

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the Study**

The United States of America, believed to be a land of freedom, is a highly progressive country with many advances in Technology, Medicine, Government, Social and Economic System. No wonder, many people think that the United States of America always comes up one-step ahead of any other country in the world. Over the past three centuries since her independence in 1776, America has kept on improving herself as a leading country in some main aspects of life, especially in the economic and political fields; spreading her influence throughout the world. One of the many American influences that have quite a significant contribution to the global world is her economic system. As stated in the encyclopedia about American Economic ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_the_United_States)), that the United States has the largest national economy in the world, with a GDP for 2006 of

13.3 trillion dollars. The success that has been achieved by USA nowadays, especially in the economic field, is not easily accomplished without any effort. Despite the fact that the economic system is so well known, the country has undergone many transformations and lots of changes in many ways.

I am interested in studying the relationship between the Capitalists, the government and the workers in the United States of America as they take a great part in the American economic development. These three elements cannot be separated since there is a strong bond among one with another. The Capitalists need the workers to operate their machines. The workers depend on the government to protect their rights from bad Capitalists. Meanwhile, the government needs the Capitalists since they give some benefits to the government.

Undeniably, human lives keep on progressing from time to time. The inventions in technologies like machines, trains, and cars have made everything easier and faster. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States of America came to the age of Industrial Revolution and these new inventions somehow replaced the role of working people. Although it seemed like machines had replaced the role of workers; however, it did not mean that these corporations did not need workers; they still needed workers to operate the machines. Unfortunately, the owners of these big corporations became less and less concerned about the workers and did not take much care about the working conditions; they only cared about the profit. The same thing happened to the farmers who lived in the rural areas. These farmers depended on railroad companies to transport their crops. Nevertheless, the railroad companies put

the farmers in such hard times by increasing the rate of freight and the cost of land renting. Many farmers went bankrupt and moved to more developing cities, which seemed to offer many job opportunities.

As time went by, the workers and the farmers started to feel dissatisfied. They were dissatisfied with the long working hours, low wages, bad and unhealthy working conditions, high renting cost of land and so on. While it seemed that the workers and farmers had expected more from the government to perform an action, in order to limit companies from exploiting the workers excessively; the government, instead, took it indifferently. The government shut their eyes to every bad practice done by the companies since they had a personal interest on the companies as to promote the export trading and increase foreign exchange, not to mention the extra money they could get from the companies. At that time, many people, especially from the middle class, saw the need to make some changes in the system so that the benefits would be split evenly. This action was called Progressivism.

Based on Digital History website, Progressivism is an umbrella label for a wide range of economic, political, social, and moral reforms. During the Progressive Era (1900-1909), the influence of Industrialization was overwhelming in America; many factories were built around this time and railroads had tracks all over the country. Nevertheless, the gap between the rich and the poor was inevitable. The rich became richer and the poor became poorer. In this greedy and corruptive time, a new breed of journalists was born, called The Muckrakers. They tried to describe the outcry of this common people in their books in order to arouse public awareness of the social and economic injustices in America during this Progressive Era.

Among the existing muckrakers, I find two notable figures who have a great contribution to the world of literature since they highlight specific economic and social illnesses that lead the government into action: Upton Sinclair and Frank Norris (taken from Wikipedia website). Both authors seem to have the same concern toward the society that they are aware of the evil of capitalists and show the importance of progressivism in their works. Therefore, I think The Jungle by Upton Sinclair and The Octopus by Frank Norris are worth analyzing since these books deal with Industrialization and uphold some issues in the American life during the progressive era, which includes the freedom of the individual versus the strength of the impersonal corporations. It was believed by most Americans that such issue was a prominent concern during the progressive era when America became industrialized and big businesses monopolized markets.

The Jungle, written by Upton Sinclair in 1906, traces an immigrant family's exploitation and the unsanitary practices prevailing in Chicago's meat packing industry. The outrage provoked by the novel contributed to the enactment of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act in 1906, the first legislation of its kind to set minimum standards for food and drug production (taken from Eagleton Institute of Politics Rutgers website). The Octopus written by Frank Norris in 1901, traces San Joaquin Valley's farmers' unfair treatment by the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad.

The Jungle deals with the immigrants who are against the Meat Packing Factory owners. This novel uncovers the wage slavery, unsanitary conditions of the cattle, the dangers of unsafe machinery, child labouring, the degrading effects of slum

existence and the exploitation of labourers. The Jungle was written before the society realized that there was a problem inside the Meat Packingtown. The horror of these details caused so much public outcry that Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act less than a year after the publication of the book. The major character, Jurgis, is the victim of the evil capitalists; he loses his family and also his dreams; somehow, he manages to change his life in the end. At the end of the novel, The Jungle seems to show an optimistic attitude even though it never states that the major character has successfully achieved the goal of progressivism.

The Octopus depicts the conflict between farmers and the Railroad Company over land and power. Having rented land from the railroad, the ranchers find themselves in a financial threat through a combination of heavy mortgages, poor harvests, and the railroad's policy of setting freight charges as high as the market will stand (<http://www.litencyc.com>). The Octopus, which was written after the Mussel Slough incident that happened in 1880s, shows the society of the degrading value of capitalism. The role of the government is more promoted in The Octopus. The books state how important government role is for the farmers to protect their rights. There is no specific major character in this novel; it deals with some characters who share quite the same idea about things that happen around them. There is a sense of progressivism in each character but they are submissive to the conditions that put a lot of pressure on them. At the end of the novel, readers are taken to a thought that there is some kind of force beyond that cannot be opposed and that human life has been tied by some kind of scheme.

My intention in writing this thesis is to present the issues of Progressivism by observing the life of the characters in the novels. Both novels refer to social criticism to create some sorts of social reformation and social changes in the social and economic injustice at that time. I think that the writers may affirm or criticize the values of the society in which they live. Thus, I choose sociological approach as a medium to reveal the theme since according to Kennedy, 'Sociological approach is used in order to analyze a certain social content within literary work that is the economic, cultural, or political values in which a particular text implicitly or explicitly promotes'. (Kennedy, 2002:646). I use the sociological approach in revealing the theme through characters in order to learn the economic background of the United States of America and its impact on the society during the Progressive Era. Hence, I will find out people's reaction toward industrial revolution and the effect of the capitalists' malpractice.

### **Statement of the Problems**

1. What are the issues of Progressivism in The Jungle and The Octopus?
2. How do the characters help to reveal the issues of Progressivism?

### **Purpose of the Study**

1. To reveal the issues of Progressivism from The Jungle and The Octopus.
2. To show how the characters help to reveal the issues.

## **Method of Research**

I choose sociological approach as a method to help me analyze the two novels. In the meantime, I also use the library research and Internet research to search for additional information regarding the books that I choose. I began with reading The Jungle and The Octopus as the primary texts. Last but not least, I combine all the information that I have collected to be able to draw the conclusion.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of four chapters as a whole and is preceded by the Acknowledgements, the Table of Contents, and the Abstract. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problems, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two provides the Theoretical Framework of the Progressive Era. Chapter Three provides a discussion on the issues of progressivism in the novel The Jungle. Chapter Four provides the discussion on the issues of progressivism in the novel The Octopus. After I finish the analysis, the thesis will arrive at the conclusion, which will be put in Chapter Five. The thesis will end with the Bibliography and the Appendices that consist of the Synopses of both novels and the Biographies of both authors.