

4MH #011 What Problems Led to the Pure Food and Drug Act?



Thomas Johnston

Podcast Script Draft 3

4 Minute History #010: What Problems Led to the Pure Food and Drug Act?

[DRUMBEAT BUMPER MUSIC]

Politicians, journalists, and everyday people spend a lot of time and efforts on solving a never-ending list of injustices in order to make our democracy work for all Americans.

“There ought to be a law!” becomes the cry. And so, new laws are often made to solve problems.

One way to study history is to examine these problems and the responses to them. In 1906, Congress passed, and President Roosevelt signed, the Pure Food and Drug Act. But what problems or injustices were behind the making of this law? That is today’ Big Question on 4-Minute History

[THE BIG QUESTION:]

Hi, I’m Thomas Johnston and today on 4-Minute History, our Big Question is - What Problems Led to the Pure Food and Drug Act?



[INTRO / PODCAST THEME MUSIC]

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[DRUMBEAT BUMPER MUSIC]

In the late 1800s, after the Civil War, many people migrated to cities. The way of life for most Americans was transformed from farm life to city life as railroads and industry expanded and America seemed to become industrial and modern overnight.

As people began moving to cities and working in factories, they began to rely on prepared and packaged foods instead of growing their own food.

Many factory owners were concerned with making the most profit possible and there was almost no government regulation. Factory workers were expected to labor long hours in dangerous conditions.

A journalist named Upton Sinclair went undercover to investigate the conditions in the Chicago meat packing industry. These factories were dangerous for the employees and they were also packaging rotten and diseased meat which was often tainted by rats and the filth from the dirty factories.



Sinclair wrote a best-selling novel called *The Jungle*, in which he exposed the unsanitary practices of the meat packing factories. His book outraged the public. People were horrified to read what was actually being put into their cans of beef. President Theodore Roosevelt was also angered when he read the novel. He had personally received the bad canned meats given to the army during the Spanish-American War.

Another problem was with medicines. In the late 1800s, medicines were widely advertised and sold to the public promising cures for just about any sickness imaginable.

These so-called medicines were not regulated and they contained a variety of ingredients that would never be allowed today.

Many of these concoctions were alcohol and flavoring but others also contained oils, drugs like cannabis and cocaine, and even turpentine. Coca Cola started as one of these medicines. Coca Cola derives its name from the cocaine it originally contained.

President Roosevelt was determined to clean up America's food supply and he encouraged the government to do something about the problem. In 1906, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and Theodore Roosevelt signed it into law. The law established standards of purity for packaged food and drugs and required that all ingredients be shown on package labels. To

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further protect consumers, the law also required that certain drugs could only be distributed by a prescription from a licensed physician. The Pure Food and Drug Act paved the way for the creation of the federal Food and Drug Administration, which now regulates and provides oversight of the nations' foods and medicines.

The Pure Food and Drug Act is a classic example of progressive reform. Progressives used the power of government to protect Americans from the greedy and unfair practices of big business.

Thanks to the reforms of the Pure Food and Drug Act, we can now have much more confidence in the safety and purity of the foods and medicines that we buy.

[DRUMBET BUMPER]

[OUTRO THEME MUSIC UNDER VOICE]

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[OUTRO THEME MUSIC RISE TO FULL VOLUME]

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