

## The Works of Upton Sinclair—Then and Now



By Aurelia C. Scott

*Sinclair's books and journalism helped make twentieth-century America a safer, fairer place.*

▶ Let's revisit Upton Sinclair, whose 90 books and muckraking journalism helped make twentieth-century America a safer, fairer place. Let's revisit him because we're struggling anew with the kind of wrongs that he exposed. Wage inequality. Skyrocketing income disparity. Unsafe working conditions, particularly in low-wage jobs. Corporations that fight unions while valuing shareholder profits above employee health, income, and safety. Luckily, several of Sinclair's literally life-changing books are newly available on audio, so just when we need him, we can revisit him.

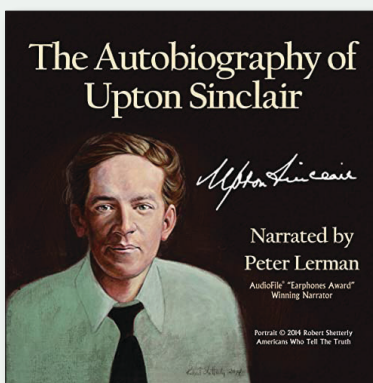
Sinclair's most famous novel, *The Jungle*, which you probably read in high school, is a graphic account of an immigrant's experience working in Chicago's stockyards. Its 1906 publication resulted in the passage of two new laws that same year: the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act. Though the stockyards of 1906 have disappeared, the commercial meat and poultry industry is troubled, and this moving novel remains all too relevant. Two excellent productions are available, read by listener favorites George Guidall and Grover Gardner.

**THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF UPTON SINCLAIR:**  
**The Author of *The Jungle* Tells His Own Story**  
*Upton Sinclair*  
 Read by Peter Lerman

By 1962, when he published his final autobiography, muckraker extraordinaire Upton Sinclair (1878-1968) was 83 years old; he had lived a full life and written more than 80 novels, countless articles, and 30 plays. Narrator Peter Lerman nicely mixes Sinclair's urgent staccato prose with the more accessible feel of the author's reminiscences of dealing with an alcoholic father and seeking self-improvement through diet and writing in a cabin in the woods. Lerman deftly captures the confident tones of a man on a mission to improve his country by taking on the meatpacking, oil, and coal industries, as well as labor relations. Throughout his life Sinclair fought for "social justice by democratic means." If he were alive today, he'd be podcasting about it. *B.P.*

Spoken Realms 13.75 hrs. Unabridged  
 Trade Ed.: **DD** \$25.70

*Lerman deftly captures the confident tones of a man on a mission.*



*More Listening*

**THE BRASS CHECK**

*Upton Sinclair, read by Peter Lerman*  
 Spoken Realms Unabridged  
 Trade Ed.: **DD**

**THE JUNGLE**

*Upton Sinclair, read by Grover Gardner*  
 Blackstone Audio Unabridged  
 Trade Ed.: **CD**  
 Library Ed.: **CD, MP3, DD, PRE**

**THE JUNGLE**

*Upton Sinclair, read by George Guidall*  
 Recorded Books Unabridged  
 Library Ed.: **CD, DD**

**OIL!**

*Upton Sinclair, read by Grover Gardner*  
 Blackstone Audio Unabridged  
 Trade Ed.: **CD**  
 Library Ed.: **CD, MP3, DD**

Gardner also narrates Sinclair's *Oil!* Published in 1926, it exposed the cut-throat, unprincipled start of Southern California's oil and gas industry. Yes, you've seen Daniel Day-Lewis give his all in the film adaptation, but do listen to Gardner's performance. While you do, ponder the untenable counterpoints of a warming planet, extractive industries, pollution, and human greed.

Audiobook narrator and producer Peter Lerman has taken Sinclair's passion for environmental and social justice to heart. Lerman is now on a mission to record all of Sinclair's out-of-print work that is still relevant. He began last year with *The Brass Check*, which our reviewer praised for Lerman's energy and deftness. In this era of "fake news" and "alternative facts," Sinclair's exposé of the early-twentieth-century press for preferring dramatic headlines over fact-checked news is eye-opening.

The only child of an alcoholic, improvident father and a religious mother from a rich background, Sinclair had a childhood that featured straitened genteel poverty with occasional visits to his wealthy grandparents. The dichotomy, along with his intelligence and passion for knowledge—he entered New York's City College at age 14—drove much of his future work. This and much more, both endearing and quirky, are in Lerman's recording of *The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair*, which was published earlier this year.

Lerman has also recorded *The Moneychangers*, about Wall Street corruption, which, we must admit, hasn't exactly disappeared in the years since. And *The Metropolis*, about the extraordinary fortunes of high-society financiers and moguls, which still sounds ripped from the headlines. Lerman has more Sinclair titles in the pipeline, which is heartening to hear about the work of an author who remains prescient and timely 54 years after his death. ■

