



Communism, Capitalism, and Democracy in China

In recent decades, China’s Communist Party has increasingly adopted capitalist models for its economy, and its economy has boomed. Will the surprising success of capitalism in China eventually lead to democracy?

Following World War I, China entered a long period of civil war. Fighting on one side were the communists. Led by Mao Zedong, they supported adapting the economic ideas of Karl Marx to China’s mainly rural peasant society. On the other side were the nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek. He favored a capitalist economic system. When the Japanese invaded China in World War II,

Mao and Chiang agreed to an uneasy truce. (Mao and Chiang are family names. Unlike Western names, Chinese family names come before given names.)

After the defeat of Japan, the Chinese civil war resumed. Mao’s experienced peasant fighters finally defeated the nationalist forces under Chiang, who fled with them to the large island of Taiwan. On October 1, 1949, Mao declared victory for the Communist Revolution and proclaimed the People’s Republic of China.

Mao Zedong and Communism

Mao Zedong concentrated all political power in the Chinese Communist Party. He set up a regime similar to that established by Vladimir Lenin in the Soviet Union, following the Russian Communist Revolution.

Under Mao, China’s Communist Party ruled as a “democratic dictatorship” in the name of the workers, peasants, and small merchants. Communist Party leaders decided China’s laws and policies. They also chose government officials and nominated those who ran unopposed for seats in China’s legislature, the National People’s Congress.



Modern high-rise buildings dot the skyline of the Pudong district in Shanghai, China’s financial center. (iStockphoto.com/David Pedre)

Mao wanted to eliminate capitalism and its emphasis on property rights, profits, and free-market competition. He followed the ideas of Karl Marx, who envisioned a communist society where all would equally share in prosperity.

Most Chinese were peasants, poor farmers who worked on land owned by wealthy landlords. Mao confiscated these

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Reform

This edition of *Bill of Rights in Action* looks at issues related to reform. The first article examines modern China and questions whether its reform of its economy will lead to democratic reforms. The second article looks at Uptown Sinclair’s groundbreaking work *The Jungle* and its impact on the meat-packing industry at the beginning of the 20th century. The last article explores the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey and looks at his attempts to reform education and American democracy.

World History: Communism, Capitalism, and Democracy in China

U.S. History: Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*

Government: John Dewey and the Reconstruction of American Democracy

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lands and executed thousands of landlords who resisted. During the 1950s, Mao formed “collective farms,” each worked by over 100 families. The income of the families was in theory equal. But since the peasants worked for the collective rather than on their own farms, there was little incentive to work hard. Farm production fell under this system.



Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997), who led China from 1978 until his death, adopted capitalist methods to reform China’s economy. (Wikimedia Commons)

In the cities, Mao began to put factories and other businesses under state (government) ownership. The state set production goals, wages, and prices. Most city workers became employees of these state-owned enterprises. The state guaranteed workers a job along with benefits like health care for life. Chinese workers called this the “iron rice bowl.” But again workers had little incentive to be efficient, productive, or even care about the amount or quality of their work. Consequently, industrial production declined.

By the late 1950s, Mao had banned free markets in rural China, where peasants used to sell farm products from little household plots. In the cities, the state owned and operated most factories and other businesses. Only a few remnants of private enterprise, what communists called the “rattail of capitalism,” still existed in China.

Dissatisfied with the progress of the economy toward a fully Marxist system, Mao turned to a more intensive approach he called the Great Leap Forward. In 1958, Mao abolished household farm plots and reorganized collective farms into “communes,” each with about 5,000 families. The government sent young people from the cities to the communes to learn farm skills. The communes not only operated huge farms but also factories, trade networks, banks, schools, and militias. People lived in dormitories and ate meals in common mess halls.

The Great Leap Forward ended in disaster in 1961. Crop and industrial production plummeted and a famine resulted, causing millions of deaths. (Estimates of the number of deaths have ranged from 2 million to 50 million.) Finally, the worsening situation forced the government to reduce the size of the communes, restore family farm plots, and put into place work bonuses and other incentives.

Five years later, Mao decided that too many were betraying the Communist Revolution by leading China back down the road to capitalism. He launched the Cultural Revolution. This mass movement attacked anyone who failed to support Mao’s ideas about creating an ideal communist society.

Mao unleashed millions of young people, called Red Guards, to enforce communist revolutionary purity. Carrying the *Little Red Book* of Mao’s sayings, they zealously denounced anyone suspected

of “capitalist leanings.” (Red is the traditional color of revolutionary communism.)

For nearly 10 years, a reign of terror gripped China. The Red Guards assaulted, tortured, persecuted, and forced millions from their jobs. With so many people’s lives disrupted, the economy suffered severe declines in food and industrial production.

The Cultural Revolution ended when Mao died in 1976. China’s economy was again in crisis. But even more troubling to Mao’s successors, many Chinese had lost faith in the Communist Party.

Deng Xiaoping and Capitalism

The death of Mao set off a power struggle within the Communist Party. Reformers wanted to change the party. Hardliners sought to continue on Mao’s path to communism. While this struggle in Beijing was going on, however, people in many parts of the country were taking matters into their own hands.

Even before Mao died, peasants were abandoning collective farming and producing food on their own to sell at rural free markets. Throughout China, many became peddlers, bike repairers, shoemakers, and other private entrepreneurs, working for a profit. Private moneylenders offered loans to these budding capitalists to finance their businesses. Wherever private enterprises emerged, they seemed to flourish.

None of this activity was legal. But local officials usually ignored the lawbreakers. The Beijing government judged local officials on how well they ran their towns and cities. These officials discovered that privately owned businesses reduced unemployment, cut prices,

provided better consumer goods and services, increased tax revenues, and tamped down social unrest.

Thus, local officials were motivated, with an occasional bribe thrown in, to bend or even break government regulations and laws. Sometimes they even registered a private enterprise as a collective or state-owned business. Thus, a private entrepreneur seemingly (but not literally) wore a “red hat.” There were an estimated half-million “red hat” capitalists, including even Communist Party officials, operating private enterprises in China by the mid-1980s.

The success of this grass-roots capitalism persuaded reform-minded leaders, anxious to restore confidence in the Communist Party, to adopt capitalist methods to stimulate economic growth. Deng Xiaoping, a veteran Communist Party leader, headed this economic reform effort after he emerged as the main leader of China in 1978.

Deng broke up the communes and permitted families to lease, but not own, farmland. The families had to sell a set amount of their farm production to the state at a fixed price. The rest they could sell on the free market for whatever price they could get. In addition, rural industries, owned collectively by a village, sold their products on the free market as well.

Deng’s reforms also legalized private enterprises owned by individuals, partners, and shareholders. Stock markets opened. Deng scaled back the government’s setting of prices and wages in favor of supply and demand on the free market. Because of all these reforms in the 1980s, the “red hats” began to come off, and increasing numbers of Chinese became “red capitalists.”

Deng faced big problems in reforming the state owned enterprises (SOEs). These were industries and other businesses owned and operated by the government. They ranged from small silk factories to huge steel mills. The reform of SOEs went much slower than in other parts of the economy. Early reforms gave more independence to managers over wages, prices, and production methods. But the SOEs had to compete with private enterprises.

Supposedly, if an SOE could not make a profit, it would have to go out of business. But this would mean mass layoffs and ending the “iron rice bowl.” While private entrepreneurs and worker shareholders bought out some SOEs, the government still keeps many of them operating even though they continue to lose money.

In another radical break with the past, Deng created Special Economic Zones. Located in the east-coast provinces of China, these zones attracted foreign investment by offering low-cost labor and tax breaks. Foreigners invested in manufacturing exports such as clothing, shoes, and toys. The economic boom drew huge numbers of migrant workers from all parts of China, seeking jobs and higher wages.

Results of Capitalist Reforms

When Deng Xiaoping died in 1997, Jiang Zemin replaced him and continued Deng’s capitalist reforms. He introduced amendments to China’s Constitution that declared private enterprise a “major component” of the “socialist market economy.” Under Jiang, the Communist Party also began to recruit Chinese capitalists as members.

By 2006, private enterprises accounted for half of China’s economic output (Gross Domestic Product or GDP) and two-thirds of industrial production. Private enterprises, owned by Chinese and foreign capitalists, continue to multiply and fuel China’s rapid GDP growth rate, which more than doubled the U.S.’s growth rate in 2007.

China is struggling, however, with many economic growth pains. The greatest improvements in Chinese income and standard of living have occurred mainly in the eastern coastal provinces and cities where Deng Xiaoping established the Special Economic Zones. In the rural western provinces, millions lost their lifetime jobs because of the breakup of the communes, the lack of investment in these provinces, and the closing down of some state-owned enterprises. Masses of workers have migrated to eastern cities.

Outside the booming city Shenzhen near Hong Kong, foreign and Chinese investors built hundreds of flimsy “three-in-one” factories, containing assembly lines, warehouses, and worker dormitories. Accidents and fires are frequent. Competition among these businesses is fierce, often causing managers to cut costs by any means, even cheating workers out of overtime pay and disregarding worker and consumer safety.

Despite government anti-corruption campaigns, factory owners often bribe local government officials and police to ignore building, labor, and pollution-law violations. “Here it is not the government but the bosses who control everything,” remarked one female worker.

Families work most farms today and sell what they produce on the free market. But they still cannot own the

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land they farm. Farmer protests have gotten increasingly violent over real estate and other developers bribing local officials to force farmers off the land for more profitable enterprises.

Clearly, China has become a more prosperous nation by unleashing private enterprises that are more efficient and productive than state-run businesses and farms. But the new economic wealth is uneven among the Chinese people. Private entrepreneurs, investors, city workers, and the families of Communist Party officials have benefitted the most from the emerging capitalist economy. An estimated 1 percent of Chinese households control over 60 percent of China's wealth. Some wonder if Marxism with its goal of economic equality is finished in China.

China and Democracy

Some democratic reforms have taken place in China since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, but the Chinese Communist Party still holds a monopoly on political power. Decisions are made by a few elite leaders chosen from the Communist Party.

Even so, significant political reforms have occurred at the local levels of government. Election reform laws now require the number of people running for local government councils to exceed the number of seats available. In addition, over 50 percent of the voters must vote for a candidate for him or her to win a seat. Political campaigning, primary elections, and absentee ballots are becoming more common. The Communist Party has apparently introduced these local democratic election reforms mainly to improve its trust among the people, eliminate corrupt local officials, and deter social unrest.

People have more freedom today to discuss public matters openly and even criticize the government, but only up to a point. The government comes down hard on individuals and groups that even appear to threaten Communist Party rule or social stability.

The army opened fire on pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Since that time, the government has acted quickly to smother attempts to establish independent student organizations and labor unions. China has even outlawed the Falun Gong, a seemingly harmless group that conducts physical exercises based on Buddhist spiritual practices. The government calls the group a cult that threatens public order.

The Chinese have wide access to newspapers, TV, and even talk radio. But certain topics are off limits. One dissenter was arrested recently for “endangering the state” when he tried to organize a “We Want Human Rights, Not the Olympics” petition. The government censors books, videos, and newspapers. It also blocks Internet sites and closes down blogs and chat rooms if they discuss topics such as “democracy” and “famine in China.”

Public demonstrations, some of them violent, have been increasing in recent years. Unemployed factory workers, farmers pushed off the land, and people fed up with corrupt officials have taken to the streets since they have few other ways to voice their grievances to the government.

Particularly disturbing to the government have been riots and uprisings by ethnic groups seeking independence. In the months leading up to the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, the government harshly suppressed protests in Tibet, which China annexed by military force in 1951.

China today may be trying to define democracy on its own terms: “democracy with Chinese characteristics,” in the words of an official document. For example, the Communist Party stresses group rights like health care over Western-style individual rights such as freedom of speech.

China's current top leader, Hu Jintao, has spoken about “greater participation” by the people. But party leaders have not given much serious discussion to expanding local competitive elections to China's provinces, let alone to the national level. “They want democracy to belong to the party, not to belong to the people,” said an anonymous retired party official.

Will the surprising development of capitalism in China lead to democracy? Political scientists had long assumed that as capitalism improved the wealth of a society, an expanding middle class would demand democratic rights. But some scholars have recently challenged this assumption as nations like Russia and China have adopted capitalism without democracy.

A number of recent surveys indicate that after 30 years of capitalist reforms in China, private entrepreneurs are much more interested in running their enterprises and making money than demanding democracy. As long as the Communist Party continues the program of free market reforms and keeps the country stable, China's new

Major Characteristics of Communist and Democratic Systems		
Communist		Democratic
	Marxist Economy	Capitalist Economy
1.	Farms, industries, and other enterprises owned in common by the people and operated by the government.	Farms, industries, and other enterprises mainly owned and operated by private entrepreneurs and shareholders seeking profits.
2.	Government economic plans set production goals, wages, and prices.	Production, wages, and prices set by free market supply and demand.
3.	Goods and services to be shared equally by all.	Goods and services distributed according to one's ability to pay.
	Leninist Government	Democratic Government
1.	Communist Party alone rules as a "democratic dictatorship."	Multiple political parties compete in fair elections to rule.
2.	Only those chosen by the party run unopposed in elections for government offices.	Competitive elections for offices at all levels of government.
3.	Persons in power dictate laws and how courts will rule.	Elected leaders must obey the laws and court decisions ("rule of law").
4.	No guarantee of civil or political rights; dissent against the party and government suppressed.	Individuals guaranteed civil and political rights, including dissent against the government.

capitalist middle class seems to be content to go along with the current regime, at least for now.

As new economic opportunities arise, more Chinese may finally begin to enjoy the prosperity that Mao Zedong could never achieve. Some experts estimate that by 2025 China will have the world's largest middle class. A wealthier and more confident China may yet evolve to become a democracy.

For Discussion and Writing

1. Why do you think Mao Zedong failed to achieve his Marxist communist goals of economic equality and prosperity?
2. Why did Deng Xiaoping launch a program of capitalist reforms?
3. Do you think China will ever become a democracy? Why or why not?

For Further Reading

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Tsai, Kellee S. *Capitalism without Democracy, The Private Sector in Contemporary China*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007.

A C T I V I T Y

Capitalism and Democracy in China

Students in small groups should first review the chart titled "Major Characteristics of Communist and Democratic Systems." The students should use these characteristics and the information from the article to discuss where to place today's China on the two scales below. Each group should then list evidence to defend its placement of China on the two scales.

Marxist Economy 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 **Capitalist Economy**

Leninist Government 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 **Democratic Government**



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Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*: Muckraking the Meat-Packing Industry

Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* to expose the appalling working conditions in the meat-packing industry. His description of diseased, rotten, and contaminated meat shocked the public and led to new federal food safety laws.

Before the turn of the 20th century, a major reform movement had emerged in the United States. Known as progressives, the reformers were reacting to problems caused by the rapid growth of factories and cities. Progressives at first concentrated on improving the lives of those living in slums and in getting rid of corruption in government.

By the beginning of the new century, progressives had started to attack huge corporations like Standard Oil, U.S. Steel, and the Armour meat-packing company for their unjust practices. The progressives revealed how these companies eliminated competition, set high prices, and treated workers as “wage slaves.”

The progressives differed, however, on how best to control these big businesses. Some progressives wanted to break up the large corporations with anti-monopoly laws. Others thought state or federal government regulation would be more effective. A growing minority argued in favor of socialism, the public ownership of industries. The owners of the large industries dismissed all these proposals: They demanded that they be left alone to run their businesses as they saw fit.

Theodore Roosevelt was the president when the progressive reformers were gathering strength. Assuming the presidency in 1901 after the assassination of William McKinley, he remained in the White House until 1909. Roosevelt favored large-scale enterprises. “The corporation is here to stay,” he declared. But he favored government regulation of them “with due regard of the public as a whole.”

Roosevelt did not always approve of the progressive-minded journalists and other writers who exposed what they saw as corporate



This 1906 picture shows workers tagging and washing recently killed sheep in a Chicago meat-packing house. (Library of Congress)

injustices. When David Phillips, a progressive journalist, wrote a series of articles that attacked U.S. senators of both political parties for serving the interests of big business rather than the people, President Roosevelt thought Phillips had gone too far. He referred to him as a man with a “muck-rake.”

Even so, Roosevelt had to admit, “There is filth on the floor, and it must be scraped up with the muck-rake.” The term “muckraker” caught on. It referred to investigative writers who uncovered the dark side of society.

Few places had more “filth on the floor” than the meat-packing houses of Chicago. Upton Sinclair, a largely unknown fiction writer, became an “accidental muckraker” when he wrote a novel about the meat-packing industry.

Packingtown

By the early 1900s, four major meat-packing corporations had bought out the many small slaughterhouse companies throughout the United States. Because they were so large, the Armour, Swift, Morris, and National Packing companies could dictate prices to cattle ranchers, feed growers, and consumers.

The Big Four meat-packing companies centralized their operations in a few cities. Largest of all was the meat-packing industry in Chicago. It spread through acres of stockyards, feed lots, slaughterhouses, and meat-processing plants. Together with the nearby housing area where the workers lived, this part of Chicago was known as Packingtown.

Long before Henry Ford adapted it to automobile production, meat packers had developed the first industrial assembly line. It was more accurately a “disassembly line,” requiring nearly 80 separate jobs from the killing of an animal to processing its meat for sale. “Killing gangs” held jobs like “knockers,” “rippers,” “legbreakers,” and “gutters.” The animal carcasses moved continuously on hooks until processed into fresh, smoked, salted, pickled, and canned meats. The organs, bones, fat, and other scraps ended up as lard, soap, and fertilizer. The workers said that the meat-packing companies “used everything but the squeal.”

Unskilled immigrant men did the backbreaking and often dangerous work, laboring in dark and unventilated rooms, hot in summer and unheated in winter. Many stood all day on floors covered with blood, meat scraps, and foul water, wielding sledgehammers and knives. Women and children over 14 worked at meat trimming, sausage making, and canning.

Most workers earned just pennies per hour and worked 10 hours per day, six days a week. A few skilled workers, however, made as much as 50 cents an hour as “pacesetters,” who sped up the assembly line to maximize production. The use of pacesetters caused great discontent among the workers.

By 1904, most of Chicago’s packing-house workers were recent immigrants from Poland, Slovakia, and Lithuania. They crowded into tenement apartments and rented rooms in Packingtown, next to the stinking stockyards and four city dumps.

Real estate agents sold some immigrants small houses on credit, knowing that few would be able to keep up with the payments due to job layoffs, pay cuts, or disabling injuries. When an immigrant fell behind in payments, the mortgage holder would foreclose, repaint, and sell the house to another immigrant family.

Upton Sinclair

Born in Baltimore in 1878, Upton Sinclair came from an old Virginia family. The Civil War had wiped out the family’s wealth and land holdings. Sinclair’s father became a traveling liquor salesman and alcoholic. The future author’s mother wanted him to become a minister. At age 5, he wrote his first story. It told about a pig that ate a pin, which ended up in a family’s sausage.

When he was 10, Sinclair’s family moved to New York City where he went to school and college. While attending Columbia University, he began to sell stories to

magazines. He specialized in western, adventure, sports, and war-hero fiction for working-class readers.

Sinclair graduated from Columbia in 1897, and three years later he married Meta Fuller. They had one child. Sinclair began to write novels but had difficulty getting them published.

As he was struggling to make a living as a writer, he began reading about socialism. He came to believe in the idea of a peaceful revolution in which Americans would vote for the government to take over the ownership of big businesses. He joined the Socialist Party in 1903, and a year later he began to write for *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist magazine.

In 1904, the meat-packer’s union in Chicago went on strike, demanding better wages and working conditions. The Big Four companies broke the strike and the union by bringing in strikebreakers, replacements for those on strike. The new workers kept the assembly lines running while the strikers and their families fell into poverty.

The editor of *Appeal to Reason* suggested that Sinclair write a novel about the strike. Sinclair, at age 26, went to Chicago at the end of 1904 to research the strike and the conditions suffered by the meat-packing workers. He interviewed them, their families, lawyers, doctors, and social workers. He personally observed the appalling conditions inside the meat-packing plants.

The Jungle

The Jungle is Sinclair’s fictionalized account of Chicago’s Packingtown. The title reflects his view of the brutality he saw in the meat-packing business. The story centered on a young man, Jurgis Rudkis, who had recently immigrated to Chicago with a group of relatives and friends from Lithuania.

Full of hope for a better life, Jurgis married and bought a house on credit. He was elated when he got a job as a “shoveler of guts” at “Durham,” a fictional firm based on Armour & Co., the leading Chicago meat packer.

Jurgis soon learned how the company sped up the assembly line to squeeze more work out of the men for the same pay. He discovered the company cheated workers by not paying them anything for working part of an hour.

Jurgis saw men in the pickling room with skin diseases. Men who used knives on the sped-up assembly lines frequently lost fingers. Men who hauled 100-pound hunks of meat crippled their backs. Workers with

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tuberculosis coughed constantly and spit blood on the floor. Right next to where the meat was processed, workers used primitive toilets with no soap and water to clean their hands. In some areas, no toilets existed, and workers had to urinate in a corner. Lunchrooms were rare, and workers ate where they worked.

Almost as an afterthought, Sinclair included a chapter on how diseased, rotten, and contaminated meat products were processed, doctored by chemicals, and mislabeled for sale to the public. He wrote that workers would process dead, injured, and diseased animals after regular hours when no meat inspectors were around. He explained how pork fat and beef scraps were canned and labeled as “potted chicken.”

Sinclair wrote that meat for canning and sausage was piled on the floor before workers carried it off in carts holding sawdust, human spit and urine, rat dung, rat poison, and even dead rats. His most famous description of a meat-packing horror concerned men who fell into steaming lard vats:

. . . and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,— sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard!

Jurgis suffered a series of heart-wrenching misfortunes that began when he was injured on the assembly line. No workers’ compensation existed, and the employer was not responsible for people injured on the job. Jurgis’ life fell apart, and he lost his wife, son, house, and job.

Then Jurgis met a socialist hotel owner, who hired him as a porter. Jurgis listened to socialist speakers who appeared at the hotel, attended political rallies, and drew inspiration from socialism. Sinclair used the speeches to express his own views about workers voting for socialist candidates to take over the government and end the evils of capitalist greed and “wage slavery.”

In the last scene of the novel, Jurgis attended a celebration of socialist election victories in Packingtown. Jurgis was excited and once again hopeful. A speaker, probably modeled after Socialist Party presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs, begged the crowd to “Organize! Organize! Organize!” Do this, the speaker shouted, and “Chicago will be ours! *Chicago will be ours!* CHICAGO WILL BE OURS!”

The Public Reaction

The Jungle was first published in 1905 as a serial in *The Appeal to Reason* and then as a book in 1906. Sales rocketed. It was an international best-seller, published in 17 languages.

Sinclair was dismayed, however, when the public reacted with outrage about the filthy and falsely labeled meat but ignored the plight of the workers. Meat sales dropped sharply. “I aimed at the public’s heart,” he said, “and by accident I hit it in the stomach.”

Sinclair thought of himself as a novelist, not as a muckraker who investigated and wrote about economic and social injustices. But *The Jungle* took on a life of its own as one of the great muckraking works of the Progressive Era. Sinclair became an “accidental muckraker.”

The White House was bombarded with mail, calling for reform of the meat-packing industry. After reading *The Jungle*, President Roosevelt invited Sinclair to the White House to discuss it. The president then appointed a special commission to investigate Chicago’s slaughterhouses.

The special commission issued its report in May 1906. The report confirmed almost all the horrors that Sinclair had written about. One day, the commissioners witnessed a slaughtered hog that fell part way into a worker toilet. Workers took the carcass out without cleaning it and put it on a hook with the others on the assembly line.

The commissioners criticized existing meat-inspection laws that required only confirming the healthfulness of animals at the time of slaughter. The commissioners recommended that inspections take place at every stage of the processing of meat. They also called for the secretary of agriculture to make rules requiring the “cleanliness and wholesomeness of animal products.”

New Federal Food Laws

President Roosevelt called the conditions revealed in the special commission’s report “revolting.” In a letter to Congress, he declared, “A law is needed which will enable the inspectors of the [Federal] Government to inspect and supervise from the hoof to the can the preparation of the meat food product.”

Roosevelt overcame meat-packer opposition and pushed through the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. The law authorized inspectors from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to stop any bad or mislabeled meat from entering interstate and foreign commerce. This law greatly expanded federal government regulation of private enterprise. The meat packers, however, won a

provision in the law requiring federal government rather than the companies to pay for the inspection.

Sinclair did not like the law's regulation approach. True to his socialist convictions, he preferred meat-packing plants to be publicly owned and operated by cities, as was commonly the case in Europe.

Passage of the Meat Inspection Act opened the way for Congress to approve a long-blocked law to regulate the sale of most other foods and drugs. For over 20 years, Harvey W. Wiley, chief chemist at the Department of Agriculture, had led a "pure food crusade." He and his "Poison Squad" had tested chemicals added to preserve foods and found many were dangerous to human health. The uproar over *The Jungle* revived Wiley's lobbying efforts in Congress for federal food and drug regulation.

Roosevelt signed a law regulating foods and drugs on June 30, 1906, the same day he signed the Meat Inspection Act. The Pure Food and Drug Act regulated food additives and prohibited misleading labeling of food and drugs. This law led to the formation of the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The two 1906 laws ended up increasing consumer confidence in the food and drugs they purchased, which benefited these businesses. The laws also acted as a wedge to expand federal regulation of other industries, one of the strategies to control big business pursued by the progressives.

After *The Jungle*

The Jungle made Upton Sinclair rich and famous. He started a socialist colony in a 50-room mansion in New Jersey, but the building burned down after a year. In 1911, his wife ran off with a poet. He divorced her, but soon he remarried and moved to California.

During his long life, he wrote more than 90 novels. *King Coal* was based on the 1914 massacre of striking miners and their families in Colorado. *Boston* was about the highly publicized case of Sacco and Vancetti, two anarchists tried and executed for bank robbery and murder in the 1920s. His novel *Dragon's Teeth*, about Nazi Germany, won the 1943 Pulitzer Prize. None of these novels, however, achieved the success of *The Jungle*.

Several of Sinclair's books were made into movies. In 1914, Hollywood released a movie version of *The Jungle*. Recently, his work *Oil!*, which dealt with California's oil industry in the 1920s, was made into the film *There Will Be Blood*.

During the Great Depression, Sinclair entered electoral politics. He ran for governor of California as a Socialist in 1930 and as a Democrat in 1934. In the 1934 election, he promoted a program he called "End Poverty in California." He wanted the state to buy idle factories and abandoned farms and lease them to the unemployed. The Republican incumbent governor, Frank Merriam, defeated him, but Sinclair still won over 800,000 votes (44 percent).

After the death of his second wife in 1961, Sinclair moved to New Jersey to be with his son. He died there in 1968 at age 90.

People still read *The Jungle* for its realistic picture of conditions in the meat-packing industry at the turn of the 20th century. Like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Jungle* proved the power of fiction to move a nation.

For Discussion and Writing

1. Why did the existing inspection system fail to guard the safety of meat for human consumption?
2. Why was Upton Sinclair dismayed about the public reaction and legislation that followed publication of *The Jungle*?
3. How did *The Jungle* help the progressives achieve their goals?

For Further Reading

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A C T I V I T Y

Working in Packingtown

Upton Sinclair was disappointed that Congress did not address the injustices suffered by workers in Packingtown's meat-packing industry. Take on the role of a muckraker and write an editorial that details the injustices to workers and what Congress should do about them.

A L T E R N A T I V E A C T I V I T Y

A Modern Muckraker

Look at a contemporary problem in the community, state, or nation. Investigate it. Write an editorial on what should be done about it.

John Dewey and the Reconstruction of American Democracy

John Dewey was perhaps America's most famous philosopher. He devoted his life trying to reform the public schools and reconstruct American democracy to increase citizen political participation.

John Dewey was born in 1859 in Burlington, Vermont. His mother came from a family with a strong New England Christian tradition emphasizing service to others to improve society. His father was involved in business ventures.

Dewey attended public schools in Burlington. The prevailing teaching method stressed memorization and recitation of facts. He was a shy student who did not like school.

Dewey's intellectual life bloomed, however, after he entered the University of Vermont, which had a reputation for being strong in philosophy. At this time, philosophy in most American colleges was heavily religious in nature and mainly prepared students for church ministry.

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Although the classic curriculum at the University of Vermont stressed Latin, Greek, ancient history, and religion, Dewey read books and journals from the college library on many other subjects. He was especially interested in new developments in the natural sciences and in European philosophers such as Herbert Spencer, who tried to apply Darwin's theory of evolution to economics.

After graduating in 1879, Dewey was unsure what he wanted to do in life. He taught high school for a while but was not good at it. Then after the leading U.S. philosophy journal published an essay he wrote, Dewey decided to pursue a career as a philosopher.



John Dewey (1859–1952), writer, philosopher, educator, and social activist, worked to reform American education and democracy. (Morris Library at Southern Illinois University Carbondale)

Becoming a Philosopher

In 1882, Dewey entered Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore to study philosophy. Unlike most American university philosophy programs, the one at Johns Hopkins emphasized new German scientific research methods rather than religion as the best way to arrive at the truth. Dewey also embraced the “new psychology,” then being practiced in Europe, which focused on observing human behavior and on scientific experimentation.

After he received his PhD from Johns Hopkins in 1884, Dewey began his career teaching philosophy at the University of Michigan. His students welcomed his new emphasis on science and psychology. Dewey became increasingly convinced that to be a philosopher one also had to be an experimental psychologist.

In 1886, Dewey married Harriet Alice Chapman, whom he called Alice. A former teacher, she was majoring in philosophy at the University of Michigan. She was a freethinking feminist who fought for women's rights all her adult life. She also turned Dewey's thinking around to use philosophy to help solve real social problems.

In 1894, Dewey moved to the new University of Chicago to become head of the department of philosophy and psychology. He based his department on scientific research, using experimentation and other laboratory methods.

Over the next 10 years, many called Dewey and the other philosophers in his department the “Chicago Pragmatists.” Pragmatism meant they relied heavily on scientific experimentation to solve social and ethical problems (see page 13). Soon after Dewey began teaching at the University of Chicago, he launched a bold experiment in education that he hoped would transform American democracy.

Schools for Democracy

Most U.S. public schools resembled the ones Dewey had attended as a boy. They were “curriculum-centered,” stressing memorization and recitation of traditional subject matter, much of which had little connection with

America's rapidly changing industrial society. Fear and humiliation seemed to be the most common methods teachers used to motivate their students.

Others in favor of "progressive education," however, were exploring new ways to teach children. Some of these education reformers promoted a "child-centered" type of schooling. Supporters of this approach believed nothing should interfere with the natural development of the child. Thus, students should study whatever interested them.

Dewey rejected both approaches. He criticized the "curriculum-centered" schools for ignoring the interests and experiences of the child. He faulted the "child-centered" schools for failing to adequately teach history, math, science and the other traditional school subjects.

Dewey developed a hypothesis that the interests and experiences of children should be the starting point for learning subject matter. As a pragmatist, however, he wanted to test his hypothesis in a laboratory setting.

Soon after Dewey became chairman of the philosophy and psychology department at the University of Chicago, the school's president asked him to also organize a new department to train teachers. Dewey agreed to do this, but insisted that the department have a strong experimental laboratory component.

Two years later, the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, soon called the "Dewey School," began operating. This was an elementary school on the grounds of the university. Dewey's vision was to create a miniature cooperative community of teachers and students to educate children for active participation in a democratic society.

The "Dewey School" Experiment

The Dewey School opened in January 1896 with one teacher and 16 pupils, aged 6–9. They were mostly the children of university faculty members and their friends. Dewey tried teaching children of mixed ages, but found that did not work well. He finally organized them into 11 age groups. By the time the school closed in 1904, it had grown to include 140 pupils, aged 4–13, 23 teachers, and 10 assistants.

Dewey designed an elementary school curriculum that went far beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. The students also learned science, art, history, methods of investigation, tools of communicating, physical

education, shop skills, and habits of self-discipline and service to others.

But what made the Dewey School far different from traditional and even most other progressive schools was *how* the students learned the subject matter. After first trying a curriculum based on the stages of human history, Dewey and his teachers developed an "Occupation Theme" that combined "hand and mind."

Dewey's teachers created problem-solving activities. Each activity duplicated occupational problems that people had to solve throughout human history. The students had to figure out how to solve the problems themselves. The youngest children, ages 4–5, worked at cooking, weaving, carpentry, and other occupations linked to their homes and neighborhoods. In doing these things, they also had to learn about the past, scientific proof, measurement, and other subject matter.

Older children planted a garden. They learned about botany, soil chemistry, the role of farming in human history, the physics of light and water, and how these subjects related to animal and human life.

Dewey's occupation-oriented curriculum enabled students to experience how human knowledge evolved. They made a cave to study prehistoric life and processed animal skins and cotton to learn the history of clothing.

Dewey used occupations not to train children to become cooks and gardeners but to motivate them to learn the traditional academic disciplines. As the students progressed from year to year, the curriculum became more complex and abstract. The oldest group, comparable to eighth grade, concentrated on such things as scientific experiments and economics.

Dewey rejected the idea that elementary school teachers should teach all subjects. At the Dewey School, they each specialized in a certain area and collaborated with one another to plan activities and projects.

The teachers used a variety of methods rare in public schools. Students participated in shop and art projects, field trips, science lab experiments, games, storytelling, and discussions. They even prepared a gourmet lunch as part of a French class. Teachers often took on the role as a helper or guide in the classroom. But they were still in charge and decided what and how the students would learn.

(Continued on next page)

Beyond the subject matter, Dewey wanted the students to learn how to cooperate in solving problems, as they would need to do in a democratic society. Each child had a share in the work. The students learned to accept responsibility, lead, help others, and think.

By most accounts, the Dewey School experiment was successful, although it was limited to a rather special group of children. The school closed in 1904, however, when Dewey resigned from the university following a dispute over his appointment of Alice as principal of the school. This ended his laboratory experimentation in education.

Dewey continued to write and lecture on school reform. He published his most well-known book in this area, *Democracy and Education*, in 1916. The book harshly criticized the still common practice of forcing students to memorize masses of disconnected facts.

“The Great Community”

After leaving Chicago, Dewey accepted a position to teach philosophy at Columbia University in New York City. He began to write and lecture more on reconstructing American democracy for greater citizen participation. He realized that this could not occur in school classrooms alone. Philosophers and other intellectuals, he believed, needed to step forward and push for democratic changes in all areas of American life.

In the years leading up to World War I, Dewey spoke out for worker and women’s rights. He also helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the New York City Teacher’s Union.

Dewey reluctantly supported President Woodrow Wilson’s decision to enter World War I. He worried, however, about increasing government restrictions on free speech and academic freedom during and after the war. In 1920, he helped organize the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Disillusioned by the weakness of the League of Nations to enforce world peace, he joined the movement to outlaw war and establish a world court to settle international disputes. Meanwhile, his fame as a philosopher and progressive educator led to invitations for him to lecture and teach in Japan, China, Turkey, Mexico, and the Soviet Union.

In the 1920s, critics began to question Dewey’s idea about more citizen participation in American

democracy. Liberal journalist Walter Lippman wrote that ordinary citizens lacked the intelligence, knowledge, and time to think about and decide important public issues.

Lippman favored a democracy in which experts supplied information to elected professional politicians who would decide what laws and policies were best for the American people. The role of the citizen, Lippman said, should be limited to voting in occasional elections: “To support the Ins when things are going well; to support the Outs when they seem to be going badly.”

In 1927, Dewey answered Lippman and other critics in his book, *The Public and Its Problems*. Dewey argued that American democracy should be reconstructed so that government would be “by the people” not just “for the people,” as Lippman believed.

Dewey said that the most important thing about democracy is what comes before voting: the thinking, discussion, and debate. He proposed that groups such as local unions, professional organizations, and business associations should meet regularly to deliberate on public questions. Elected politicians would follow their lead since only the ordinary citizens knew what was best for them.

Dewey agreed that Americans were often uninformed and easily manipulated by the wealthy and powerful. Thus, he repeated his ideas to make schools emphasize problem solving, thinking skills, and other knowledge necessary for democratic decision making. In addition, he assigned a key role to the media (then mainly newspapers, journals, and books) to pass on accurate facts from the experts to the people.

Dewey concluded that the result would be a more democratic society, which he called “The Great Community.” Governing the nation, he said, would be everyone’s business, not just that of an elite class of experts and politicians.

Dewey as Social Activist

Alice, Dewey’s wife and inspiration for transforming philosophy into a useful instrument for social progress, died in 1927. Two years later, at the peak of his international fame, he celebrated his 70th birthday. The following year he retired from Columbia.

He soon began a new career as a social activist. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Dewey harshly criticized capitalism for “stunting” workers by

Pragmatism

William James, America's leading psychology scholar in the 1890s, was the first to use "pragmatism" to describe his philosophy. James once said, "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good." The reliance on what works and what is useful based on experimental trial and error provide the foundation for the philosophy of pragmatism.

Pragmatists value experimental proof over religious faith, the wisdom of thinkers in the past, or human reasoning to discover truth and knowledge. Pragmatists want to know what works as a practical matter in such areas as law, politics, and education.

Many associate John Dewey's philosophy with pragmatism, but he preferred to use the term "instrumentalism." He argued that ideas were instruments or tools to experimentally investigate and solve social problems. His most famous experiment, the Dewey School at the University of Chicago, attempted to find out the best way to educate American children for life in a democracy.

denying them any share in controlling their work. But he also condemned Marxism, Stalinism, and government-planned "state socialism" for going too far in taking away the freedom of individuals. In addition, he thought President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal liberalism did not go far enough in its reforms.

In books, political journals, and speeches, Dewey staked out a middle ground between unregulated capitalism and state socialism. He envisioned a decentralized "planning society" where workers and consumers would participate in decisions affecting their lives and communities. But Dewey never developed a clear plan for what he called "democratic socialism."

Dewey rejected revolutionary rhetoric and violence to achieve his ideas for reconstructing American democracy. He also did not have much faith in either of the two major political parties. In the midst of the Depression, he declared, "democracy has joined the unemployed." He tried to organize a third party, but finally abandoned that effort after Roosevelt's landslide re-election in 1936.

Dewey's Impact

By the time Dewey celebrated his 90th birthday in 1949, he had published about a thousand books, essays, articles, and other writings and had given countless lectures and speeches. Dewey was 92 when he died in 1952 after careers as a philosopher, educator, and social activist, spanning 70 years.

Widely honored throughout the world at his death, Dewey may have been America's most famous philosopher. But he had limited impact on future generations of American philosophers. Some have followed Dewey and pragmatism, but most American

philosophers have adopted the methods of British language philosophy. They debate abstract problems rather than using ideas pragmatically as Dewey did to further social progress.

Dewey's greatest impact was on education. While few schools adopted Dewey's experimental curriculum, his ideas helped move schools away from recitation and rote memorization and toward discussion and problem solving.

Progressive school reformers, however, often misused Dewey's ideas about schooling for a democratic society. Even today, many critics unfairly blame Dewey for ruining the schools with "progressive education."

Americans never adopted Dewey's ideas for reconstructing American democracy. Yet, he always considered our democracy a pragmatic experiment and once wrote, "the experiment is not played out yet."

For Discussion and Writing

1. Why was the Dewey School an example of Dewey's pragmatism?
2. Do you think the curriculum and methods used in the Dewey School over 100 years ago would work in today's elementary schools? Explain.
3. How did Walter Lippman and John Dewey differ over how American democracy should work? Who had the better idea? Why?

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(Continued on next page)

A C T I V I T Y

“The Great Community”

Meet in small groups to evaluate the relevance of John Dewey’s “Great Community” for American democracy today.

1. Each group should discuss the following key components of Dewey’s “Great Community” and then decide whether they are both *pragmatically workable* and *desirable* in the United States today:
 - a. Elected politicians should follow the lead of the citizens who meet regularly in all sorts of local groups to discuss and decide public issues.
 - b. The media (now including TV, radio, and the Internet) should provide accurate expert information to citizens.
 - c. The schools should be cooperative mini-communities where students will learn the knowledge and thinking skills they will need in order to participate more fully in American democracy.
2. The groups should then report and debate their conclusions.
3. Finally, each student should write an essay on this question: Should we reconstruct American democracy along the lines of John Dewey’s “Great Community”?

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Standards Addressed

China

National High School World History Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world. (13) Understands how global political change has altered the world economy . . .

California History-Social Science Content Standard 10.9: Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world. (4) Analyze the Chinese Civil War, the rise of Mao Zedong, and the subsequent political and economic upheavals in China . . .

The Jungle

National High School World History Standard 20: Understands how Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption. (1) Understands the origins and impact of the Progressive movement . . . (2) Understands major social and political issues of the Progressive era . . .

California History-Social Science Content Standard 11.2: Students analyze the relationship among the rise of industrialization, large-scale rural-to-urban migration, and massive immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. (1) Know the effects of industrialization on living and working conditions, including the portrayal of working conditions and food safety in Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*.

Dewey

National High School Civics Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals. (1) Understands how individual participation in the political process relates to the realization of the fundamental values of American constitutional democracy.

California History-Social Science Content Standard 12.2: Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured. (4) Understand the obligations of civic-mindedness, including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service, and service in the military or alternate service.

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PostScript

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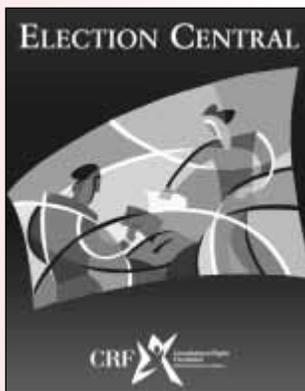
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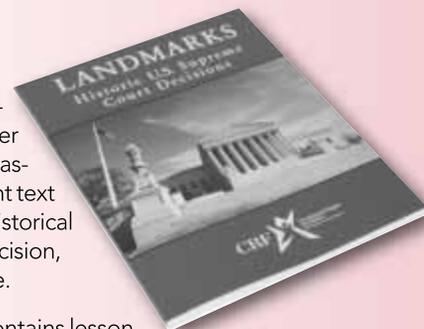
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Leadership Changes at Constitutional Rights Foundation

Following a nationwide search, Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) has named Jonathan Estrin to be its new President.

Estrin had run a consulting practice in education, entertainment and new media opportunities for non-profit organizations. He was formerly Executive Vice-President of the American Film Institute, where he supervised its K-12 Teacher Education program, its renowned Conservatory of Filmmaking as well as film exhibition and new technologies. Prior to that he was the Dean of the College of Media Arts & Design at Drexel University.

Estrin has been a writer-producer for 30 years and has created over 100 hours of award-winning television series, movies, and miniseries for various broadcast and cable networks. His credits include *Cagney & Lacey*, the Showtime movie *Jasper, Texas* as well as such series as *Family Law* and an adaptation of Pat Conroy's novel *The Water Is Wide* for the Hallmark Hall of Fame/CBS. Estrin also chairs the Board of Operation USA, a Los Angeles-based international medical relief and development agency.

Estrin will be joined in senior management by longtime CRF staff member Marshall Croddy, who will assume the newly created role of Vice President, heading up the critical areas of programs and publications.

Estrin succeeds Todd Clark, who served as Executive Director since 1990. Under Clark's leadership and throughout his 40 years of service to the organization, CRF has become a leading source of civic education for millions of students and teachers nationwide. Clark will continue to provide consulting advice for the nationally recognized *Educating for Democracy: California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools*.



Jonathan Estrin
President



Marshall Croddy
Vice President

About Constitutional Rights Foundation

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