsanitary conditions in food processing plants.

Muckrakers often wrote about impoverished people and took aim at the established institutions of society, sometimes in a sensationalist and tabloid manner. (See History of American newspapers for Muckrakers in the daily press). Muckrakers were often accused of being socialists or communists. In the early 1900s, muckrakers shed light on such issues by writing books and articles for popular magazines and newspapers such as Cosmopolitan, The Independent, and McClure's.

The term muckraker now also applies to contemporary persons who follow in the tradition of that period, and now covers topics such as fraudulent claims by manufacturers of patent medicines, modern-day slavery, child prostitution, child pornography, and drug trafficking.

Although the term muckraking might appear to have a negative connotation to it, muckrakers have often served the public interest by uncovering crime, corruption, waste, fraud and abuse in both the public and private sectors.

An example of a contemporary muckraker work is Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965) and one of the more well known from the early period is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, (1906) which, respectively, led to reforms in automotive manufacturing and meat packing in the United States. Some of the most famous of the early muckrakers are Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, and Ray Stannard Baker.

The rise of muckraking in the late 19th and early 20th centuries corresponded with the advent of Progressivism yet, while temporally correlated, the two are not intrinsically linked.

President Theodore Roosevelt is credited with originating the term 'muckraker.' During a speech in 1906 he likened the muckrakers to the Man with the Muckrake, a character in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).