The Flivver King

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF UPTON SINCLAIR

Upton Sinclair was born in 1878 to Upton Sinclair, Sr. and Priscilla Sinclair. His mother's family was very affluent while his father was an unsuccessful liquor salesman; this gave Sinclair insight as to how both the rich and the poor lived in the late 19th century. In 1888, the Sinclair family moved to Queens, New York, and Sinclair started at the City College of New York just before his 14th birthday. He wrote dime novels and magazine articles to move his parents into an apartment when he was 17 years old. He then attended Columbia University, where he majored in law but also studied writing. After graduating, Sinclair married Meta Fuller in 1900, and the pair had their first child, David, in 1901. Sinclair then pursued a writing career, devoting his work to criticizing the social and economic conditions of the early 20th century. He went undercover to write the political exposé *The Jungle*, which addressed concerns in Chicago's meatpacking plant. Following the success of the book, he ran (unsuccessfully) as a Socialist candidate for Congress. In 1911, Sinclair and Fuller divorced, and in 1913, Sinclair married Mary Craig Kimbrough. From 1913 to 1914, Sinclair made three trips to the coal fields of Colorado to write his book *King Coal*. He then helped to organize against Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Company, and in 1927, he wrote *Oil!* Sinclair also made multiple attempts to run for Congress throughout the 1920s and ran for the governorship of California in 1934. Sinclair continued to write throughout the 1940s and 1950s, winning the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1943 for *Dragon's Teeth*. Sinclair's wife died in 1961, and he married for a third time, to Mary Elizabeth Willis. Following her death in 1967, Sinclair died a year later in 1968, in New Jersey.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Flivver King spans from 1892 to 1936, covering many significant periods of United States and global history as well as specific historical events surrounding the development of cars and unions. Sinclair touches on the Panic of 1893, which was caused by the failure of a major Argentine bank and led to global economic uncertainty. The less confidence people held in the banking system, the more they removed their money from it, and the further stocks and the economy fell. The next major world event that Sinclair focuses on is World War I, which began in the summer of 1914 and ended in November of 1918 and primarily involved Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire (the Axis Powers) fighting against France, Britain, and Russia (the Allied Powers). At first, the U.S. government remained neutral in the conflict, but over time, as the munitions and banking industries became more involved in funding the Allied Powers, President Woodrow Wilson expanded the army and navy. Following Wilson's reelection in 1916, the United States entered the conflict, and Henry Ford helped manufacture vehicles and other equipment for the war. The final period that Sinclair focuses on is the Great Depression, which began with the Stock Market crash of 1929 (Black Tuesday) and continued through the 1930s. As a result, of the crash, the economy spiraled because of reduced spending, falling confidence, and lower production, and U.S. unemployment rose to 23 percent. This resulted in major political changes in the U.S.: in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected by a wide margin to enact a recovery plan called the New Deal. The New Deal instituted programs to provide relief for the unemployment, recover the economy, and reform the financial system to prevent another depression. At this time, the labor movement expanded greatly as well, which is also explored in *The Flivver King*. In 1933, most union members belonged to skilled craft unions, but F.D.R.'s National Industrial Recovery Act enabled collective bargaining among workers within a given industry, while the National Labor Relations Act required businesses to negotiate with any union supported by the majority of their employees. This is why Henry Ford was so intent on preventing his workers from unionizing and even resorted to violence to do so. While United Auto Workers of America (UAW) was founded in 1935, Ford would not agree to a collective bargaining agreement with them until 1941.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Upton Sinclair has written several other muckraking novels, including *The Jungle*, *King Coal*, and *Oil!*, which tackle the meatpacking, coal, and oil industries, respectively. Other muckraking books of the period include Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*, which documents the squalid living conditions in New York City in the 1880s, Ida Tarbell's *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, and Lincoln Steffens's *The Shame of the Cities*, which focuses on political corruption. Other books that focus on Henry Ford include his autobiography, *My Life and Work*, Steven Watts's *The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century*, and Sidney Olson's *Young Henry Ford: A Picture History of the First Forty Years*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Flivver King
- **When Written:** Around 1937
- **Where Written:** California

- **When Published:** 1937
- **Literary Period:** Muckraking Journalism
- **Genre:** Muckraking Journalism, Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Detroit, Michigan; 1892–1936
- **Climax:** Tom Shutt Jr. is beaten unconscious as Henry Ford attends a lavish party
- **Antagonist:** Capitalism, Greed
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Union Solidarity. *The Flivver King* was so important to the labor movement that the UAW, the auto workers' union, published the novel in 1937. Thanks in part to the book and waning public support for Ford, the Ford Motor Company agreed to a collective bargaining agreement with the UAW in 1941.

Notable Critics. Sinclair was not the only famous author of the time to critique Henry Ford. In *Brave New World*, author Aldous Huxley posits Ford as a god-like figure. In the World State, the setting of *Brave New World*, "Our Ford" takes the place of the words "Our Lord," the symbol "T" (for the Model T) takes the place of the cross, and 1908 (the year in which the Model T was first produced) becomes the first year of the calendar in "Anno Ford." Huxley uses this reverence of Ford satirically to criticize mass production, homogeneity, and mass consumption.

PLOT SUMMARY

It's 1892 in Detroit, Michigan, and Henry Ford has finally completed the first model of his "horseless carriage," which runs on a gasoline powered engine. Though many of the neighbors are skeptical that Ford's invention will amount to anything, Ford insists that he's going to revolutionize transportation for the masses. Young Abner Shutt admires Ford's invention. He often watches Ford work and helps push Ford's **car** home when it occasionally breaks down.

At first, Ford has a difficult time getting investors, but after 12 years of tinkering with his invention, he holds a race against another car and wins. Buoyed by the results, Ford raises $28,000 to start a company. When Ford sets up shop, Abner, who is now 24, asks him for a job, and Ford agrees to hire him. Abner works on screwing spindle-nuts onto the axle of the car to secure the wheel in place.

While Ford's investors want to market the car only to rich people and make new models every year, Ford wants to mass produce a cheap car that everyone will want and ultimately be able to afford. Ford's strategy proves successful, and he quickly earns millions of dollars selling the Ford Model T. As he expands his business, he hires more workers and divides the labor so that each man is doing a small task. When the time comes for someone to oversee some of the assembly because there are so many men working, Ford promotes Abner to sub-foreman, and he makes $2.75 a day. Abner is thrilled, and considers himself to be one of the luckiest men alive. After Abner is promoted, Ford also implements a new device called the **assembly line**, which allows men to assemble the car along a belt so that they don't have to move. Dividing the labor further, the belt reduces the time for assembling a car from 12 hours and 33 minutes to 93 minutes. After implementing the belt, Ford periodically speeds it up without the men knowing, and if the men can't keep pace, they're fired.

While Ford expands his business, Abner expands his family: he marries a girl named Milly and has four children: John, Hank, Daisy, and Tom Jr. Ford and Abner both feel successful and like they are achieving their own versions of the American Dream. Ford pays his workers well, figuring that employees will want to buy a car eventually and he will earn the money back. But as wages go up, so do prices of consumer goods and real estate, and Abner feels as poor as he has always been.

When World War I begins in 1917, Ford is initially opposed to it, and Abner follows suit because he looks up to his employer. As the war drags on, however, Ford recognizes the profit in making trucks and ambulances for the U.S. government and the Allies, so he puts his personal opposition aside and makes $29 million dollars doing war work. Though he says that he is going to return the profits to the government, he never does so.

After the war, Ford buys a **newspaper** called the *Dearborn Independent*. When a Russian man named Boris Brasol tells him that the world's problems are due to a conspiracy of the Jews, Ford begins printing anti-Semitic articles in the paper. Abner reads the paper and starts absorbing these viewpoints. Then, one day, a man from the Ku Klux Klan asks Abner to join the organization; he got Abner's name and address from the paper's subscription list. Abner joins and learns more about the "evil race" of the Jews and starts burning crosses on the lawns of Jews, Catholics, communists, and other people whom they view as a threat to "Protestant Gentile America."

Abner's children grow up and start to find their own success: John goes to Ford's trade school and becomes a welder in Ford's factories; he eventually rises through the ranks and is able to marry a girl named Annabelle and buy an elegant home. Hank gets involved in smuggling alcohol from Canada to Detroit, but Abner ignores this business and is happy when Hank turns up with money for him and Milly. Daisy studies at a business college and ultimately works in the office of a company that makes cushions for Ford, while Tom Jr. is recruited at Michigan State for football and starts to learn about the labor movement there.

The 1920s are a time of relative prosperity for Ford and the Shutts, though at times Ford "reorganizes" his factories and his employees are out of work for months with no benefits while

Ford updates his machinery. When this happens, Abner depletes his savings and looks for lower-paying jobs. But as soon as he is back working, he forgets all his grievances and is grateful for the money flowing in—he knows that if he complains, he will be fired and replaced with a younger, better worker.

In 1929, the Great Depression hits. Abner and hundreds of thousands of other workers are laid off from Ford's and have no benefits. The only member of the Shutt family who keeps their job is Hank, and the money he brings home is lifesaving. As the depression wears on, both Abner's father (Tom Sr.) and mother die, and Abner's heart breaks when he is too poor to afford a proper burial for his mother. Ford, meanwhile, loses hundreds of millions of dollars and has to hire a security team to protect himself from angry workers. Inside the plant, he also uses his security to make sure that workers aren't conspiring to unionize.

In 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt is elected president and begins enacting New Deal policies like providing relief to the poor and unemployed, and the economy starts to pick up again. However, profits pick up far more quickly than wages; many people are still unemployed, and the conditions in the plant are worse than ever. And even though Ford is the wealthiest man in the world, he is isolated, paranoid, and feels completely at the mercy of his billion dollar fortune.

After Tom Jr. graduates, he returns home with the intention of getting a job at Ford's and trying to organize the workers into a union so that they can have a decent living wage. At first, Tom is successful, but when Ford's spies discover that Tom is trying to start a union movement, the company fires him.

The book's final chapters are split between Tom and Ford over the course of a single evening; Tom is speaking at a labor meeting, while Ford attends a lavish party at the home of a wealthy friend. Tom speaks passionately about how the workers need to unionize and demand their share of Ford's profits so that they never again have to experience the destitution of the Great Depression. Ford, meanwhile, eats decadent food and dances in the old American style; he is akin to a king. After the meeting, five men drive Tom off the road as he is going home and mercilessly beat him and his wife, Dell. As Ford heads home from the party in a limousine along the same road, Dell tries to call out to the limousine for help, but Ford's driver simply swerves to avoid her, and Ford doesn't notice her.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Henry Ford – Henry Ford is one of the novel's protagonists and the real-life founder of the Ford Motor Company. Ford grows up in Detroit and invents his first working **car** at 28 years old. He is idealistic and hopes that the car will revolutionize transportation for the American public. Most businessmen are skeptical that Ford's invention will be as revolutionary as he believes, and it is not until Ford is 40 years old that he is able to amass $28,000 to start his company. After a few years of moderate success, Ford realizes that the best business model is to mass produce something cheap so that the general public can buy cars—which leads him to design the Ford Model T. While Ford amasses more and more wealth as a result of this strategy, he still tries to maintain his idealism. He refuses to sell his cars to the British for use in World War I and aims to pay his workers high wages so that they can eventually buy his cars. After America gets involved in World War I, however, Ford slowly abandons his ideals. He refuses to return the profits he made from war to the U.S. government, as he promised; he continues to speed up the **assembly line** in his plant without the workers' knowledge, increasing their productivity without increasing their pay; and he starts a **newspaper** called the *Dearborn Independent* which peddles anti-Semitic conspiracy theories for three years. When the Great Depression hits, millions of workers lose their jobs, and Ford rehires them at a fraction of their previous income because they are desperate for any amount of work. Facing growing resentment, Ford hires ex-criminals as security and to make sure that the workers do not unionize. By the end of the novel, Ford is the richest man in the world, but he is also paranoid and isolated, illustrating the damage that the capitalist system renders on both the rich and the poor.

Abner Shutt – Abner, an employee of Henry Ford, is one of the novel's protagonists. Initially, Abner is idealistic; he has a firm belief in the American Dream and knows that if he works hard he can find success and achieve social mobility for his children. He begins the book as a young boy in Detroit who is enamored with Ford's new invention; Abner often watches Ford work and helps push Ford's **car** home if it breaks down. When Abner is 24 years old and Ford is just starting his company, he asks Ford for a job and becomes one of Ford's first employees. Abner attaches wheels onto the axle of the car, and when Ford's business picks up, Abner supervises the wheel assembly. Abner thinks he is one of the luckiest workers in America, but he isn't fully aware of the worsening conditions in the factory. Abner reveres Ford and follows everything he says, including which politicians to support and what news to follow. When Ford starts peddling anti-Semitic Jewish conspiracy theories in the *Dearborn Independent*, Abner subscribes to those beliefs and joins the KKK as a result. He also becomes skeptical of the union movement as a "socialist" or "Red" movement. However, when Abner loses his job during the Great Depression, he becomes destitute and takes money from his son Hank, who is a criminal and a gangster, illustrating his own form of disillusionment with the American dream. Still, he remains loyal to Ford through the end of the book, even when his youngest son, Tom Jr., starts to organize Ford workers. Abner provides a different side of capitalism than Henry Ford does, but his story

still underscores how the system can easily take advantage of and degrade the lives of working-class people, particularly when they are being manipulated by entrepreneurs like Ford who work solely for their own interests.

Tom "Tommy" Shutt Jr. – Tom is Abner and Milly's youngest child, and John, Hank, and Daisy's brother. He's an eager child who likes to tell others what to do. As Tom grows up, he doesn't share the family's sense of gratitude to Ford, believing instead that Ford takes advantage of his workers. This perspective puts him at odds with Abner, who reveres Ford. In high school, Tom becomes a football star and he is recruited to play at Michigan State University, making him the first person in his family to attend college. At school, Tom takes an interest in the labor movement and studies the economic factors that caused the Great Depression. When he graduates, he decides to get a job at Ford's to help spark a union movement there. This irks Abner, Hank, and John, who believe that Tom is going to cause trouble at the factory. Around this time, Tom marries a girl he met at college, Dell Brace, who also supports the union movement. When Ford's security department discovers that Tom is quietly having meetings with some of his colleagues after work, Tom is promptly fired. The United Auto Workers pays Tom to continue organizing and meeting with Ford workers. One evening, Tom holds a meeting with Ford workers and gives an impassioned speech about why the workers need to organize into a union, push for better safety regulations, and demand higher wages. When Tom and Dell drive home from the meeting, five men run him off the road and beat him until he is unconscious. Because Tom represents the union movement, this final act of violence reinforces the need for a powerful union to combat Ford's violent security department.

John Shutt – John is Abner and Milly's first child, and Hank, Daisy, and Tom Jr.'s brother. Growing up, John takes interest in his father's work and attends Ford's trade school. He then gets a job at Ford's as a welder and receives a promotion in less than a year; in this way, John fulfills Abner's American Dream, surpassing his father's station in life. John eventually becomes so successful that he receives a monthly salary rather than a weekly one, marries the daughter of his department head, and buys a home in an elegant neighborhood. John and his wife, Annabelle, both revere Ford, grateful for the opportunity and prosperity he has given them. However, when the Great Depression hits, John loses his job and, as a result, his home. He moves into exactly the kind of home in which he grew up, refuting the idea that he has gained greater success and mobility than his father. John's department then rehires him to work for a few days a week at $6 a day—a fraction of what he was making before. John and Annabelle grow furious at Ford, seeing how is taking advantage of his unemployed workers' desperation to make any amount of money. However, once the industry picks up again, John is able to regain his position and he tries to save as much money as possible in order to guard himself against another economic downturn, reinforcing how the capitalist system takes advantage of workers and only spurs people to try and make as much money as possible.

Henry "Hank" Shutt – Hank (who is named after Henry Ford) is Abner and Milly's second child and John, Daisy, and Tom Jr.'s brother. Hank is a troublemaker even in childhood—he skips school, runs away from home, and even gets arrested for his involvement in a gang. As an adult, Hank works as a bootlegger, illegally smuggling alcohol into Detroit. Hank becomes very successful this way and is the only Shutt child not to lose his job during the Great Depression, suggesting that only those who give up their idealism and morals are able to fulfill the American Dream. He even branches out, working with politicians to ensure that they are elected by intimidating voters. When Ford expands his security at the factories due to the unemployed workers' resentment, Hank becomes a part of his security team of ex-criminals and makes sure that the workers in the factory do not unionize.

Daisy Shutt – Daisy is Abner and Milly's third child and John, Hank, and Tom Jr.'s sister. Daisy attends business college and dreams of being a stenographer in an office, but she ends up working for a company that makes Ford cushions and marries a bookkeeper. During the Great Depression, all married women working at Ford's lose their jobs, and Ford reduces Daisy's husband's work to one or two days a week, so she is forced to move back in with Abner and Milly. She becomes very disillusioned by Ford's practices and frustrated that she is not able to achieve her dreams.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (F.D.R.) – Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the 32nd president of the United States, serving four terms from 1933 to 1945. F.D.R. was elected largely in response to the Great Depression, which began in 1929, as Americans hoped that he would be able to help repair the massive economic damage. A progressive Democrat, F.D.R. enacted his New Deal policies, which involved providing economic relief to the country's poorest people. He also aimed to regulate businesses to avoid another depression, helping to spur the labor movement and trying to prevent manufacturers like Ford from overproducing goods and underpaying workers.

Milly Crock Shutt – Milly is Abner's wife and John, Hank, Daisy, and Tom Jr.'s mother. Milly also has two additional children who die shortly after being born, and as a result of these miscarriages she becomes bitter and experiences severe pains. During the Great Depression, Milly grows very sick from cancer and she dies shortly after Tom Jr. returns home from college.

Tom Shutt Sr. – Tom Sr. is Abner's father. At the beginning of the book, Tom works in a freight-car factory making $1.40 a day. Although he is poor, he maintains faith in the American Dream and believes that his son can achieve social mobility. When Tom is in his 60s, his legs are overcome with joint pain and he loses his job and is forced to move in with Abner and

Milly. Tom subsequently dies during the Great Depression.

Dell Brace – Dell is Tom Jr.'s college friend and eventual wife. Dell is the daughter of a state senator from Iowa, but like Tom, she recognizes the need for greater economic equality and benefits for the workers. In the book's final chapters, she attends a labor meeting with Tom; when they drive home, five men run them off the road and assault the couple for being a part of the labor movement.

Harry Bennett – Bennett is a former boxer in the navy whom Ford chooses to lead his security department during the Great Depression. Bennett trains 3,600 private police to guard the gates of the plant, report workers for any work violations, and root out union organizers. During the Dearborn march, Bennet drives a **car** into the crowd and fires a gun at the protesters, sparking the violence that leaves 4 protesters dead and 50 wounded.

Woodrow Wilson – Woodrow Wilson was the 28th president of the United States from 1913 to 1921. Prior to becoming the president, Wilson was the president of Princeton college and a Democratic governor of New Jersey. Wilson initially avoided becoming involved in World War I, but after his reelection in 1916 he led the United States into the war. Ford worked with Wilson to make army trucks, ambulances, and other equipment during the war.

Herbert Hoover – Herbert Hoover was the 31st president of the United States, serving from 1929 to 1933. He was in office during the stock market crash of 1929, which signaled the beginning of the Great Depression. Hoover tried to remedy the economic depression by providing relief to the banking industry, but these measures failed to stem the economic crisis and Hoover was not reelected at the end of his first term, losing to F.D.R.

Dean Marquis – Dean Marquis is an advisor to Henry Ford. An Episcopal clergyman, Dean Marquis initially heads Ford's Social Department, helping to determine which employees deserve bonuses based on their virtuous lifestyle. But after World War I, Dean Marquis discovers the inequity at Ford's plants, and when Ford doesn't try to fix these problems, Marquis leaves the company.

Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt – Teddy Roosevelt was the 26th president of the United States, serving from 1901 to 1909. Roosevelt was a Republican who oversaw a period of huge economic growth while also prioritizing the labor movement over capitalism. He was a strong critic of Henry Ford, particularly for Ford's pacifist stance during World War I.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Annabelle Shutt – Annabelle is John's wife and the daughter of John's department head at Ford's. Like John, she initially reveres Ford, but she grows frustrated when she recognizes how much Ford takes advantage of his workers.

Clara Ford – Clara is Henry Ford's wife and Edsel's mother. With Ford's success, Clara becomes a prominent philanthropist.

Edsel Ford – Edsel is Henry and Clara Ford's son and the heir to the Ford empire.

TERMS

United Auto Workers (UAW) – The United Auto Workers is an American labor union that represents workers in the automobile industry. It was founded in the 1930s with the goal of negotiating for higher wages and better safety regulations for auto workers. In *The Flivver King*, the UAW pays **Tom Jr.** to help organize the Ford workers. In real life, the UAW published *The Flivver King* in 1937, hoping to use the book to convince Ford employees to unionize. Ford eventually agreed to enter an agreement with the union in 1941.

Ku Klux Klan (KKK) – The Ku Klux Klan is a white supremacist hate group that was first founded in 1865 and was responsible for lynchings, bombings, and other acts of violence against Black people. After becoming inactive in the 1870s, the Klan was revived in 1915 and targeted Jews, Black Americans, Catholics, and newly arrived immigrants. In *The Flivver King*, **Abner** joins the KKK after buying into **Ford**'s anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

CAPITALISM AND DEHUMANIZATION

The Flivver King tracks the rise of Henry Ford's automobile industry from the late 1890s to the mid-1930s in Detroit, Michigan. The story is told through the lens of two men's lives: Henry Ford himself, and Abner Shutt, a fictional worker in one of Henry Ford's plants. While the growth of the automobile industry brings some prosperity to the workers and the magnate alike, gradually this new fortune corrodes the humanity of everyone in the industry. Henry Ford becomes completely consumed by and paranoid about holding onto his fortune, even at the cost of treating his workers decently. Ford drives Abner Shutt and the rest of the workers to exhaustion with few benefits—and even as Abner gains some money, he never feels secure. Thus, *The Flivver King* is a scathing critique of unfettered capitalism, illustrating how the constant pursuit of money degrades the lives of both the

rich and the poor.

At first, Sinclair describes the new degree of prosperity in the automobile industry that makes Abner and Ford pursue even more success, suggesting that an unchecked industry like this benefits everyone involved. Henry Ford initially makes a limited number of **cars** at a high price and is able to make millions of dollars in this way. Gradually, he realizes that producing cheaper cars on a mass scale will make him a fortune. The year he introduces the "Model T" Ford, he sells twice as many cars and more than doubles his profits. With this model, he continues to build a gigantic empire, providing people with a better mode of transportation while also increasing his personal wealth, illustrating the general benefit of his work. When Abner is 24, he begins working for Ford at his factory. As a result of this new security and higher wages, Abner is able to marry his girlfriend, Milly; take a modest vacation to Niagara Falls; and have four children. Noting that many other men in Detroit are unemployed, Abner thinks that he is one of the luckiest men alive to be working at Ford's factory. He's eventually able to buy a car himself, one of his greatest dreams. Thus, Ford's empire not only benefits Ford himself but also the people working for him.

Over time, however, Abner recognizes how the capitalist system dehumanizes and exploits workers. Abner works at Ford's for 22 years, and each year, Ford tries to squeeze more and more productivity out of his workers. The workers' jobs are reduced to one or two small actions on the newly invented **assembly line**, which speeds up every year. Abner knows he can't complain, or else his supervisor will simply find someone else to do the job. Abner is grateful for the work, but Ford and the supervisors take advantage of this fact by slowly degrading their working conditions. Because there are no regulations or unions, the workers are powerless to stop them. Even as Abner gets raises, prices of consumer goods and homes in the Detroit area creep up so that they match the wages that Ford is paying. For example, when Abner gets a car, he realizes that he can now travel further to buy cheaper products. But soon, farmers in more rural areas realize that people from urban areas are taking advantage of their low prices, so they start to raise them. This means that when Abner gets a promotion, he doesn't actually have more buying power. Even in times of prosperity, Abner is essentially as poor as he was before. When the Great Depression hits, Abner realizes that the capitalist system doesn't really serve or protect workers like him. He and most of his children lose their jobs, they can't afford to pay rent or buy food, and they can't afford to bury Abner's mother properly after her death. The economy's fragility, along with the Shutt family's personal hardships, show that the system doesn't guarantee job security—rather, it renders people helpless and deprived of basic needs during hard times.

Meanwhile, as Ford's empire grows, he, too, loses his humanity as he becomes obsessed with maintaining his wealth. Ford feels as though he is "competing at every moment of his life," trying to make sure that his competitors don't outdo him. He is constantly coming up with ways to pay less money for more labor, but ultimately, this turns the workers against him. Because of his unpopular policies and great wealth, Ford has to surround himself with guards and worries constantly that his children will be kidnapped and held for ransom. Ford's empire has earned him wealth, but it's also taken away his security and happiness. This leads Ford to hire ex-criminals as a kind of "secret police" force to keep his workers in line and prevent them from unionizing. In this way, Ford becomes a mafia-like leader who's only concerned about maintaining his money and status—no matter who he hurts in the process. Ford's disregard for his workers is particularly evident when Abner attends a protest organized by some of the other unemployed workers. At the march—which ends in front of Ford's largest factory—police and some of Ford's security shoot 50 men, killing four of them. This proves Ford's dehumanization, as he is so concerned about his profits and preventing his workers from unionizing that he is even willing to have his security kill some of the unemployed workers.

By the end of the book, Ford lives like a "European potentate," or monarch: he rarely meets strangers, he is surrounded only by yes-men, and he can't give interviews for fear that he will say something inflammatory. Sinclair writes, "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," quoting Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 2*. This implies that Ford has attained the wealth and power of a king, but with it, he has become completely miserable. The constant pursuit of money, combined with uncontrollable economic and political forces, has left both Ford and his workers vulnerable and unhappy.

AMERICAN IDEALISM AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Initially, the main characters in *The Flivver King* are idealistic. Henry Ford is an optimistic engineer who wants to improve Americans' lives by providing people with a more efficient means of transportation, paying his workers well, and protecting American values like freedom, opportunity, and the idea that hard work can earn prosperity. Abner Shutt, meanwhile, is a loyal worker who wants to achieve the American Dream of working hard to provide greater opportunity and a better quality of life for his children. But over the course of the novel, corruption is laid bare in many of America's institutions, and the hopes, dreams, and morals of most of the characters are completely eroded. By charting the journey of the character's idealism to their disillusion with American life, Sinclair suggests that traditional American ideals—equal opportunity, success through honest work, and a peaceful family life—are essentially unattainable without compromising one's values.

At first, Ford is idealistic and firmly believes in the American

Dream. Ford's belief in American values is what causes him to invent a **car** in the first place: he wants people to have greater mobility around the country. Sinclair describes him as an "idealist" who believes in "making people happy." Ford also wants to be able to pay his workers a high wage, so that they will be happy working for him. This optimism is rooted firmly in the traditional American values of freedom, opportunity, and the ability to work hard and make a living. At first, Ford's optimism and morals even supersede his desire for power on a global stage. During World War I, Ford refuses to sell his cars for use in the war. Sinclair writes, "he was a sincere idealist, priding himself upon the fact that he had created a 'clean' fortune, earned by producing useful things and not by robbing or oppressing anybody. [...] He loathed war as a stupid, irrational, and altogether hideous thing." In this way, Ford has faith in his ability to make money through honest work, without resorting to criminality or profiting off of warmongering.

Yet, as Ford pursues his automobile empire, it comes at the expense of his ideals, suggesting that it's much easier to attain the American Dream by abandoning one's morals. When America gets involved in World War I, Ford openly sells his cars for war because he recognizes how much he can profit from it, despite his previously held conviction to keeping his fortune "clean." In addition, although Ford says that he will return the war profits he makes, he never does so, keeping the $29 million he makes on the war. Rather than maintaining his ideals, he discards them in favor of profit. Ford also allows inequality in how his employees are paid and promoted. The man leading the department that oversees these promotions "[sees] injustice done, and trie[s] to intervene, and discover[s] that Ford [is] pretending not to know anything about actions which had been taken upon his express orders." The man realizes that "the period of idealism [is] past, and that there [is] no longer any place for a Christian gentleman in the Ford business machine." This demonstrates how Ford's empire has put him at odds with morality and idealism.

Like Ford, Abner initially believes in the American Dream, but his children's fates illustrate how this goal is unattainable without abandoning one's morals. Sinclair describes how growing up, Abner "shared the faith of all American families, that the young ones would rise in the world. America was the land of opportunity, and wonderful things were happening every day." Abner, too, believes in the American Dream—particularly when it comes to making sure that his children can have a better life than he had. Abner's oldest son, John, receives technical training as a welder and quickly rises through the ranks of the Ford company—to the point that he is promoted to "the class which receives a monthly salary." He gets married and buys an elegant home. But when the Great Depression hits, John and his wife, Annabelle, are forced to sell their home, and "John [is] right back where he had been born—one generation from shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves!" This illustrates that the American Dream is fickle—and particularly during an economic crisis, even someone with better education and a good work ethic may not have greater opportunity than his father. Meanwhile, Abner's second son, Hank, gets a lucrative but illegal job smuggling alcohol from Canada into Prohibition-era Detroit. During the Great Depression, Ford hires Hank and other criminals to keep an eye on the workers and stop any insurrections or talk of unionizing. Because so many members of the Shutt family are out of work during the Great Depression, Hank often gives them money. It is a perversion of the American Dream that the only child whose life is an improvement over his father's is a criminal. The contrast between John and Hank demonstrates the overarching disillusionment with American idealism. John and Annabelle are disgusted with Ford's greed and frustrated that Hank makes a better living as a criminal than they do as honest, hard-working people. Because characters who give up their morality, like Ford and Hank, are much more able to find success and security, Sinclair suggests that the American Dream is only attainable by abandoning one's idealism.

MISINFORMATION, MEDIA BIAS, AND IGNORANCE

Information and the news are crucial aspects of *The Flivver King*. Early on, Henry Ford recognizes the power of controlling the narrative around his business and his personal life. Many characters in the novel rely solely on the press to help them understand economic and political issues. As such, Ford tries to shape the news, taking over a **newspaper** called the *Dearborn Independent*. However, Sinclair exposes the press's dishonesty and bias, and how it leads many people—including Abner, one of Ford's workers—to latch onto conspiracy theories and become involved in violent organizations. In this way, Sinclair suggests that media bias and misinformation are powerful forces that can dangerously affect people's political ideologies—and their lives more broadly.

Abner and Ford's initial attitudes toward the media demonstrate how powerfully it affects people's ideologies, opinions, and actions. Leading up to the 1912 presidential election between Democrat Woodrow Wilson and Republican William Howard Taft, Abner reads about the candidates in the newspaper. He likes some of the ideas that Wilson has, but he also reads that "hard times [come] when the Democratic party [gets] in," and so he decides to vote Republican. This illustrates how even a single assertion in the newspapers can have a great effect on its readers, as the analysis can have more of an effect than the candidate's words themselves on how people vote. At the beginning of World War I, newspapers advocate for the United States to remain peaceful and neutral, and Abner and Ford both adhere to this view. But as the munitions and banking industries realize that if the Allies lose, they will lose their business, the newspapers in turn begin to change their

tone, spurred by the influence of these industries. Sinclair describes how, in 1916, newspapers tell of "the horrors of war"—yet in 1917, they begin to report on the "glories of French civilization" and the "humane ideals for which the British ruling classes had always stood." In turn, Ford and Abner both start to change their minds about America getting involved in the war. This is particularly crucial for Ford, who decides to design a one-man submarine with a bomb and starts selling **cars** to the Allies. These changes demonstrate how the slant of the news can change global events and public support for them. The same is true of Abner's view of the labor movement: when Abner attends a march to protest Ford's treatment of workers, he likes one of the speaker's "workers' talk" about organizing. But later, Abner is completely convinced by the newspaper that the speakers were "Red agitators" and that he shouldn't have been at the march or listened to the speakers. Even though he liked the movement, the paper's association of those ideas with communism, and its negative bias against communism, undermines Abner's support for unionization.

Acknowledging the newspapers' impact, Ford decides to start a newspaper himself—but he is equally susceptible to misinformation and prints anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, illustrating how easily news organizations can become biased and misinformed. Ford helps a friend in debt by buying the *Dearborn Independent*, a local newspaper in the Detroit area. He wants a journal that would "speak for the people's welfare" and "have the courage to give them the truth about what was going on." Even in buying the *Dearborn*, Ford acknowledges the problems with the existing press and the need for clear, accountable journalism. However, Ford's paper also begins to deal in misinformation. A Russian journalist investigating the "wicked forces" trying to wreck Europe meets with Ford and tells him that all of the troubles in the world are due to a conspiracy led by Jewish people who are "plotting to seize the mastery of the world." Terrified by his story, Ford publishes a three-year-long series of anti-Semitic articles—and the American people, trusting Ford, take his words for truth. Ford's newspaper is susceptible to bias even though he bought the paper with the intention of giving people "the truth"— he even begins to deal in harmful and discriminatory misinformation, despite his honest intentions.

Abner joins the Ku Klux Klan in response to the information he reads in the *Dearborn Independent*, which illustrates how misinformation can manipulate the ideas and actions of those who read it. Abner subscribes faithfully to Ford's newspaper out of loyalty to his employer. He gradually starts to believe its ideas, particularly because he uneducated, and he becomes skeptical of those who try to discredit Ford's ideas. Abner begins avoiding stores with Jewish names on them and warns his children about this "evil race." Thus, Ford's newspaper not only makes false claims, but in doing so, it spreads a dangerous anti-Semitic ideology. The danger of spreading this ideology becomes even clearer when the KKK obtains the subscription list of the *Dearborn Independent* and contacts the people who receive it, including Abner. Coming to Abner's home, KKK members explain that the organization is being revived to put down "Jews, Catholics, Reds, and other alien enemies." This convinces Abner to join the KKK: he starts burning crosses on the lawns of these "culprits," feeling assured that he is protecting "Protestant Gentile American civilization." Thus, the press not only changes Abner's ideology, but it also leads him to join a hate group and incites him to violence, illustrating the dangerous path that misinformation and media bias can lead people down.

The only way to respond to misinformation, it seems, is through education. Tom Jr., Abner's youngest son, goes to college and takes up the workers' movement. He acknowledges that the newspapers will likely call him a "Red" (meaning a communist), but he says, "Long before I went to college I'd made up my mind that labor was getting a crooked deal, and what I've got out of my four years' study are the facts and figures to prove it." Tom hopes that educating the workers with facts about their situation will spur them to organize—just as Sinclair hopes that *The Flivver King*, his own exposé on the automobile industry, will inspire people to organize as well.

INDIVIDUALISM VS. UNIONIZATION

In addition to critiquing capitalism, *The Flivver King* explores the benefits of the labor movement and unionization. The book was so important to the labor movement that the United Auto Workers (UAW) published the book in 1937 in an attempt to convince Ford's employees to unionize; the Ford Motor Company subsequently entered a collective bargaining agreement with the UAW in 1941. In the book, Sinclair shows how little power individual employees like Abner Shutt have against the inequity and unfair working conditions in Ford's factories. Alongside this, he demonstrates the power of collective bargaining through Abner's son, Tom Jr., who rallies fellow Ford workers to demand equal rights and fair wages. In juxtaposing these two ideas, Sinclair argues for the labor movement by demonstrating that individuals will never have as much power to incite change as a union does.

Sinclair establishes the demanding conditions in the Ford factory and demonstrates how individual workers have very little means to combat the increasingly unfair practices. In 1913, Ford institutes the **assembly line** in his factories to increase production. In subsequent years, he continues to speed up the assembly line, forcing his workers to keep up with the new pace. If the workers complain or take days off, supervisors dock their pay or fire them. Sinclair writes, from the perspective of a supervisor, "If [a worker] is a weakling, there are a dozen strong men waiting outside to take his place. Shut

your mouth and do what you're told!" Because there is always a danger of being replaced by someone willing to work under harsh conditions, there is no way for workers to push back against this unfair treatment. Without union oversight, conditions grow worse and worse over time. Because of the increased speed of the assembly line, "men so driven couldn't handle machinery without accidents." The plant even has its own hospital, and there is a saying among the factory workers that one man dies every day. Without a union, there is no collective protection to ensure that the working conditions at Ford's plant are fair and humane. Abner grasps this unfair treatment and lack of benefits when he asks for a promotion. The sub-foreman thinks that Abner is after his job, so he begins to target Abner, reprimanding him if he stays 10 seconds more than his three allotted minutes on the toilet or his 15-minute lunch break. When Abner gets angry over this treatment, he is promptly fired after 22 years of loyal service. As an individual, Abner has very little power to ask for basic worker's rights; without a union, he is unprotected from this unfair firing.

Abner's son Tom then tries to argue for the power that unions can have, illustrating that if they work together, they can increase their wages and improve their working conditions. Tom tells the workers about the root cause of their problems: "under the New Deal profits had increased fifty percent while wages had increased only ten percent." A union of workers, on the other hand, could collectively bargain—that is, organize as a group to negotiate for increased wages. Tom also argues for why the workers need a single union, rather than several unions for the different types of workers. He says, "Imagine Ford's with a hundred different unions, all fighting for jurisdiction; dividing up the River Rouge plant among carpenters, machinists, steam-fitters, glass-workers, truck-drivers! All these workers now had one boss, and let that boss deal with one union." A single body of workers organizing collectively, he illustrates, would be the most effective in balancing the power with a man as wealthy as Ford. In this same vein, Sinclair states that "A billion-dollar industrial empire such as Ford's could be met and matched by only one thing, a union of the two hundred thousand Ford workers, controlled by the democratic will of its membership. That was what they meant to have, because it was the only way out of misery and despair for the producing masses." This is the only way, he argues, to fight the unfair conditions and raise wages in line with profits.

The final pages of the book again emphasize the need for collective action: Ford is so afraid of unions that he has a secret police force to quell any possible organizing. These men find Tom and his wife, Dell, and beat them brutally. Because Tom is acting so singularly and visibly, he is an easy target as an individual. But with the power of a collective, the workers would be able to stand up to Ford's intimidation and unfair labor practices.

TECHNOLOGY AND PROGRESS

Henry Ford's success centers on the advent of two machines: the **car** and the **assembly line belt**. Both are revolutionary concepts that significantly affect the workplace and society at large. Yet while each has its advantages in terms of mobility and efficiency, each also has drawbacks. Thus, Sinclair illustrates that while technology and progress is important, it is not unilaterally positive, particularly because it often exacerbates issues that society's poorest members face.

First, Sinclair demonstrates the benefit of Ford's automobile, or "horseless carriage," because it gives people freedom of mobility. Henry Ford builds a car that can convey people "to any place on the land-surface of the globe except a few mountain-tops." Abner hopes to own a car because he likes the idea of taking his wife, Milly, and their kids into the country to visit his brother, illustrating how cars can tangibly connect people and improve their lives. There is also economic utility in the car: Ford tells Abner, "Suppose it's ten cents a day, that's thirty dollars a year—and for one person. There's no reason a wagon like this shouldn't be built to carry four people at once." In this way, a car provides a cheaper option for transportation. In addition, having a car would allow Abner can travel to cheaper farms, where his family could buy vegetables at half the price charged at the corner grocery. This is yet another economic utility of the car.

The new cars also have drawbacks, however, which particularly affect the working classes. For a long time, few working-class people are able to buy cars, only exacerbating class inequality because they cannot access the same economic benefits that cars bring for middle- and upper-class people. The car also comes with additional costs like building a garage and gas money. Additionally, the cars start to have wide-ranging effects on the economy. For instance, farmers notice more people driving out to buy their products, so they raise their prices. In this way, the widespread use of cars creates economic inflation that hurts working-class people, as they're forced to pay more for consumer goods without experiencing any of the economic benefits of car ownership.

The assembly line also represents a major technological innovation, as it enables greater efficiency and helps Ford produce more cars a year. Before the assembly line, cars are built on one spot in the factories. Due to this structure, many men are constantly running around with parts and tools, bumping into each other. But when the assembly line is set up along a moving belt, the work is divided among 84 different men, and the time it takes to build a motor is cut by more than 40 percent. Before the assembly line, a man making a complex motor part called a magneto could make one every 20 minutes; after the assembly line is instated, the work is divided among 29 different men. Likewise, the time of assembling a chassis is cut from 12 hours to 90 minutes. As Sinclair describes, "It was a

revolution": it not only allows Ford to employ more men, but to expand the business (and the profits) even more.

Yet Ford also pushes the assembly line to its breaking point, demonstrating how even this revolutionary technology still has major drawbacks on the workers. Sinclair explains that once the assembly line is established, Ford continues to speed it up. He writes, "You simply moved a switch, and a thousand men jumped more quickly. It was an invisible tax." While the workers increase their productivity, their stress levels increase, and their quality of life suffers as they're pushed to their limits. As a result of the assembly line, people are constantly injured. Sinclair writes, "[Ford's] 'safety department' was overruled by his speed-up department, and there was a saying in the plant that it took one life a day." Thus, even though the increased efficiency benefits Henry Ford, it comes at the cost of the workers' well-being.

In the book's final passage, Sinclair sums up the dual nature of technology and progress in Henry Ford's conversation with his wife. Ford's wife, Clara, says, "You have done a great deal of good in the world." Ford responds, "Have I? [...] Sometimes I wonder, can anybody do any good. If anybody knows where this world is heading, he knows a lot more than me." In this exchange, Ford's wife acknowledges how much Ford has improved the world with his cars and his factory structure—but at the same time, Ford himself recognizes that there have been drawbacks to each of these innovations. While progress can be beneficial, it can come with great costs as well.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CARS (OR "FLIVVERS")

Cars—or flivvers, as they are sometimes called in the book—initially symbolize the idea that the American Dream is accessible for the masses. When Ford first invents his car, he is an idealist who simply wants to create "a useful article for everybody," not just for the rich. The car is a new kind of technology that affords the masses greater freedom, opportunity, and prosperity, instantly setting up the car as a representation of the American Dream. Even Abner is able to buy a car after working at Ford's, suggesting initially that anyone can achieve the American Dream by working hard.

However, as Ford pushes for greater productivity and profit in his factories, the cars take on a more sinister quality, coming to symbolize the way that capitalism can corrupt a person's idealism. Ford sells cars to be used in World War I despite his personal pacifist stance, indicating how he is foregoing his morals in order to pursue a profit. The sheer number of cars he makes also demonstrates that he cares more about productivity than anything else—in 1927, he makes a million cars in six months and does not increase wages to keep up with those profits. Additionally, when Ford's security guards kill 4 men and wound 50 others who are marching for union rights, Sinclair notes that Ford's cars have become the color of "Fresh Human Blood," suggesting that the cars' profitability now come at the cost of human life. By the end of the book, Ford is referred to as the "Flivver King," indicating that the cars' success has created a power-hungry tyrant, corrupted by greed.

ASSEMBLY LINE (OR "THE BELT")

The assembly line (or "the belt," as the workers call it) initially represents the benefit of new technology. Because it allows for a greater division of labor, the belt revolutionizes Ford's factories. All in all, it allows Ford to reduce the time it takes to assemble a **car** from 12 hours and 28 minutes to 1 hour and 33 minutes, increasing efficiency and productivity in the plant.

However, the belt also symbolizes the harm of new technology, as well as how unregulated capitalism degrades working conditions. The belt quickly becomes a tool to take advantage of the workers in the factory, squeezing as much productivity out of them as possible. Ford periodically speeds up the assembly line without the workers' knowledge, causing them to do more work for the same wages. The assembly line becomes so harmful that people are constantly injured on the line—they even have a saying in the factory that one man dies every day. Without safety regulations or union protections, the assembly line enables Ford to take advantage of his workers, thus illustrating how new technology can also have detrimental effects, particularly on working-class people who are defenseless against unjust working conditions.

NEWSPAPERS

Newspapers represent the harmful effects of misinformation and media bias. Abner reads the newspaper every evening, but he doesn't recognize how newspapers—which are often funded by banks—can be biased, misinformed, and misleading. So in an election year, when newspapers report that "hard times came when the Democratic party got in," Abner takes this assessment as fact, even though he prefers the Democratic candidate that year—proving how newspapers can shift people's opinions and actions, even against their own interest.

Ford's own newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, affirms the problems with misinformation, as he reports anti-Semitic conspiracy theories for three years without verifying this information. Abner then changes his attitude towards Jews based on this reporting and even joins the KKK as a result,

demonstrating the power of the media and misinformation. Sinclair also demonstrates how inescapable this influence can be: when Abner is too poor to afford a newspaper, he thinks that he has no means of finding out what's wrong with the country. Newspapers therefore become not only *a* source of information, but the *only* source of information for many, reinforcing how they make people susceptible to false reporting because there is nothing to counter them.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Charles H. Kerr edition of *The Flivver King* published in 1999.

Chapter 2 Quotes

They were poor, but far from hopeless; not only had they the certainty of a blessed state in the hereafter, but the children were all going to school, and the family shared the faith of all American families, that the young ones would rise in the world. America was the land of opportunity, and wonderful things were happening every day. The poorest boy had the right to become president; and beside this grand prize were innumerable smaller ones, senators, governors, judges, and all the kings, lords, and lesser nobility of industry. Life in this land was a sort of perpetual lottery; every mother who bore a child, even in a dingy slum, was putting her hand into a grab-bag, and might draw out a dazzling jewel.

Related Characters: Henry Ford, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

This passage introduces the Shutt family's idealism and optimism surrounding the American Dream when Abner is a young boy: even though they are poor, they believe that the United States can afford them opportunity and social mobility. Sinclair draws an extreme contrast between this quote and later chapters, wherein Abner and his children become disillusioned by the United States' opportunity because they recognize their lack of social mobility.

The passage also underscores how integral capitalism is to the society. All of the benefits referenced here are explained in terms of money or wealth: the United States affords people a "lottery," powerful jobs are "prizes," and even children can have the value of a "dazzling jewel." This word choice illustrates how characters view success solely in terms of money and hints at the fact that many of the characters will spend their lives in relentless pursuit of that wealth, even at the expense of their own values or humanity.

Additionally, Sinclair introduces the idea of industry as an empire, even though he doesn't explicitly tie that empire to Ford yet. The references to the "kings, lords, and lesser nobility of industry" alludes to Ford's eventual kingdom. And while Ford does win the lottery, as the case may be, he also uses his newfound power and wealth to act as a tyrant. So though the story takes place in the democratic United States, Sinclair emphasizes even from the outset that industrial empires can be just as tyrannical and rigid as any feudal system.

Chapter 5 Quotes

All the nations had hard times, the newspapers assured him; it was a law of nature and there was no way to escape it. But now prosperity was coming back, and America remained the greatest country in the world, and the richest; if you worked hard, and lived a sober and God-fearing life, success was bound to come to you.

Related Characters: Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

A three-year economic turndown begins inn 1893, but when business starts to pick up again in 1896, newspapers assure Abner that these hard times are a natural part of the world. The newspaper's rhetoric highlights American idealism and how Abner shares in it. Abner is very invested in the American ideals of opportunity and prosperity that the newspapers relay, and because they report on these phenomena with surety, they reinforce the beliefs that Abner already holds and in which he *wants* to continue to believe. Because he is optimistic by nature, he is reassured by what they say.

However, Sinclair's readers may recognize—particularly because this novel was published just after the Great Depression—that this rhetoric of the United States as the greatest and richest nation, with guaranteed success, may ring false and foreshadow the hardships to come. Additionally, the media's positive slant on the crisis also affects people like Abner in a harmful way. Even though the newspaper maintains that hard times are inevitable "laws of nature," in reality this statement removes agency from

banks or governments who mishandle the economy. Sinclair uses this passage from the newspaper then to establish that the media can be biased, and ignorance of how economic issues work can prevent people like Abner from trying to change them.

Chapter 11 Quotes

And while Abner and Milly were thus fulfilling their dream, Mr. Ford was occupied with his; to bring it about that when the little Shutts grew up—and likewise the little Smiths and Schultzes and Slupskys and Steins—they should find millions of little horseless carriages available at second-hand prices, to convey them to any place on the land-surface of the globe except a few mountain-tops.

Related Characters: Milly Crock Shutt, Henry Ford, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

While Abner and Milly are enjoying Abner's new income after being hired at Ford's, Henry Ford is also beginning to enjoy his own prosperity. The fact that they are mutually finding success illustrates Sinclair's point that the capitalist system can provide benefits to both the rich and poor, at least initially. Abner now has the stability to marry and start a family, while Ford can expand his business and start manufacturing cars.

The quote highlights the benefits of Ford's new technology as well—most notably, it gives Americans a greater degree of mobility so that they can travel anywhere in the country. Although the image of the mountain-top is used as an example of where people cannot go, the language evokes the idea of making it to the pinnacle of success by having a car—and Ford will be vaulted to this pinnacle in creating them.

Ford also highlights the fact that he wants the cars to be widely available; he doesn't want this technology to be produced solely for the benefit of the wealth. Naming all of the different families—particularly those of German and Jewish origins—implies that he wants even lower-class immigrant families to have the same opportunities as anyone else. Not only does this support the ideal that everyone should have equal opportunity, but it also allows Ford to pursue a larger profit. Thus, initially, the cars become emblems of profit, but they are also products that align with American ideals like freedom and equal opportunity.

Chapter 14 Quotes

In the year after the panic he produced 6,181 cars, a little over three per worker; but within three years he was managing to get thirty-five thousand cars out of six thousand workers.

Of course nobody ever showed these figures to Abner Shutt, and they wouldn't have meant much to him anyhow. In that period, while learning to make twice as many cars for his employer, Abner was getting a fifteen percent increase in wages, and was considering himself one of the luckiest workers in America. And maybe he was, at that. There were breadlines in Detroit for two winters, reminding him of those dreadful years of his boyhood which had weakened him in body, mind, and soul.

Related Characters: Henry Ford, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Between 1907 and 1910, Ford doubles his output per worker and only raises his employees' wages by 15 percent. By including these statistics, the book underscores the problems with the capitalist profit system and also illustrates the need for unions and regulations. Sinclair demonstrates how Ford is trying to make as much profit as possible—not only to expand his personal wealth but also to grow his business and to produce more cars. Yet he does so at the expense of workers like Abner, who are not given fair wages for the amount of work that they produce. This correlation between the number of cars and the worsening working conditions reinforces how the cars are a symbol of corruption because Ford pursues these profits so relentlessly.

The quote also explores why it is so difficult for workers to demand fair wages. Workers like Abner *are* getting a higher wage than most people, as Sinclair concedes in noting that Abner may be one of the luckiest workers in America. Additionally, Abner notes how he is haunted by the constant threat of being fired, underscoring the toll that economic downturns have taken on him and reinforcing his feelings of

fortune. One of these unemployed workers could also be willing to do a job for less money, thereby taking the work away from Abner. Yet this is exactly the situation that necessitates a union, so that these workers have some job security and are paid fairly for the incredible amount of output and money that they are creating for the company.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ Some persons would not have cared for this life, but Abner didn't know any such persons, and had no contact with their ideas. He did not think of the Ford plant as an immense and glorified sweatshop; he thought of it as a place of both duty and opportunity, where he did what he was told and got his living in return. […] If you had asked him to tell you his ultimate dream of happiness on this earth, he would have answered that it was to have money enough to buy one of those cars—a bruised and battered one, any one so long as it would run, so that he could ride to work under shelter when it was raining, and on Sundays could pack Milly and the kids into it, and take them into the country, where his oldest brother worked for a farmer, and they could buy vegetables at half the price charged at the corner grocery.

Related Characters: Henry Ford, Milly Crock Shutt, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Abner appreciates the opportunity he's been given to work at Ford's. The quote further elaborates on cars as a symbol of American idealism. To Abner, the ability to make the cars is an "opportunity" that allows him to "get his living"—two essential parts of the American Dream. He also imagines what a car could provide for him if he bought one, emphasizing the additional benefits that the technology provides. It allows him greater mobility and freedom—another American ideal; it enables him to spend time with his children and his brother; and it provides the opportunity to purchase cheaper consumer goods. Thus, the passage as a whole highlights some of the benefits of progress and new technology.

However, the quote also notes the darker side of the automobile industry. First, Abner doesn't own a car yet, nor would he be able to afford a new one. In this way, the quote demonstrates that new technology often benefits those who are already wealthy, deepening the socioeconomic divides between people. Additionally, even though Abner thinks of the factory as a positive place, Sinclair's assertion that he does *not* think of it as a "glorified sweatshop" implies that Sinclair does believe this. Using the word "sweatshop" suggests that Abner is working under poor and even unsafe conditions for very little money, so while the factory has provided Abner with some opportunity, Sinclair hints that Abner is ignorant of some of its problems and how the capitalist profit system is taking advantage of him.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ It was the year of a presidential election. There was a college president by the name of Wilson running on the Democratic ticket, and he tried hard to win Abner away from his staunch Republican principles, making eloquent speeches about "the New Freedom." Abner read some of his golden words in the newspapers; but also he read that hard times came when the Democratic party got in, and he was more afraid of hard times than of any tyrant.

Related Characters: Woodrow Wilson, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In 1912, Democrat Woodrow Wilson runs against the Republican incumbent Howard Taft, and as this passage shows, Abner's understanding of the election is largely based on what he reads in the newspapers. Like most Americans, Abner's only source of information is the newspaper, and so their influence on people's ideas is inevitable. Yet Sinclair also demonstrates how the newspapers' subtle biases and misinformation can mislead readers and even affect people's political opinions.

Abner's reference to the Wilson's "golden words" and "eloquent speeches" suggests that he likes some of Wilson's ideas. Speaking on freedom is particularly effective because this idea plays into Abner's American idealism; he, too, wants greater opportunity and freedom, as Wilson's words evoke.

Yet the newspapers' assertion that Democrats bring about "hard times" sways Abner not to vote for Wilson, emphasizing the outsized impact that the newspapers'

analysis can have. Sinclair explores over time that newspapers slant towards Republicans because many of the papers are funded by banks that benefit from Republican policies. And here, a single line declaring that Democrats cause economic downturns is more powerful in Abner's mind than Wilson's appealing and inspiring words, because the newspaper reports this idea as fact. In this way, misinformation and bias can have a severe impact on politics, particularly because most Americans like Abner don't have other means of understanding the news and are ignorant of these biases.

Chapter 19 Quotes

Never had there been such a device for speeding up labor. You simply moved a switch, and a thousand men jumped more quickly. It was an invisible tax, like the tariff, which the consumer pays without being aware of it. The worker cannot hold a stopwatch, and count the number of cars which come to him in an hour. Even if he learns about it from the man who sets the speed of the belt—again it is like the tariff in that he can do nothing about it. If he is a weakling, there are a dozen strong men waiting outside to take his place. Shut your mouth and do what you're told!

Related Characters: Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In 1913, Ford implements a new assembly line in his factory and continues to speed it up over time to make his workers more productive. This quote illustrates the dual nature of new technology as well as the issues with the relentless pursuit of profits in a capitalist economy. While the assembly line certainly helps increase Ford's productivity, it also has its drawbacks—particularly for the workers. Even without their knowledge, the assembly line forces workers to be more productive. The image of a thousand men jumping more quickly with the flick of the switch evokes not only the assembly line's scale, but also reinforces the lack of control that the workers have over the factory conditions.

The passage emphasizes the need for union regulation. In describing how the assembly line works as a tariff or tax, Sinclair illustrates that the men are quite literally losing money with each increase in the belt's speed. They are working harder and producing more cars, but their wages are not increasing alongside that increased output.

Lastly, the final sentence of the quote underscores the degrading nature of capitalism. Sinclair changes perspective from a third person omniscient narrator and implies that he is speaking from the supervisor's point of view. This abusive language demonstrates how workers can't really complain about their conditions—as the quote suggests, there are many other men who can take their place, and the supervisors can easily replace them because there is no job protection or unemployment at the factory.

Chapter 21 Quotes

It passed Abner's comprehension how any man or woman could fail to be grateful for such divine compassion on the part of Mr. Ford. But human nature is notoriously perverse, and many of the men grumbled bitterly against having their private lives investigated, and they changed the name of the new department from "Social" to "Snooping." Instead of complying loyally with the terms of the agreement, they set to work to circumvent it by diabolical schemes. [...] Some of these tricks were caught up with, and the tricksters were fired, and there was not a little spying and tale-bearing and suspicion.

Related Characters: Henry Ford, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

After Ford announces that no worker will make below $5 a day, his employees quickly discover that this seemingly positive and generous declaration comes with many caveats. Even though Ford is being generous with *some* of his workers, the process to qualify for bonuses provides an early example of the need for unionization rather than individualism. The contrast between Abner and the rest of the workers displays this idea clearly. While Abner—who receives the bonus—is grateful for Ford's "divine compassion," others who may not receive the bonus view Ford's tactics as "snooping." This makes sense: individuals like Abner who benefit are more likely to have a positive view of his employer, while those who don't are not.

Ford's tactics soon sow discontent among the workers. Abner begins to view his fellow workers as "diabolical" and having "perverse" natures, when in reality the workers simply want to achieve the same benefits that others receive for doing the same work without their private lives

being investigated. Rather than working together to achieve this goal, Ford's policies spark division between the men, leading to spying and suspicion, as the passage notes. This not only highlights the problem with individualism in the plant, but also foreshadows the intense spying that arises later in the book, as all of the workers are on alert to make sure that no one is unionizing. In both cases, this suspicion of each other only hurts the workers themselves, as they displace their power by working separately rather than together.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ He loathed war as a stupid, irrational, and altogether hideous thing. He began to give less and less of his time to planning new forges and presses, and more and more to writing, or at any rate having written, statements, interviews, and articles denouncing the war and demanding its end. To other business men, who believed in making all the money you could, and in whatever way you could, this propaganda seemed most unpatriotic; the more so as many of them were actively working to get America into the conflict, and multiply their fortunes overnight.

Related Characters: Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

As World War I rages on in Europe, Ford is dismayed by the fact that the British are buying some of his cars from his dealers for use in the war, despite his express declaration that he does not want his cars to be used this way. Ford's subsequent decision to speak out against the war emphasizes Ford's initial idealism and his genuine desire to make useful technology that won't hurt anyone. Yet the fact that the cars can and are being used in this way is another example of technology's drawbacks—sometimes new technology can be corrupted and used for unintended purposes.

At this point, Ford is also willing to match his words and actions, using the power of the press to sway others to his point of view. Sinclair even draws a contrast between Ford and other businessmen, who use their own press to counter Ford's perspective. The fact that they call Ford "unpatriotic," even though he is expressly trying to remain true to his ideals and not inflict unnecessary violence, shows their attempts to manipulate the press and turn public sentiment for the war because it advantages them.

However, Ford's attitude in this moment contrasts with his perspective later. While here he is adamantly pacifist, Ford later willingly manufactures cars and other equipment for the war. In this way, the cars come to reflect Ford's *loss* of idealism as he becomes more and more corrupted by capitalism and the desire for profit, as the other businessmen are.

Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ The matter was not stated thus crudely in the American newspapers; but their tone and contents began to change to meet this situation. Whereas in 1916 Abner and Henry had read about the horrors of war, in 1917 they read about the horrors of submarine war. Also they began to read about the glories of French civilization, and the humane ideals for which the British ruling classes had always stood. So presently Abner Shutt began to say to all his fellows in the shop, "By Heck, them Huns ought to be put down!" And in February the pacifist Henry Ford was telling a *New York Times* reporter about a bright idea he had for a "one-man submarine," which he described as "a pill on a pole"—the pole being fastened in front of the submarine and the pill being a bomb.

Related Characters: Abner Shutt, Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 42-43

Explanation and Analysis

Between 1916 and 1917, American newspapers begin to shift their stories about World War I in order to raise public support for the war. This is because, if the Allies lose, America's economy will collapse, which would be detrimental for banks, and the banks are funding the newspapers. This is another example of the corrupting influence of capitalism, because the banks' desire for profit is ultimately what leads to America's involvement in the war and the newspapers' change in tone.

Additionally, the newspapers again reveal the impact of media bias. Prior to 1917, both Ford and Abner were both staunch pacifists. But with the change in the newspapers' tone and content, both men become less reticent to the war. Abner even begins to parrot the newspapers' language of

the "Huns"—meaning the Germans—revealing how influential the newspapers are on his own words.

Ford's shift in viewpoint is particularly important in illustrating the impact of media bias, as not only does he go on to design this submarine, but he also starts to manufacture cars, trucks, and other equipment to be used in the war. This is an enormous change and perhaps even a hypocritical one—Sinclair emphasizes this fact by pointing out that Ford is a pacifist even as he thinks of designing a submarine that can carry a bomb. Thus, Sinclair illustrates how newspapers' analysis of an event can have a huge influence on public sentiment and even global events.

Chapter 39 Quotes

Dean Marquis had been a wise counsellor during the five years he was in Henry's employ. But now in several cases he saw injustice done, and tried to intervene, and discovered that Henry was pretending not to know anything about actions which had been taken upon his express orders; he promised to investigate, but did nothing; and so, reluctantly, Dean Marquis realized that the period of idealism was past, and that there was no longer any place for a Christian gentleman in the Ford business machine.

Related Characters: Henry Ford, Dean Marquis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

After World War I, Ford's character and morals shift significantly. Whereas before the war, he was focused on pacifism and idealism, now Ford has caved to corruption and a desire for profit, at least according to his employees' observations. Shifting to the perspective of Dean Marquis, the man overseeing the company's Social Department, allows Sinclair to explore a different perspective from Ford. He is able to reveal to readers how Ford not only doesn't care about maintaining equity and morality, but is actively working against it. The long phrasing here suggests a long, arduous back and forth between Ford and Marquis that ultimately led nowhere, because Ford is unwilling to change his business practices or keep up his standards if it comes at the expense of his success.

The final sentence of this quote makes it even more explicit that Ford has left behind some of the ideals that he held before the war. It also places Ford in direct opposition with the "Christian gentleman," suggesting that Ford has lost his sense of morality in favor of his "business machine." Thus, in addition to losing his idealism, he is also losing his integrity in favor of pursuing profits.

Chapter 43 Quotes

He showed how Jews, controlling stage and screen, were depraving American morals; they were doing this, not because it paid, but as a deliberate plot to break down American civilization. Drunkenness was spreading, and it was not because the Jews were making money out of liquor, but because they wanted America drunk. Jews controlled the clothing trade, and so American girls were wearing short skirts. Jews controlled music, and so the American people listened to jazz and danced themselves crazy.

Related Characters: Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

After buying into an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, Ford begins to print a series of stories in his own newspaper to convince others of this conspiracy theory. In highlighting the plot to break down "American civilization," Ford positions the Jews as existing outside of traditional American values and excludes them from American society. It also hints at the beginnings of Ford's cultural conservativism: he is nostalgic for a simpler time when he could listen to wholesome American music (not jazz, another inherently racist criticism) and when girls didn't wear short skirts. This shows how easily Ford has been swayed by the conspiracy theory and how easily news outlets can print misinformation.

Sinclair also points out some of the hypocrisy and issues with Ford's statements. Sinclair presents both sides of an argument here, as if Ford is refuting possible alternate explanations for the Jews' behavior. The irony in the refuted arguments is that they are exactly what Ford would do in the situation. Motivated by profit, Ford absolutely would cater to the masses—just as any capitalist might. Therefore, Sinclair suggests that the Jews aren't "controlling" what the general public consumes; instead, the general public makes certain styles and culture popular. As in any capitalist system, those who mass market those popular cultures will earn success—just as Ford himself has done.

Chapter 44 Quotes

He talked about the matter to the children, also, and warned them to have nothing to do with this evil race. It so happened that the boy who had led the gang of freight-car robbers had been named Levy, and of course that explained everything. It made Abner more inclined to mercy for his son, and Abner talked with him and got the names of men who were making money out of gambling, whiskey, and dope-selling in their home town. Some were Jewish names and some were not, but it was the Jews whom Abner fixed in his mind.

Related Characters: Henry "Hank" Shutt, Henry Ford, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

After reading Ford's reporting on conspiracy theories in the *Dearborn Independent*, Abner begins to discriminate against Jews. First, these actions demonstrate the severe impact that misinformation and bias can have on those who read it. Abner not only takes the *Dearborn Independent*'s words as truth, but he takes these opinions to the very extreme in believing the Jews to be an "evil race."

The media also biases Abner's thoughts. He starts to look for evidence to support his theories based on what he already believes, rather than be open to evidence that refutes his ideas. Sinclair provides examples of Abner noting that the leader of the gang his son hung out with was Jewish. While Sinclair posits this as a coincidence, saying "it just so happened" that the boy was Jewish, Abner sees this as all the proof that he needs of the Jewish conspiracy theory. And he is more inclined to notice criminality in Jewish people than non-Jewish people, as the passage implies.

This moment illustrates why it is so difficult for Abner to relinquish these viewpoints, because he only looks for things to confirm the beliefs put forth by the *Dearborn Independent* and other publications rather than looking for evidence that could refute it. Like many other Americans at the time, newspapers were the only source of information and were often taken at face value, and so this is a prime example of the insidiousness of misinformation and media bias, and how it can affect people's viewpoints for their entire life.

Chapter 48 Quotes

Henry Ford was doing more than any man now alive to root out and destroy this old America; but he hadn't meant to do it, he had thought that men could have the machinery and comforts of a new world, while keeping the ideas of the old. He wanted to go back to his childhood, and he caused millions of other souls to have the same longing.

Related Characters: Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

By the mid-1920s, Ford has become a billionaire—he is making two million cars a year, and he has revolutionized transportation and roads. However, this quote illustrates how technology and progress isn't unilaterally positive, even for Ford. Ford is the one causing the changes: because of his improved cars and roads and the popularization of mass production, different ideas and forms of culture are spreading throughout the country—he names jazz and short skirts as two examples. Yet the irony is that Ford is clearly reluctant to subscribe to this progress, even though he caused it. Ford is now 60 and has hit a turning point in his life, wherein he has become very culturally conservative and yearns for the simplicity of his childhood world.

The fact that "millions of other souls" agree with Ford indicates that many people believe progress isn't always unilaterally good. In the case of this new world, it has become more vibrant and comfortable, but it is also more complicated. This feeling indicates Ford's continued loss of optimism and the sense that he is losing the ideals of "old America." He has been so wrapped up in creating profitable technology, but it has made him more cynical in the process. In this way, Sinclair demonstrates how cars are a corrupting force not only in that they spur Ford to pursue more profit, but they are also remaking a world out of Ford's control.

Chapter 54 Quotes

The Ford empire was not a metaphor but a fact, not a sneer but a sociological analysis. Henry was more than any feudal lord had been, because he had not merely the power of the purse, but those of the press and the radio; he could make himself omnipresent to his vassals, he was master not merely of their bread and butter but of their thoughts and ideals.

Related Characters: Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

As the Great Depression hits, Sinclair explores how Ford has become much more than a business magnate to his employees. Emphasizing his description of Ford's empire as "not a metaphor but a fact" demonstrates that Sinclair wants to show in starkest terms that Ford has become "The Flivver King," or the car king. In his pursuit of fortune Ford has essentially restructured society in Detroit, determining who belongs to which class, how much money they make, and with whom they can interact. John and Annabelle Shutt, for example, are part of the nobility because John works a specialized job, makes a monthly wage, and can afford a neighborhood that separates him from the "serfs" like Abner and others.

In addition, Sinclair underscores again the power of the press. In controlling newspapers like the *Dearborn Independent* or putting out statements about which presidential candidates to vote for, Ford is wielding a weapon that can help keep him in power. Because he is biased towards maintaining his fortune, he espouses ideals that will help him do so. And because his employees have very few ways of garnering outside information, they become completely controlled by his beliefs.

Overall, this is another example of how the capitalist system degrades the poor, implying that their current economic system sets them back to a time in which democracy didn't exist. Because of Ford's power, working-class people remain ignorant about how much he controls their lives, and he keeps them in the dark about how their lives could be different if they simply had more information and rights.

Chapter 58 Quotes

❝ Such things do not seem much to outsiders, but they are what break the spirit of poor people who have always earned what they spent and kept themselves "respectable." Abner had come now to the point where he had to forget that his second son was a bootlegger and a gangster, and let Milly take gratefully whatever money Hank brought.

Related Characters: Tom Shutt Sr., Milly Crock Shutt, Henry "Hank" Shutt, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

In the midst of the Great Depression, both of Abner's parents die, but the family is unable to give Abner's mother a proper burial because most of the Shutts have lost their jobs. This quote illustrates how issues like this are very serious to working-class people—even if they don't "seem like much," Sinclair tries to impress upon readers how severe this indignity is to the Shutts. The capitalist system has robbed them of basic human decency, and disillusionment starts to creep into their outlook as well. For people who have always tried to remain "respectable" and who have worked hard in order to do so, the Great Depression shakes their faith in achieving the American Dream by honest means.

Hank provides a contrast with this idea. He is illegally smuggling in alcohol from Canada, and he is the only member of the Shutt family who has kept his job and who makes a living wage. While Hanks business has also slowed to a degree, Abner and Milly are so desperate that they also need Hank's illegal business to support themselves, even though they dislike his illegal activity and usually try to remain ignorant of it. Thus, Sinclair demonstrates how the American Dream—or even simple survival in America—is only achievable through abandoning one's idealism and morals. Honest people are not able to attain it.

Chapter 61 Quotes

❝ With every month of the depression these things had got worse and worse. The twenty-five thousand workers were driven until they went out "punch-drunk." Sometimes one went out on a stretcher, because men so driven couldn't handle machinery without accidents. On no subject had Henry written more eloquently than on the importance of safety; but again and again his "safety department" was overruled by his speed-up department, and there was a saying in the plant that it took one life a day. They had their own hospital, and there was no way to get any figures.

Related Characters: Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

While the Great Depression leaves many people without jobs, the remaining men in Ford's factory do not fare much better. First, this quote proves that technology is rarely unequivocally good. While the assembly line is crucial for increasing efficiency and reorganizing the workplace, there are also major drawbacks. Although initially, placing men along the assembly line prevented them from running around and bumping into one another, now the assembly line causes more injuries than it avoids.

This quote also demonstrates both the degrading effects of capitalism and the need for unions and regulations. Ford is most concerned with making a profit in his factories, and so his supervisors drive workers to their absolute limit, even at the expense of their safety. Pointing out that Ford has written on the importance of safety only emphasizes that Ford *knows* how important safety is, and yet he still chooses to prioritize speed instead. His drive for increased productivity, and therefore profits, leads to inhumane working conditions in his factories.

The fact that Ford refuses to note the figures for the hospital shows his determination to keep the workers—and people who might try to help them—in the dark about exactly how bad the conditions are. It is alarming that there are so many accidents that the plant needs a hospital at all, and it demonstrates the need for an organization acting on the workers' behalf. As much as Ford claims to represent his workers, his hypocrisy is clear here. Without that union, there is nothing to ensure that the conditions at the plant are fair and humane.

Chapter 62 Quotes

❝ He had once been simple and democratic; but his billion dollars now decreed that he should live like an Oriental despot, shut off by himself, surrounded by watchmen and guards. He who had liked to chat with his men and show them the work now would not dare to walk past his own assembly line without the protection of secret service men. He who had been so talkative had now grown morose and moody. His only associates were "yes-men," those who agreed with everything he said. He met few strangers, because everybody was trying to get some of his money, and he was sick of being asked. His secretaries helped to keep him alone, because he had made a fool of himself so many times, they could never be sure what he would say next.

Related Characters: Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

While the Great Depression wears on, Ford becomes the richest man in the world, with a $1 billion fortune. While Ford has clearly benefitted from the capitalist system and his constant pursuit of profit—particularly in contrast to most people, who are struggling to survive—this passage illuminates how that billion dollars has not bought him happiness. This is the first time Sinclair uses the "billion dollars" as an active instrument, an idea that will recur throughout the rest of the book. In writing that "his billion dollars now decreed," Sinclair suggests that Ford's billion-dollar fortune now has a mind and actions of its own that acts outside of Ford's own wishes and robs him of agency.

The next few lines indicate that Ford misses a time when he could talk to his men and help build his cars, or when he could talk and meet strangers. In this way, Ford's billion dollars have actually left him isolated and miserable. The fact that he has so much money and has earned the resentment of his employees who have so little, is an inherent critique of a system that allows inequality to occur at this magnitude.

The passage also reintroduces the idea of Ford as a king, comparing him to a "despot" and contrasting him with someone who was once "democratic." But while he has gained the wealth and power of a king, his billion dollars have also stripped him of some of his humanity and even his freedom.

Chapter 66 Quotes

❝ So there was Henry Ford's answer to Abner Shutt and the rest of his unemployed workers. Or rather, it was the answer of the billion dollars which had taken charge of Henry's life. A score or two of men lay in hospitals with bullet-wounds, also with handcuffs on their wrists and chains fastening them to their beds; but not a single policeman or "service man" had a bullet-wound.

The Ford Model A had gone back to the old days when you could have only one color. It might be called Arabian sand, or Dawn grey, or Niagara blue, or Gun Metal blue—but it would always be Fresh Human Blood.

Related Characters: Henry Ford, Abner Shutt

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

Abner attends the march at Dearborn, where police officers and Ford's security shoot and kill 4 men and injure 50 others. This passage puts it in starkest terms how the capitalist system has dehumanized both Ford and his workers. Some of the workers who attended are unemployed; others are simply hoping for safety regulations and higher wages. But while they are simply asking for basic human decency and rights, they are met with violence.

Sinclair again uses personification to demonstrate how much Ford's wealth has taken control of Ford's life. No longer does he have agency; instead, his fortune is speaking and acting for him. Ford is so concerned about protecting his wealth and preventing his workers from unionizing that he is even willing to have his security kill some of the unemployed workers, showing how that wealth has completely corrupted him.

The final sentences of the passage, which conclude the chapter, expand on the car's symbolism. It illustrates how the cars have completely corrupted Ford—the fact that the color of the cars will always be "Fresh Human Blood" is a searing indictment of how the cars' profitability has now come at the cost of innocent human lives.

Chapter 76 Quotes

There was a new stirring in labor all over the country; a demand for unions organized according to industries and not according to crafts. It was an old idea, which had had to wait for the workers to realize the need. In the midst of mass poverty and mass unemployment thousands of workers in the Detroit area had started discussing this fundamental idea, that there must be one big union of workers in the motor-car industry, regardless of what kind of work they did. Henry Ford, master of the labor of two hundred thousand men, would deal with one union of that number, and not with a hundred small unions.

Related Characters: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (F.D.R.), Henry Ford, Tom "Tommy" Shutt Jr.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Tom starts to discuss organizing a labor union with the other Ford workers, and here Sinclair emphasizes the need for that union. The historical context of the book is particularly important in understanding Sinclair's intention here: as the book was published in 1937, the Great Depression was at the forefront of many readers' minds. F.D.R. was helping to bolster the labor movement through his New Deal policies in order to protect working-class people and stave off another economic depression. The United Auto Workers (the union for the car industry) published the book, and so part of Sinclair's project in writing it is to convince readers of the union's necessity.

This passage is part of that argument. While many might believe that joining a labor union is a revolutionary concept, Sinclair shows that it is actually an "old idea." He emphasizes that the only way to meet the power and wealth that Ford has accumulated is as one body of workers. As he suggests, 100 small unions would not have the same power, thus demonstrating the need for a large collective to meet the moment.

Chapter 82 Quotes

I am greatness, I am power, I am pride, pomp, and dominion, said the fortune of Henry Ford; I am a dynasty, surviving into the distant future, making history which will not be "bunk," carrying the name of Ford and the glory of Ford to billions of unborn people. But there are evil men, devils in human form loose in the world, who plot to take that glory from me; who desire that the world shall talk, not about Henry and Edsel, and Henry II, and Benson, and Josephine Clay, and William Ford, now fully grown and ready for their share of glory, but about persons with names such as Trotsky and Zinoviev and Bela Kun and Radek and Liebknecht and Luxemburg and Jaurès and Blum.

Related Characters: Tom "Tommy" Shutt Jr., Edsel Ford, Henry Ford

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108-109

Explanation and Analysis

When the police release Tom from prison, the novel shifts perspective to Ford and illustrates how he has become a prisoner of his own fortune. This passage underscores just how much the capitalist system has corrupted him. In the several chapters leading up to this, Sinclair has slowly built

up the idea that Ford's billion-dollar fortune has agency of its own, and Sinclair takes that idea to the extreme here by ascribing a monologue to Ford's fortune.

The tone of the passage suggests a sinister inner voice that is whispering in Ford's ear, flooding him with paranoia and building up his desire for power and glory. Sinclair also references a famous line from Henry Ford himself, in which he said that "history is bunk," suggesting that he cares less about the past and more about the future of his own and his technology's making. Taken as a whole, the passage emphasizes how the capitalist system, while providing Ford with wealth and the power to shape the world, has also left him isolated and distrustful.

Additionally, in referencing primarily Jewish names as the "devils in human form," Sinclair suggests that Ford still believes in his anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. This again reinforces the harm in misinformation and how it can shape a person's beliefs for life.

Chapter 86 Quotes

Tom Shutt couldn't see any member of his audience, but he could hear them, and they were not slow in letting him know what they thought about his arguments. Were they getting a living wage out of the motor industry? Were they able to buy the products of the factories and the farms? They made plain that they were not; and Tom told them that their troubles could be summed up in one simple statement: that under the New Deal profits had increased fifty percent while wages had increased only ten percent. So the very factor which had caused the depression was working faster than ever, leading them straight to another smashup, unless they could find a way to increase wages at the expense of profits.

Related Characters: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (F.D.R.), Henry Ford, Tom "Tommy" Shutt Jr.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

When Tom holds a meeting in support of the labor movement, he makes an impassioned speech for the need for a union. This speech sums up many of Sinclair's arguments over the course of the book and seems to be a direct plea not only from Tom to his audience, but also from Sinclair to his readers, as the book was published with the intention to convince Ford workers to unionize. Tom illustrates that Ford has been taking advantage of his workers—his profits have increased significantly while wages have not risen to match them. Even F.D.R.'s progressive New Deal policies have not done enough to protect the workers, highlighting the need for regulations and a union to protect the workers.

Even the description of the meeting itself emphasizes the workers' need for safety and protection. They are meeting in complete darkness because they are worried about Ford's security department perpetrating violence against them if they are found to have attended the meeting. Ford's willingness to perpetrate violence against these workers also suggests his desperation and dehumanization, as he has become a kind of mob boss willing to attack his workers who are simply asking for a basic living wage and safety.

Chapter 90 Quotes

The gangsters were making a professional job of it. They had Tom on his side and were kicking him in the small of his back to loosen his kidneys.

"Chassez out," called the prompter; the old-timers always pronounced it "Shashay." And then, "Form lines." The dancers moved with perfect grace, knowing every move.

The chief executioner was now kicking his victim in the groin, so that he would not be of much use to his wife for a while.

"Six hands around the ladies," called the prompter. Such charming smiles from elderly ladies, playing at coquetry, renewing their youth.

Related Characters: Dell Brace, Henry Ford, Tom "Tommy" Shutt Jr.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Towards the end of the book, Ford attends a formal dinner and dance while a group of men beat up Tom and his wife, Dell, on their way home from the labor meeting. The stark contrast between the two scenes illustrates the problems on both ends of the capitalist society. As the title of the book implies, Ford has attained the level of a king. He is a ruler in his court, surrounded by a lavish home, decadent food, and traditional dancing. Intercutting these scenes of violence, which are undertaken in order to suppress unionization, illustrates the tyranny of a king like Ford. He is completely ignorant of the violence being perpetrated in his name, which emphasizes how insensitive he has become to the plight of the working classes—only concerned with the

"graceful" and "charming" people around him.

Meanwhile, Tom's experience reveals the way in which capitalism has degraded the lower class. Not only is he unemployed and lacking any kind of worker's protections or benefits, but his desire to fight for an improved quality of life leads him to face grave danger. It also emphasizes the need for collective action over individualism: as a single person, Tom vulnerable to this violence, but in a collective, the workers would be able to match Ford's power and achieve those benefits.

Chapter 92 Quotes

"You should let yourself be happier, dear," the wife was saying. "You have done a great deal of good in the world."

"Have I?" said the Flivver King. "Sometimes I wonder, can anybody do any good. If anybody knows where this world is heading, he knows a lot more than me."

Related Characters: Henry Ford (speaker), Clara Ford

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

In the book's final passage, as Ford drives home from his formal dinner, he expresses doubts about the good he's done for the world. This final exchange ties together many of the threads running through the book: first, the contrast between Clara and Ford's statements emphasizes the dual nature of technology and progress. While new technologies like cars can certainly provide benefits for the world, Ford acknowledges that they also come with drawbacks, and progress always comes with new issues to solve.

First, in deeming Ford "the Flivver King" rather than calling him by name, Sinclair illustrates that Ford has become completely consumed by the pursuit of wealth and power and that his ideals have become corrupted. Where once cars represented American idealism and innovation, now cars have become a symbol of capitalism's corrupting influence: Ford's pursuit of greater and greater car production has left him greedy and pessimistic.

In wondering if anyone can do any good in the world, Ford seems to recognize (if implicitly) that the capitalist system is problematic. He understands that his industry has left many men unemployed, and he has even directly caused violence. And while these men are clearly unhappy, Ford isn't happy either—as Clara notes, he is grimmer than his success might warrant. In this way, Sinclair acknowledges that the system as it stands harms the lives of both the rich and the poor, concluding the book with this overarching critique of capitalism in emphasizing that it helps nobody.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Henry Ford is working on a "horseless carriage" in his backyard. While the adults in the neighborhood dismiss Ford as an eccentric inventor, kids like Abner Shutt are excited about his contraption. The carriage runs on four bicycle wheels and a new kind of engine, which is powered by gasoline. Hearing the loud chemical reactions from Ford's garage, his neighbors think that Ford is going to blow himself up, but the kids eagerly come out to watch him work. Ford insists that when he finishes the engine, there will be roads full of the horseless carriages.

The opening of The Flivver King *introduces the brand-new technology that will be central to the book—so new that it doesn't have a name yet. Ford recognizes how the "horseless carriage," or car, as it will come to be known, has the potential to revolutionize modern society.*

CHAPTER 2

Abner's father, Tom Shutt, works in a factory making railway freight-cars. For this skilled work, Tom makes $1.40 a day, and he always comes home exhausted. The Shutts live on one side of a two-family frame house; they are poor, but not hopeless. They share many Americans' beliefs that their children will be able to rise in the world and that opportunity is available to everyone.

Here, Sinclair establishes that even the poor characters in the novel have faith in the quintessential American Dream—the idea that they can have freedom, prosperity, security, equal opportunity, and social mobility.

One evening, while Ford is working on his invention, Abner introduces him to Tom. Ford is 28, lean, and intelligent, and he tells Abner and Tom that he plans to make the carriages on a mass scale so that anyone will be able to drive to work in one. People will be able to save a lot of money by driving themselves. Tom politely wishes Ford luck, but privately he doesn't believe that Ford will be able to carry out his visions.

Ford demonstrates his idealism as he builds his first car: he wants to be able to provide Americans with something useful that will save them money in the long run. In this way, Ford not only displays his optimism but also demonstrates the potential benefits of new technology on a broad scale.

CHAPTER 3

Ford's father was a farmer, but Ford learned all he could about machinery growing up and worked hard all his life. Now, in Detroit, Michigan, in 1892, Ford spends all his spare time and money on his invention—often working for days at a time without resting. Then, one evening in April, Ford is able to start his **car** and drive down the street. When he returns home, he is exultant.

Ford initially becomes an early proof of the American Dream: while his father was a farmer, Ford worked hard and educated himself about machinery. In doing this, he has the opportunity to create a revolutionary invention and rise up the ladder of success.

CHAPTER 4

Ford continues to improve his **car** until he's confident enough to drive it during the day. Abner is amazed to see Ford drive down the street, even though the car sometimes breaks down. When this happens, Abner helps push Ford's car home—something he talks about for the rest of his life. While the **newspapers** treat Ford relatively politely, bicyclists sometimes ride alongside Ford and make fun of him, and none of the businessmen take his invention seriously as a commercial possibility. Ford decides to resign from his job at the electric company to work on his invention full-time.

Ford continues to demonstrate his idealism, as he believes that he'll find success with his invention through sheer perseverance and hard work. The fact that Abner is proud of being able to push Ford home illustrates that he, too, shares in this idealism. The fact that Abner talks about this for the rest of his life foreshadows the massive success that Ford will attain, and it illustrates that Abner is proud of having faith in Ford before he becomes massively successful.

CHAPTER 5

In the summer of 1893, there is a panic on Wall Street, and by the winter, Tom and his older sons lose their jobs. These economic downturns are mysterious to the Shutts, who don't fully understand why they occur. All they know is that as a result, they have to sell most of their belongings, move into one tenement room, and live on very little food. Abner has to leave school and make a few pennies selling **newspapers**. One day, his fingers freeze on the job, and a doctor has to cut one of them off. Meanwhile, Tom stands on the breadlines with hundreds of starving men.

This is the book's first implicit critique of the capitalist system. The wealth inequality in America means that the poorest workers are often hit hardest by the economy's fragility. The Shutts live in destitution for several years and this period of poverty has a huge impact on Abner going forward. Not only does Abner lose a finger, but he also misses out on the rest of his education as a result of this crisis.

After three years of this hardship, business picks up again. Abner never returns to school; instead, he gets jobs where he can find them. He grows up to be an upstanding boy, keeping Tom's faith in the country and its institutions in spite of the family's poverty. The **newspapers** report that hard times are an inescapable law of nature, but now America is returning to prosperity and remains the greatest and richest country in the world. Abner thinks that if a person works hard and lives a God-fearing life, success is bound to come.

Abner's idealism is resilient at first: even when facing hardship and poverty, he has faith in America's institutions and his own future. He continues to hold onto the American Dream that hard work can give a person opportunity and social mobility.Additionally, Sinclair hints at the press's impact here. Because the newspapers report that hard times are inevitable, many Americans like Abner take this as fact. But part of Sinclair's project in the book is to illustrate that this is misleading, and that major economic systems could be regulated better.

CHAPTER 6

Ford has a difficult time finding businessmen who share his vision. Most businessmen want to market his **car** to rich people, and they tell Ford to find out what rich people want and build it. But Ford wants to build something useful and then mass market the car—in the same way that bicycles are produced. He argues that the product will advertise itself on the road, and pretty soon everyone will want one.

Ford's initial idealism again shines through here, as he hopes to make a positive impact on many people's lives rather than simply market something for the wealthy. He recognizes that technology and progress is important to provide to people across the economic scale, and he searches for businessmen who share those values.

Companies advertise bicycles through high-profile races: manufacturers employ professional riders and pay them bonuses to beat the other makes' riders. So to advertise his **car**, Ford decides to hold a race between himself and a man named Mr. Winton, who is inventing a car in Cleveland. Abner attends the race, and he watches as Ford's car roars past Mr. Winton's car. Abner is thrilled when Ford wins and brags about knowing Ford when he was building his first machine.

Ford reveals his ambition through these races. While he still wants to create something useful, he starts to display his desire to beat out his rivals and gain as much success as possible. This race represents the beginning of an unending competition in Ford's life.

CHAPTER 7

After Ford's **car** wins the race, Abner realizes that Ford's business will likely grow, and Abner wonders if Ford might give him a job. Abner is now 24 and works at a tool company. Having worked there for three years without receiving a promotion, Abner realizes that he doesn't much chance of advancing. He also asked a girl named Milly Crock to marry him five years earlier, but they are still trying to save enough money to get married. It is the era of Teddy Roosevelt and business is booming—but it seems to Abner that everyone is getting rich except for him, so he decides to meet with Ford.

Abner's situation hints at both the benefits of and the inequality in the American capitalist system. While it is true that Abner has the opportunity to gain success alongside Henry Ford, Abner and other working-class people are also being left out of the 1890s' economic boom. He has very little opportunity at the tool company, to the point where he can't afford to marry or have children, suggesting that the capitalist system doesn't always allow people to earn a decent living.

CHAPTER 8

At 40 years old, Ford still has no business success and he is essentially making **cars** by himself. But one of Ford's friends, a coal dealer named Malcolmson, is interested in Ford's victories in the races. Malcolmson puts up $7,000 to create the Ford Motor Company, and together he and Ford round up a series of investors. Altogether, the new company starts with $28,000; with these investments, they set up a new shop to make the cars in a building with a false front, which makes the building appear taller than it actually is.

Malcolmson's and the others' investments acknowledge Ford's invention's importance and the potential progress that it carries. The car itself is also a symbol of American idealism and industry at first, because it provides greater freedom and proves that success can be earned hard work. The detail of the false front on Ford's first building is also symbolic, because it represents the fact that Ford is putting up a front of idealism—one that masks his underlying greed and corrupt nature.

CHAPTER 9

One day, Abner happens to drive by Ford's new building and notice the sign; he decides goes inside to ask Ford for a job. Abner reintroduces himself to Ford and explains that he's a good worker, that he never drinks, and that he'd be grateful for the chance to work at Ford's company. Impressed by Abner's sincerity, his worker's clothes, and his calloused hands, Ford agrees to give Abner a job. Abner is thrilled and grateful, and he plans to start the next day.

Abner's ability to get a job proves the capitalist system's benefit: even working-class people can rise up and gain a degree of success alongside a company's entrepreneur. Additionally, Ford shows that at this point, he values American ideals like hard work and strives to provide others with opportunity, prosperity, and social mobility in exchange for that hard work.

CHAPTER 10

The next day, Abner starts at the factory. The foreman shows Abner exactly what to do: Abner will place the wheels on the **car**'s axle and screw on the spindle-nuts with a wrench to hold the wheel in place. He has to make sure that the work is done accurately and carefully so that the car wheel will remain on firmly. Abner learns the job quickly and starts to become very fast at it. If he doesn't keep up this pace, however, supervisors give him dark looks. Over time, Abner also learns to assemble the alarm bell and the lantern on the car. Abner is on the move the whole day, but he doesn't mind it—he is getting 17 cents an hour and will be promoted if he works hard, which is all he can ask for.

While Abner's job at the Ford plant gives him a new degree of social mobility and opportunity for advancement, there are also hints of the toll that the work will take on him and the other factory workers. Abner is given a specialized job, but when he doesn't keep up the pace, supervisors take notice and discreetly criticize him for it. This foreshadows the ultimate problem with the assembly line, which forces workers to maintain a fast pace so that they can be as productive as possible, even if it comes at the cost of their health and safety.

CHAPTER 11

With Abner's new job security, he and Milly get married and take their first and last vacation. Over the following six years, they have six children, of whom four survive: three boys (John, Henry "Hank," and Tom Jr.) and a girl (Daisy). While Abner and Milly are fulfilling their dream, Ford is fulfilling his: to make sure that the Shutt children grow up in a world with millions of **cars** to convey them anywhere in the country.

Abner and Henry are both starting to achieve success. Abner is able to marry and pursue his version of the American Dream: having a good job and a big family. Meanwhile, Ford continues to pursue his own dream of providing people with greater mobility around the country, underscoring his new technology's benefits.

In its first year, the Ford Motor Company makes $1.5 million—nearly one quarter of which is profit. The first **car**, the Model A, sells for $850, and Ford hopes to keep reducing the price in order to sell more cars. This strategy puts him at odds with his investors, who want to design a new car model every year that costs the same high price. That way, wealthy people will feel like they have to have the latest model and will continue to buy new cars.

While Ford wants to provide people with opportunity on a grand scale, the investors are attempting to provide the car's opportunity and economic benefit only to the rich, demonstrating how new technology and progress can sometimes intensify the socioeconomic inequality that already exists.

The investors outvote Ford, so Ford begins making new models at the same prices every year. Each year, however, his sales drop further. Ford decides to buy out the investors who are dissatisfied, and as a result anyone who doesn't agree with Ford leaves the company. Ford then starts to make less expensive **cars**, and the results are immediate: in 1906, the year after this buyout, the company sells five times as many cars as the previous year.

Ford's new strategy demonstrates how the capitalist system is benefitting everyone—at least at first. Americans are able to buy cars at significantly reduced prices, and as a result Ford is able to find a much greater level of success.

CHAPTER 12

As **cars** sell more quickly, Abner has to work faster and faster. He even gives up some aspects of his job; by dividing up the labor among more men, the workers are able to assemble the car faster. Soon, all Abner does is screw on the spindle-nuts for the wheels. While production is skyrocketing, Abner decides to ask Ford for a promotion, because he's worked hard for Ford for three years.

In addition to the new technology of cars, Ford to introduces a new division of labor that will become key to the assembly line, allowing him to increase production even further as he chases greater profits. At the same time, Abner's job is starting to become more and more downgraded and repetitive, hinting at how this extreme division of labor and increased production can harm the workers.

When Abner approaches Ford, he tells Ford that he sees a lot of waste in the plant. The left and right side spindle-nuts come to him mixed up—it would be very easy for someone to deface the nuts if they made a mistake and picked out the wrong one. He could also do more work if someone brought him the wheels rather than going to get them himself. Ford says he'll help make these adjustments possible.

Like Ford, Abner is also interested in creating a more efficient process in the plant through a further division of labor, particularly to prove his worth and insight to Ford. In return, Ford rewards Abner for this initiative, as the pursuit of greater efficiency and productivity helps them both.

Abner then explains that someday, Ford will likely have a whole team of men just to put on the **car**'s wheels; Abner asks to be the supervisor for this work when that position becomes necessary. Ford agrees, and when the time comes that five men are doing the work of putting on the wheels, Ford makes Abner the sub-foreman at $2.75 a day.

Again, Abner is sharing in the capitalist system's benefits here. However, it is notable that Abner is looking out for himself, and the same benefits that he gets may not necessarily be extended to someone doing the same work, hinting at the need for regulation and unionized wages.

CHAPTER 13

Abner and his growing family find a five-room house to rent for $9 a month. It has running water and a toilet inside—something they've never had before. Meanwhile, Ford buys a new three story brick factory building entirely with his profits. The space is an upgrade from less than half an acre of space to two and a half acres, and with $250,000 worth of machinery in it. Ford walks around the plant making sure that the men keep up their pace as they move from one spot to another to assemble **cars**.

During the company's rise, both Ford and Abner find mutual success, and the novel highlights the similarities between the two men as they simultaneously move into a new space that reflects their success. However, that success is not wholly comparable. While Abner is amazed at the luxury of a toilet inside his home, this is negligible compared to the luxury and wealth that Ford now enjoys. This disparity underscores the fact that Ford is making his fortune without fair payment to the workers who are helping him attain it.

Soon after buying the new building, Ford goes to Florida to attend an auto race. When a French **car** gets into an accident, Ford picks up a piece of the wreckage and notices how light the car's metal is. Ford then decides to only use this alloy for his cars, which would allow the cars to be lighter, stronger, and cheaper. Back in the factory, as the workers assemble the new cars, Ford quotes scripture: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business […] He shall stand before kings."

Ford continues to try to advance his technology in order to both advantage his consumers and himself in making a lighter, cheaper product. Additionally, Ford's quoting of a Bible verse (Proverbs 22:29) reflects his high expectation for his employees to work hard. However, it also hints at the inequity between Ford and his workers: if they work hard, they can work for a king (him), but they will not be kings themselves.

CHAPTER 14

In the new plant, Abner continues to oversee the wheel assembly. He goes from **car** to car, watching others work. This is before the **assembly line**, which means that a lot of men are constantly bumping into each other. Abner also has to keep the men in line behaviorally, making sure that they don't come to work drunk. Abner is generally easy-going and hates to make trouble, but if someone isn't doing their work correctly, Abner is forced to report the man to a supervisor.

Abner notes the inefficiency of their division of labor without the assembly line, because so many men are wasting time running around and bumping into each other. Abner also reveals how the hierarchy in the plant puts the men at odds with one another, rather than unifying them as workers in pursuit of the same benefits and wages.

In 1907, there is another panic on Wall Street, but it barely affects Ford's sales. In the year after the panic, he produces 6,181 **cars**—three per worker. Within three years, Ford is making 35,000 cars for 6,000 workers—almost six cars per worker. In that period, Abner is paid a 15 percent wage increase to make twice as many cars, and he considers himself one of the luckiest workers in America.

The data in this passage paints a clear picture of the profit system's inequity. While Abner is doing twice the work, he only receives a 15 percent increase in wages, highlighting the need for fair wage regulation and unionization. The fact that Abner views himself as one of the luckiest workers in America is telling, because it illustrates the reason that Abner won't ask for more money—he knows that other people don't make nearly as much as he does and he could easily lose his job to someone who will work for less. Thus, these statistics highlight the need for an outside force like a union to ensure the men are treated fairly.

CHAPTER 15

After six years of child-bearing and housekeeping, Milly starts to have many physical pains. Worse, her last two children die shortly after being born, and she starts to grow resentful of Abner. Abner tries to make the best of their situation, but while he loves his children, he rarely gets to spend time with them. Six days a week he gets up at 5:30 a.m. and gets breakfast before riding his bike to the Ford plant. He spends all day on his feet making sure that everything is running properly and safely, and at the end of the day he returns home with $3.

While Abner and his family remain optimistic about their lives, disillusionment is starting to creep in. Abner's work takes a toll on his body, and he realizes that he doesn't have the opportunity to be with his children. He wants to work hard, but he also wants to make sure he can have a family life.

Still, Abner thinks of Ford's factory as a wonderful place. It is also Abner's greatest dream to buy one of the **cars** so that he can take Milly and the kids to visit the farm where his brother works, and where they could by vegetables at half the price charged at the corner grocery.

Abner views the car as a symbol of his personal American Dream, as it brings him both prosperity and a means of bringing his family together. This passage also highlights another aspect of the car's economic utility. Not only does it allow Abner to see his brother, but he can also travel to buy consumer goods more cheaply.

CHAPTER 16

In 1908, Ford decides to create a single cheap model that he can sell to the masses: the Model T. All of the **cars** are ugly and black, but he figures that most Americans are like him and care less about the car's and more about its usefulness. He buys 60 acres of land in Highland Park (just north of Detroit) and builds the world's largest automobile plant. He charges $950 for his car that year and makes 18,000 of them. The next year, he reduces the price to $780 and sells twice as many, earning millions of dollars. Ford also wants his workers to have high wages so that they can then buy his cars.

This section reinforces how initially, the capitalist system does provide benefits for both Ford and his workers. This is particularly due to the fact that Ford has an incentive to give his workers higher wages, so that they will then be able to buy his cars and he can earn even more money. Yet even though Ford aims to give his workers good wages, they are not keeping pace with his profits, highlighting again the need for workers to unionize and negotiate for better working conditions and wages.

CHAPTER 17

Every night, Abner reads the evening **newspaper** and learns about what is happening at the new plant. Most of Ford's employees are proud of their employer, but a few are jealous of him. They believe that Ford is amassing wealth thanks to their labor, while he is not paying them fairly for it. Abner is annoyed at these men and calls them socialists—though he doesn't know what the word means and only read it in the newspapers.

These grumblings introduce the idea that unions and regulation are important, because without them, Ford can simply take advantage of his workers and doesn't have to pay them fairly. Additionally, Abner's relationship to the word socialist—believing that it is bad without fully knowing what it means—also illustrates how media bias can influence the average American's political views. The media gives Abner a negative view of socialism despite the fact that the labor movement, which is often associated with socialism, would benefit Abner.

At the beginning of 1912, Abner gets very sick. He panics—he hasn't missed a day of work in 8 years. The company's agent comes to the house to check on Abner and promises that Abner will keep his job. However, Abner worries that if he misses too many days, his supervisor will realize that he doesn't need Abner, and Abner will be fired. Gradually Abner's strength returns, but the experience makes him very fearful of losing his job. More than ever, Abner is grateful to Ford for the work, and for the $70 bonus he receives at the end of the year which fortunately covers his medical bills.

While Abner is grateful to Ford for the work, this incident illustrates the clear problems with having no union support or benefits. Abner is terrified at losing his job over getting sick because he doesn't have any kind of job protection, despite the fact that he has worked hard for the company for many years. Abner feels he always has to drive himself as hard as possible in order to maintain a sense of security, even when it might not be healthy for him.

CHAPTER 18

In 1912, Woodrow Wilson runs on the Democratic ticket. Wilson makes eloquent speeches about freedom, but Abner reads in the **newspapers** that the Democratic party causes "hard times." Afraid of these hard times, Abner votes Republican. Then, when Wilson wins the presidency and business starts to slow, Abner is convinced that the newspapers were right, and he votes Republican for the rest of his life.

This is another example of the severe impact of media bias. Even though Abner likes Wilson's words and ideas, he is more terrified of the newspaper's analysis, which states that Democrats usher in hard times—an idea that has haunted him since he was a teenager and lost his finger during an economic downturn. Without a fuller understanding of the economic forces in the country, Abner doesn't necessarily vote for candidates that match up with his personal views because journalists sway him in another direction.

Fortunately, these hard times affect Henry Ford very little. He sells more than 500 **cars** every day at $600. The next year he reduces the price to $550 and sells 1,000 cars per day. Millions of people like the idea that they can cross the continent in a month or a week, rather than a year, and cars are all over the roads now. Meanwhile, Abner moves his family to the neighborhood of the new factory, and he oversees the assembly of 4,000 wheels a day.

Again, Sinclair emphasizes the benefit of the cars in giving people greater mobility, particularly as Ford lowers the prices so more and more people can buy the cars. At the same time, these reduced prices also illustrate Ford's interest in maximizing profits—trying to lower the cost marginally while greatly increasing production and, consequently, profits. In this way, the cars become a symbol of Ford's relentless pursuit of profit.

CHAPTER 19

Ford hears about a new **assembly line** at General Motors, and he decides to try it out at his factory. Now, 29 men divide the work of assembling a complex part called the magneto, and they reduce the time it takes to assemble the part from 20 minutes to 13. The same is done for the motor: 84 men divide the work and they cut the time by 40 percent. The old method of assembling a **car** took 12 hours and 28 minutes. With the assembly line, it now takes one hour and 33 minutes.

While the car is certainly Ford's greatest invention, his use of the assembly line is just as revolutionary. It not only allows Ford to hire more men, but it also allows him to maximize division of labor, cut down on the time that it takes to assemble the cars, and thus greatly increase his own profits.

Ford feels that he is competing at every moment of his life, and he knows that his success depends on getting the most out of his labor. So, after a few weeks with the new **assembly line**, they speed up the "belt" one minute per hour and make 16 more **cars** per day. The workers are completely unaware of this process. All they know is that if they seem weak or cannot keep pace, there are a dozen men to take their places.

This is a turning point for both Ford and the workers. Ford's feeling that he is constantly competing illustrates the harm in the capitalist system, as he subsequently pushes his employees harder and harder. The fact that he is speeding up the belt to get as much out of the workers as possible highlights this technology's drawbacks; it also underscores the need for workers to have regulations in place so the employees aren't worked past their limits.

CHAPTER 20

Ford is an idealist; he wants to make his workers happy, and he also knows that if he pays high wages, his workers will be able to buy his **cars**. Thus, in 1914, he declares that he is going to divide a bonus of $10 million a year to his workers, which would bring the lowest paid workers a minimum of $5 a day. The working day would also be reduced from nine hours to eight. Instantly, Ford becomes a national hero.

Here, Ford begins to lose a little of his idealism: while he wants his workers to be happy and to have solid wages, he is also motivated by a desire for good press and by his own greed, knowing that the money he invests in his workers would likely come right back to him when they purchase one of his cars.

Because of Ford's announcement, manufacturers, businessmen, and **newspapers** call him a socialist. In addition, workers from all over the country take the first train to Detroit in the hopes of being hired, only to find that there are few jobs for them. The workers stand outside the factory and throw stones but ultimately recognize that they can't do anything about the lack of jobs. Meanwhile, Ford and his wife, Clara, become instantly famous. Ford has to live like a "European potentate," with armed security between him and the public.

Ford's new label as a socialist is ironic, particularly given the fact that he is completely motivated by a desire for profit. The passage also illustrates how capitalism is already degrading some aspects of his life. While he is attaining the success and power of a "potentate" or king, he is simultaneously forced to be secluded from others for fear that they might be violent or critical of him.

CHAPTER 21

While the public believes that Ford is going to pay all of his workers at least $5 a day, in reality the workers will only get a biweekly bonus provided they "qualif[y]." Qualifications for married men include taking care of a family; for single men, they include "living wholesomely" and being the sole support of a family member. The company ascertains these qualifications by sending a company agent to each employee's house and interviewing them. Abner qualifies for the bonus and receives an additional check for $25.44 every two weeks. While he is immensely grateful for this, other employees are frustrated by the department's snooping in their personal lives. Employees also begin to spy on and report one another if they don't meet the qualifications, and people who try to subvert the rules are fired.

While the press reports on Ford's generosity, the reality is not as kind. Ford is still trying to maximize profits—only giving bonuses to a subset of people who "qualify" by living up to his version of American ideals and values. In addition, he is starting to sow discontent and mistrust among his workers. Rather than trying to work together and ensure that they all get the same benefits, the workers are only looking out for themselves as individual people and are turning on anybody whom they don't think deserves the bonus.

CHAPTER 22

Though Abner's wages go up, prices and rents are also increasing. Abner and Milly decide to buy a home, but real estate prices have doubled since the bonus announcement. Some of Ford's associates knew about the bonus and bought land to sell at a higher price. It seems the one person who got what he wanted out of the bonus was Henry Ford, who has become America's number one employer. He has his pick of the best labor, and rarely has to fire anyone because they are so keen to keep their jobs.

Sinclair starts to reveal some of the issues with the capitalist system. Just as Ford is trying to increase his profits, the landlords and shop owners are as well. Thus, even though Abner is getting a bonus, he is essentially as poor as he was before, and those who do not receive the bonus are even worse off. Sinclair also illustrates the corruption in America's institutions, as Ford's associates used the information about the bonus to take advantage of the situation and make a profit at the expense of the home sellers and buyers who did not have that information.

CHAPTER 23

As Abner and Milly search for a home, a real estate agent tells them that he has the last bargain in Highland Park (a city in the Detroit area). The house has six rooms, more than they ever hoped for, and is more expensive than they wanted. They decide to take the risk and pay $3,150 (though the house was $1,000 cheaper prior to the bonus days). They pay $600 down and $20 a month, plus a very high interest rate. Because they never owned a home before, they are unaware of property taxes, and they soon find that their savings are dwindling.

Again, the novel continues to illustrate some capitalism's problematic effects, particularly in that it often disadvantages those in the working class. This real estate agent takes advantage of Abner and Milly's ignorance and gets them to buy a more expensive home without fully understanding the financial ramifications; like everyone else, the agent simply wants to make the highest sale possible. Thus, even though Abner is making more money than before, he has less money overall.

Meanwhile, Europe is now embroiled in a massive war. Headlines report on the war's horrors, and Abner is glad that the United States isn't involved. Ford also doesn't support the war, and he refuses to sell any **cars** for war work. However, it's possible that the British found a way to get hold of some cars, in spite of Ford's conviction. During the war's first year, Ford sells more than 300,000 cars; during its second year, 500,000, and during its third year, 750,000. But the increase may have been because other car companies supply the warring nations and leave a larger share of the American market to Ford.

Ford's pacifism is another aspect of his initial idealism, as he clings staunchly to his decision not to become involved in World War I. However, even here Sinclair foreshadows the fact that Ford may not stick completely to these ideals. This passage leaves open the possibility that even as Ford says he doesn't want to sell cars to the British, the British still acquire some of his cars—with or without his knowledge.

CHAPTER 24

With the new eight-hour days, the factory is working in two shifts. Abner starts at 6:00 a.m. and gets home in the middle of the afternoon. Abner is grateful for the time to keep up the new house, and he also gets to watch his children grow. John is now 10 years old and interested in everything his father does and says. The second boy, Hank makes constant trouble for Milly. Daisy is a sweet and gentle eight-year-old, and Abner can tell that the youngest, Tommy, is going to manage men—he is an eager kid who likes to tell others what to do.

Even with some of the financial snags, Abner recognizes that he is living his version of the American Dream. He owns a house that he feels lucky to have and he is now able to spend more time raising and getting to know his children. Additionally, Sinclair foreshadows the children's fates as adults: John follows in his father's shoes, Hank makes trouble, and Tommy will manage other men.

CHAPTER 25

Ford continues to prosper, and Abner continues to pay off his house. Abner also decides to buy an old Model T from 1910 for $325. It is the proudest moment of his life thus far, and his social position in the neighborhood rises immensely. The kids are giddy sitting in the **car**'s back seat. Abner also realizes that he will have to build a garage—just another thing to spend his bonus money on.

While the car provides some benefits to Abner, like freedom and a degree of social capital, it also comes with some cost, like building a garage. While it is a symbol of prosperity and progress for both Abner and Ford, this indicates that progress and technology can still have some drawbacks.

CHAPTER 26

Ford knows that as long as Europe is at war, **cars** will be in constant demand. He is a little troubled by this fact, however, because he prides himself on creating a "clean" fortune. Feeling that there are bloodstains on his money, Ford decides to write articles in opposition to the war. Some people view his articles as unpatriotic, but Abner never wavers in his loyalty and knows that whatever Ford does is right.

At this point, Ford continues to stick to his ideals of pacifism and prosperity. He even does this at the expense of some profit, as he continues to refuse to sell cars for the war effort and is even labelled unpatriotic. That Abner remains loyal to Ford also demonstrates his own adherence to those same ideals.

CHAPTER 27

Rosika Schwimmer, a Hungarian women's rights activist and pacifist, comes to Ford for help. She describes the war's horrors and asks him to take action to oppose it. Ford charters a ship and invites other pacifists with the mission of trying to figure out how to resolve the war. In the **newspapers**, former president Teddy Roosevelt criticizes the peace ship and a Wall Street lawyer who ran against Roosevelt calls Ford a clown. Ford says that the fight to stop the war is necessary despite the "vaporings of editorial-writing comedians."

Here, Ford starts to become at odds with the newspapers, as he calls out the lack of substance in "editorial-writing comedians." This only spurs Ford's desire to hang on to his ideals, even if the top politicians criticize him for doing so.

CHAPTER 28

Britain is winning against the German naval fleet and they are intent on destroying it entirely. These forces have a big impact on Wall Street: prices for everything that can be used in a world war go up, and 17,000 new millionaires are made in America. Banks are keen for the war's continuation and the German fleet's destruction, and magazines and **newspapers** (which are those banks' clients) make fun of Ford mercilessly for his peace ship. Most people agree with the newspapers, but historians, looking back on the way the Allied forces took advantage of their situation and what came out of it afterward, thought that Ford showed more sense than most of Europe.

Sinclair continues to reveal the corruption of American institutions. Rather than fight for peace and diplomacy, the newspapers and other leaders mock Ford for his pacifism. Journalists like Sinclair note that banks and others have a vested interest in the war, and they are also able to bias the newspapers and the people as a whole. Sinclair hints, however, that Ford's instinct toward pacifism was right; he foreshadows here that end of World War I instigated German nationalism and set the stage for World War II.

CHAPTER 29

Every day, Abner comes home in the afternoon and reads the **newspaper**. He is pleased that Ford is trying to end the war, believing that Ford is the greatest man in the world. From the paper, Abner learns about the peace ship, where people gathered to discuss the importance of ending the war. Ford caught the flu, however, and had to stay in his cabin while people visited him, clamoring for his ear and his input.

Ford has now reached the level not just of a captain of industry, but also of a politician or world leader. Because of his business success, he is starting to take on the manner of a king, with people visiting him in his chambers.

CHAPTER 30

There are 54 journalists on Ford's peace ship, including one from the London *Daily Mail*. The *Daily Mail*'s owner rose to power in the same fashion as Ford, only he sold sensations and scandals instead of machinery. The journalist sends out detailed accounts of the pacifists' disagreements, which are broadcast by the international press.

The description of the Daily Mail*'s rise sheds some light on the newspaper industry's bias. Just like Ford and his cars, the newspaper industry is equally invested in maximizing their profits and selling the news, even if it means printing biased stories or misinformation.*

While the peace ship is sailing, President Wilson calls for a heavy increase in military forces, which delights Wall Street and exasperates the pacifists. When the ship lands in Denmark, Ford's advisor Dean Marquis urges Ford to return home. Ford takes the next steamer back, and the pacifists continue to hold their meetings. When Ford returns, he declares that he is more of a pacifist than ever. He publishes full-page advertisements full of attacks on the munitions empire.

Again, Ford demonstrates how at this time, he is willing to hang on to his ideals even if this puts him at odds with major politicians and world leaders. Sinclair places Ford at odds with the war-hungry bankers on Wall Street, emphasizing that his desire for profits have not yet fully corrupted him in the way that it has corrupted other businessmen.

CHAPTER 31

Back in Highland Park, Abner's father, Tom, is now in his 60s, and his legs are overcome with joint pain. Though he has been working for the same company for 25 years, he is promptly fired without a note of thanks, and Abner and Milly are forced to take in Tom and Abner's mother. Milly, who is often aggravated by her children, becomes jealous of Abner's mother, whom the children love much more openly.

Tom's firing demonstrates the problems with lack of regulation or unions. He is unable to work through no fault of his own, and as a result he loses all benefits and has no protection for the future. While some people are able to survive these situations—Tom is able to move in with his son—this is not always the case, and this is one of Sinclair's first illustrations of why protective regulations are necessary.

Abner tries to keep the peace at home, but his worries are offset by the fact that his wages have been raised again, and he is getting over $6.50 a day now. Yet at the same time, prices are going up, and so are the family's demands. Abner tries to tell his children how lucky they are, and how they didn't have to grow up amid hard times like he did. They do have one luxury: the **car**. On Sundays they drive out to visit his brother's family or Milly's sisters. For years they brought home cheap groceries from these trips, but now the farmers are ramping up their prices as well.

While the new technology allows Abner to gain some benefits, and while Ford is giving Abner greater wages, the cars start to have widespread economic impact. Although Abner is able to go to cheaper groceries, farmers recognize the new demand for their products and raise prices accordingly. Thus, the capitalist system makes it so that Abner is essentially as poor as he was before.

CHAPTER 32

In 1917, Ford makes new machinery, buys property, and branches out into other industries to cut out the middlemen in his production line. He also continues to read the **papers**, which are slowly changing their reporting on the war. Because American businesses are selling so many goods and lending so much money to the Allies, if they were to fail, American industry would implode. Thus, they report on the glories of French civilization and the humane ideals that the British always stood for.

Here, the corruption in the American industries is again laid bare. Newspapers start to change their stories according to the needs of American businesses. Those businesses want to drum up support for the war, because they have become so entrenched in it that they need to encourage it.

In response, Abner and Ford both start to change their ideas on war. Ford starts to build a submarine that can be equipped with bombs. Soon after, Wilson declares that he wants to make the world safe for democracy, and the U.S. gets involved in the war. Ford continues to make **cars**, but he also makes army trucks, ambulances, and airplane engines. He buys a plant on the Rouge River in Detroit to keep pace with all of this production. Meanwhile, **papers** report on the danger of German spies, and Abner grows vigilant in the factory about trying to spot them.

This passage underscores the power of media bias, and how it shapes readers' opinions. As the newspapers print more positive stories about the Allied powers and the importance of defending them, both Abner and Ford change their minds on the war. This has even further ramifications in Ford's case, because he has the power to shape global events with his manufacturing. Ford also demonstrates how his ideals are starting to slip in favor of his desire for profits, as the war work is enabling him to grow an even larger business.

CHAPTER 33

For the next two years, Abner has plenty of work, and his wages rise to $8.25 a day. This seems astronomical to him, except that the price of almost everything is going up. One advantage that Abner has, however, is that because he bought a house, he doesn't have to worry about rents going up, as others do.

Again, while Abner is finding some success, his prosperity comes with caveats. Because of the increased prices, he doesn't actually have a greater degree of wealth. And in addition, his experience exposes the inequity of the system: while he gets the benefit of a house, those who were unable to afford a house become even worse off.

At the same time, Ford runs for the U.S. Senate seat in Michigan. He loses to a naval officer who raises $5 million and bought voter support, but the man is later convicted of bribery. The Allies (including the United States) also win the war, but Abner learns from the **papers** that there is a new threat called the Bolsheviki, who are even more dangerous than the German spies. Abner starts to look out for them in the plant as well.

This is another exposé of corruption within America: that political offices and power can simply be bought. Even if Ford were to win, he, too, is backed by an immense degree of success. While he might have good ideas, he is still motivated by the desire to retain power, wealth, and status, and thus Sinclair suggests that both of these men would corrupt the political sphere.

CHAPTER 34

Ford, now 55 years old, spends the winter resting in California with Clara and their son, Edsel. During this winter, an idealistic author meets with Ford. The author discovers that Ford is kind and unassuming—largely unchanged by his success. The author asks what Ford thinks about the profit system, and Ford explains that he doesn't know what it is. The author explains that no one can or will work without the promise of making a profit. Ford counters, explaining that that he promised President Wilson to turn over his plant and resources to the government without profits during the war. When the author asks why he doesn't do this during peacetime, Ford says that he wants money to be able to try out more inventions, and because he doesn't want politicians butting in on his work.

The unnamed author (who could perhaps be Sinclair himself) questions Ford about the benefits and deficiencies of the capitalist system. Ford himself acknowledges that a person can work without profits, and yet he chooses not to because of his desire for greater wealth, power, and freedom. However, as Sinclair foreshadows, Ford's humanity becomes degraded by that desire. No longer is he as interested in supporting his workers or the American people generally; instead, he aims simply to expand his industry.

Ford points to the railroad industry, which broke down during the war, leaving the government to run them. Ford submitted proposals for how to fix the situation to the Secretary of the Treasury, but the Secretary was a businessman and did nothing about it because he was serving the banks and private interest. The author points out that in that case, private interest is what corrupted politics, but Ford argues that politics is full of waste and incompetence.

The author points out the contradiction in Ford's assessments. While Ford believes government is wasteful and self-interested, the author examines the root cause of that waste and self-interest: loyalty to the banks and the capitalist system. Thus, he argues that the constant greed and desire for power latent in capitalism is instead what corrupts America's institutions.

The author makes one more point: that a monarchy is good with a good king, but with a bad king, there is trouble. Ford concedes this point indirectly later when he admits that the reason there are no unions in the Ford shops is because the men don't want them.

Here the author foreshadows Ford's eventual problems, particularly given the book's title of The Flivver King. *Currently, Ford tries to support the workers and pay them high wages. But in hard times where a king may not be as generous, workers need institutional regulations and union protections.*

CHAPTER 35

Another well-known American magnate, King C. Gillette, also dreams about working through some of the world's problems and creating more equality. Gillette tries to talk with Ford about solving some of these problems, but Ford remains a staunch individualist who believes that most of America's institutions, like the post office or public schools, should be privatized to avoid waste. Gillette is frustrated and tries to argue that the capitalist system also creates a huge amount of waste and that competition can quickly devolve into madness, because overproduction can leave millions out of work.

Ford's comparison with Gillette, the razor magnate, illuminates how Ford has fallen sharply as an idealist. While Gillette dreams of producing greater equality and opportunity, Ford has become completely invested in the capitalist system because of the benefits that it has afforded him, and he refuses to see its limits or how it can be adjusted and improved. Gillette's references to overproduction also hint at the impending Great Depression.

CHAPTER 36

Back in 1916, when the U.S. was possibly going to go to war with Mexico, Ford announced that any workers who joined the national guard would lose their positions. For this, the *Chicago Tribune* called him an "anarchist," and Ford sued them for libel. For the trial, he had to face two to three months of investigating to prove that he was not an anarchist. Ford won his suit in a public victory, but he was only awarded six cents. From then on, Ford recognizes the futility of libel suits and lets the **newspapers** lie about him all they want.

This episode emphasizes how futile it is to combat misinformation in the newspapers at this time. Ford's defense requires months of time and reaps very little benefit. The lesson he learns—that it's useless to fight misinformation—only demonstrates how easy it is for the newspapers and magazines to get away with spreading misinformation and alter public opinion with their slant.

CHAPTER 37

Some of Ford's investors, like the Dodge brothers, buy out of the company to start their own ventures, earning nearly 1,000 times what they invested. Abner reads about these deals in the **paper** and wishes that he invested in Ford's company when he knew the man on Bagley Street. It is a very romantic idea in the United States, knowing someone can invest in something and win the lottery. But because of this romantic idea, many scammers are able to take advantage of people trying to invest in "get-rich-quick" schemes, robbing people of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Again, Sinclair emphasizes that while capitalism can come with a kind of romantic idealism, it also leads to a great deal of corruption and disillusionment. While people are attracted to the idea of making a lot of money quickly, this mindset allows greedy people to take advantage of those who don't have very much money to begin with. Likening it to the lottery is apt, as success is a rare occurrence but losing money is frequent.

CHAPTER 38

John, Abner's oldest son, is now 15 years old. He applies for and is accepted into Ford's trade school, where he learns to work in various parts of the Ford shops. Meanwhile, Hank, Abner's second son, has become a troublemaker. He frequently lies to his teachers, runs away from home, and cuts school. Once, he lands in jail for breaking into freight cars, disgracing his hard-working parents. Abner has to take off half a day from work and go to court, pleading to get Hank on probation. Hank is better behaved for a while after this incident, but he is already marked as a young criminal.

John's success in trade school plays into Abner's values and idealism; he is fulfilling Abner's American dream that his children might rise up and have more opportunity than he had. However, Hank's misbehavior contrasts with John's upstanding nature, hinting at the fact that not every child fulfills that promise and maintains the same ideals.

CHAPTER 39

Ford continues to expand his business, and he, Clara, and their son, Edsel, are now the three sole stockholders of the company. The war changed Ford from an idealist to a businessman, and he fires many people who have been with the company since the beginning. One man who decides to leave is Dean Marquis, an Episcopal clergyman who was in charge of the Social Department, because he sees that the period of idealism has passed in the company. Marquis discovered that there is much injustice in Ford's factories, and Ford is pretending not to know about it.

Ford's corruption and poor treatment of his employees illustrates that it's much easier for him to attain security and prosperity when he abandons his morals. The passage explicitly contrasts idealists with businessmen, suggesting that the two are mutually exclusive. And because the person pointing out injustice is a clergyman, the passage demonstrates that Ford is also at odds with religion and morality.

Ford also goes back on his promises to return his war profits to the U.S. government. He made $29 million in the war, and though he claims he returned the money, the Secretary of Treasury says that there is no record of such payment.

This is another example of Ford abandoning his morals in favor of prosperity. Rather than maintaining his ideals and returning the profits that he gained from his work in the war, Ford lies and chooses to keep his wealth instead.

CHAPTER 40

In the first year after the war, Ford's sales double. But in 1920, there is a panic on Wall Street and businesses tank. Ford tries to cut his **cars**' prices, but even this doesn't help, as he is producing too many cars for too little demand. He also has a $35 million debt from buying out others' stock, and $18 million in income tax to pay. Stories about the situation appear in the **newspaper**, and a group of New York bankers work out a plan to finance Ford because he can't raise enough money to stay in business.

While Ford's enterprise has brough him prosperity, there are recurring "panics" on Wall Street. Without any kind of regulation, Ford is overproducing cars to the point where his business might be completely eradicated. The massive debts he has incurred demonstrate the pitfalls of an unchecked system, particularly when the heads of businesses are irresponsible with their financial strategy.

Abner is shocked to read this story and talks about it with the shop mates: people are worried about what to do if the plant shuts down. But Ford gets his **car** dealers to immediately sell all of their Ford cars and only take cash for them. The dealers are so desperate to make these sales that they even buy some of the cars themselves—they know if Ford goes out of business, they would also be out of business.

The passage illustrates how dire it can be for average workers and car dealers when the capitalist system fails—not only would Ford lose his fortune, but thousands of others would also be affected. Thus, the situation highlights the need for a safety net to prevent this kind of overproduction, debt, and massive unemployment.

CHAPTER 41

Ford closes down his plant for "reorganization." He assures workers that the plant will be shut down for only a few weeks and they will get their Christmas bonuses, but they aren't convinced. Abner has saved a little money, but those savings vanish quickly in these "hard times." As Abner picks up odd jobs like cleaning sidewalks, he realizes how out of shape he has become from his work at the plant, where he usually walks around overseeing other workers.

Here, Ford's incessant pursuit of wealth prevents him from protecting his workers. The novel illustrates how the system falls hardest on people like Abner, who have very little money and no job security or unemployment. These men also have difficulty finding and performing other work because they have been driven so hard by the work in the plant and have also become out of shape.

The waiting period stretches to six weeks, after which Abner returns to the plant. He discovers that Ford's reorganization means reducing the amount of men on the **assembly line**. Before the reorganization, the factory employed 15 men per **car**; now, the factory only needs nine. As a result, Ford saves $60 million a year, but thousands of men are out of work.

The reorganization again emphasizes the need for union protection and regulation. Not only are many workers unemployed as a result of the reorganization, but the remaining workers also have to work even harder than they did before to maintain the same production levels.

Now one foreman watches the work of 20 men, and Abner becomes one of the 20, getting back on the **assembly line**. Abner's job lets him rest his legs, but his back begins to ache and his arms are ready to give out from putting in cotter-pins, which secure the bolts on the wheel in place. But he endures the pain because he is over 40 and worries about losing his job if he can't keep up.

Ford's desire for profit is degrading the conditions of the workers. Without any regulations, Abner worries that he could easily loses his job, and therefore he doesn't protest the harsh working conditions. This emphasizes the problem with individualism: because the workers are worried only about their own jobs, there is no one protecting their working conditions collectively.

CHAPTER 42

Before the reorganization, Ford helped a friend out of debt by buying a local **paper** called the *Dearborn Independent*. Ford has long been frustrated with the dishonesty of the American press and decides to make the *Dearborn Independent* a journal which would "speak for the people's welfare" and have "the courage to give them the truth." He worries about the world, which seems constantly to be on the verge of chaos, and wants to figure out what is causing the world's problems.

Ford's desire to start a paper that will speak for "people's welfare" and "the truth" suggests the idea that he doesn't believe most print journalism does so. Publishing the Dearborn Independent, *then, is Ford's means to try and combat the misinformation that he has frequently encountered.*

One day, a Russian man named Boris Brasol, a former agent of the "Black Hundreds," meets with Ford, claiming to know what is causing the world's problems. He has 100 pages of documents proving that the troubles of the world are due to a conspiracy of the Jews, who are plotting to seize control of the world. He points to the fact that all of the international bankers, munitions magnates, and revolutionaries are Jews. Boris's documents convince Ford that what the man says is true.

Although Ford wants to find out the truth, he continues to be easily convinced by misinformation. The Black Hundreds were an anti-Semitic, ultra-nationalist movement in Russia. Thus, the information that Boris presents is just as biased and misinformed as the journalism that Ford hates. Yet Ford's ignorance makes him susceptible to that bias.

CHAPTER 43

Ford begins to publish a series of stories in the *Dearborn Independent* for three years, telling the country how the world's troubles, wars, strikes, revolutions, and crime are due to the Jews. The stories also argue that Jews are undermining American morals by producing racy films, making shorter skirts, and promoting lewd music and dancing. The American people generally take Ford's stories as true.

Ford's decision to print unverified and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories illustrates how susceptible news organizations are to false and biased information—even though Ford intended to use the paper to give people the "the truth."

CHAPTER 44

Abner subscribes to the *Dearborn Independent* and reads every word faithfully. He starts to avoid stores run by Jews and warns his children about this "evil race." Noticing that some of the men who are making money out of gambling and whiskey are Jewish, Abner becomes even more convinced by Ford's stories. One of Abner's children's schoolteachers named O'Toole argues that Ford's material about the Jews is not wholly reliable, causing Abner to wonder if she is Jewish and changed her name to hide her identity.

Abner's response to the Dearborn Independent *stories illustrates the real-world ramifications of misinformation. Reading about anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, Abner actively starts to discriminate against the Jews and even anyone who aligns with them. The fact that Abner immediately suspects anyone who questions Ford's truthfulness demonstrates an additional problem with the misinformation: even trying to combat it with facts or questions is difficult.*

One evening, a man from the Ku Klux Klan approaches Abner's home, having gotten his name from the subscription list of the *Dearborn Independent*. The man explains that the Klan is being revived to put down "Jews, Catholics, Reds, and other alien enemies." Abner gladly joins up, pays $20, and starts attending Klan meetings. He and the other members nail threats to people's doors and burn huge crosses on their lawns. As he does this, Abner is reassured that Protestant American civilization is safe.

This moment explores the even greater ramifications that misinformation can have on people's lives. The Dearborn Independent *represents a gateway for Abner to become involved in far more hateful ideologies and groups, even while he feels he's upholding American values. That irony is exposed here, as Abner believes he's making America safe by making threats and burning crosses.*

CHAPTER 45

Ford continues to dig up dirt about various prominent Jews like William Fox, a movie producer. However, Ford's investigation leaks to Fox, and Fox begins to make an investigation of Ford in response. Fox consequently instructs hundreds of cameramen to get photos of accidents involving Ford **cars** and catalogue some of their defects. When Ford learns of this reporting, he immediately stops his stories on the Jews.

Even as Ford feels it is important to print these anti-Semitic stories, there is also a limit to his desire for "the truth." This counterattack from William Fox illustrates that when someone threatens Ford's empire, Ford will gladly sacrifice his views and morals in order to maintain his wealth and security.

Soon after, a Jewish man named Sapiro brings a libel suit against Ford for $5 million. Eventually, Ford admits that he didn't read what was published in the *Dearborn Independent*, that the charges made against the Jews in it were untrue, and that he was mortified by the journal. He says that he wants to make amends for the wrong he has done to the Jews. However, Ford also published an autobiography in which he espoused the same ideas—so either Ford did not know what he said in his own autobiography, or the truth did not concern him.

Sapiro's libel suit against Ford also reveals Ford's hypocrisy. Rather than admit his own fault in printing misinformation, Ford instead claims that he was ignorant of the stories in the Dearborn Independent. *Yet Sinclair pointedly illustrates that Ford* did *know what was being printed in the journal, and that in fact he was complicit in spreading conspiracy theories.*

CHAPTER 46

Tommy Shutt, Abner's youngest son, is now 15 years old and thinking for himself, which Abner dislikes because Tommy doesn't think the way Abner does. Tommy doesn't share the family's sense of gratitude towards Ford and believes that Ford—who is now a billionaire—takes advantage of his workers. This annoys Abner, who thinks that Tommy is being influenced by "Red" (communist) teachers.

Tommy's perspective on Ford creates a conflict within his family because of their differing priorities. While Abner looks at all that Ford has done for him personally, Tommy doesn't have the same reverence for Ford because he sees how much Ford takes advantage of his workers collectively in pursuit of profit.

Meanwhile, Abner continues to associate with the KKK, who want to make Henry Ford a candidate for president. Ford realizes that he has nothing to lose by running, because his campaign also serves to advertise his **cars**. Traveling around the country, Ford meets hundreds of Americans. People form clubs to support Ford and donate large sums to his campaign. During Ford's tour, however, President Harding dies and Calvin Coolidge takes his place. Coolidge is a Protestant Gentile, so the KKK is happy to have him in office. Ford meets with Coolidge; afterward, Ford drops out of the race and buys an Alabama community named Muscle Shoals from the government for a very low price.

Ford's run for president also exposes his lack of ideals. Rather than run for president with the intention of improving Americans' lives, Ford simply uses the campaign as an advertisement for his cars. Likewise, his decision to drop out of the race is equally motivated by profit: he negotiates with Coolidge to buy Muscle Shoals, Alabama, in order to develop and use the electricity generated by the dam there, turning his candidacy into another means of amassing wealth.

CHAPTER 47

American magnates across all industries adopt Ford's policies of mass production and low prices. Journalists and economists both agree that with this strategy, there can never be another depression or poverty. Ford has developed 53 different industries and perfected the process for making **cars**. The Shutt family is also enjoying success: Abner buys a better car and they become a "two-car family," which is a great distinction, at least according to advertisements.

Ford's innovations have both revolutionized people's lives, giving them greater mobility, and revolutionized American industry in providing a model for massive profits. However, even as it brings some prosperity to both Ford and Abner, Sinclair hints at the fact that this system will not always work. Assuring readers that there can never be poverty—particularly as the book was published in the wake of the Great Depression—is clear dramatic irony critiquing this belief and these policies.

John finishes trade school and gets a job in Ford's factory as a welder—a skilled job that pays $8.75 a day. In less than a year, he gets a promotion. Meanwhile, Hank finds success as well—though he does so smuggling alcohol into Detroit from Canada. Abner chooses to remain ignorant about Hank's affairs, but Abner is glad when Hank comes home with a bit of extra money for Milly. The only person who really knows about Hank's work is Daisy; he confides in her that the police and politicians are all crooked, and that anyone can be bribed.

Abner's sons continue to illustrate dual means of achieving the American Dream. On the one hand, John is able to go to school, work hard, and build on the opportunity that his father gave him. However, Hank shows that it's just as easy to achieve prosperity and security by abandoning one's morals, and even Abner finds it easy to overlook criminality when it benefits him and Milly.

Daisy, meanwhile, is studying at a business college so that she can become a stenographer and marry someone from a higher class, and Tommy is a quarterback on the football team in high school. One day a college scout comes from the state university to try and recruit Tommy. Abner is amazed that his son might be able to go to college, and he thinks that America really *is* the land of opportunity.

Tommy and Daisy also reinforce Abner's belief in the American Dream, because Abner recognizes that they, too, can rise beyond his standing in life, whether through marrying someone in a higher class or becoming the first person in the family to attend college.

CHAPTER 48

Ford is now close to making 2 million **cars** a year; he has 60 factories across the U.S. and 28 in foreign countries. People are also traveling and mingling like never before, thanks to Ford remaking the roads of America. As time passes, however, Ford starts to lose his optimism; he feels the world is becoming corrupted. Girls are wearing short skirts, people are listening and dancing to jazz music, and the public is even starting to criticize the Model T. Though Ford led the world into the future, all he wants is to retain old values. Trying to hang onto the past, Ford buys a traditional house and fills it with objects from his childhood.

Ford's obsession with the past is an aspect of his disillusionment—he feels that Americans are losing the values that he once held dear. The irony is that Ford was a huge instigator of progress, as his cars allowed people to travel and appreciate new styles and different music. Thus, his nostalgia (as he fills his home with objects from a time before this progress) is another aspect of how technology and progress don't always seem wholly good.

CHAPTER 49

Ford misses the clean square dances of his childhood, and so he hosts classes and dances for the old styles while expressing his disgust for jazz music. Because Ford calls it a "patriotic act" to dance the two-step and the quadrille, Abner and Milly try to attend the dances. They only go once, however, as Milly's health is worsening and Abner is constantly exhausted from his work.

Ford continues to connect the past to traditional American values and oppose any kind of cultural innovation. The "patriotic act" of dancing the old two-step or quadrille directly contrasts his frustration with jazz music, illustrating his disillusionment with some of America's cultural progress.

The Shutt family is doing relatively well for themselves, but Abner starts to wonder about getting his old sub-foreman job back. He has been working for Ford for 22 years, and so he puts his case for a promotion to his superintendent. In doing so, however, Abner earns the resentment of the sub-foreman, who believes that Abner is after his job. As a result, the sub-foreman starts to criticize Abner for minor violations like taking ten extra seconds on his bathroom or lunch breaks. One day, Abner yells back at the man, and after 22 years, Abner is unceremoniously fired.

Here, Abner experiences the lack of fairness in Ford's policies and reveals the need for regulations and unionization. All Abner wanted to do was earn fair wages for his hard work and loyal service, but because he is only one person and his rights aren't guaranteed by an outside entity, he can be dismissed on unfair grounds and receive no benefits for the hard work that has helped the company earn success. The fact that Abner can't take 10 extra seconds on a break shows how inhumane the factory conditions have become, as well.

CHAPTER 50

John manages to find a job for Abner in the tool shop of the welding department, and Abner is on his feet once more. As a result, Abner's legs quickly grow sore and he can hardly sleep. Abner doesn't complain, however, because this is his only chance to earn a living. It's the same across all the jobs in the automobile industry: every worker is pushed to their limit because the companies are all in incessant competition with each other. Meanwhile, Abner reads about Ford boasting of the great working conditions in the plant, and Abner thinks that Ford must simply not know about the conditions. So Abner does his work and stays quiet.

Abner's experience here demonstrates the clear inhumanity of the factory. Abner faces grueling conditions, but he has no way to address this fact because then his job will simply be given to someone else. Without union protections, Ford can make the conditions worse and worse as long as there is someone willing to work for less. And the system also degrades Ford's humanity, as his desire for profit has either made him ignorant of the factory's conditions or, if he does know about the conditions, prevents him from caring about his workers at all.

CHAPTER 51

Ford has been making the Model T for 18 years, and Americans are growing sick of its outdated style and single black color option. Other **car** companies have started to make new models with yellow paint jobs or grey leather upholstery. Executives try to persuade Ford to change his model, but he simply kicks out anyone who opposes his will. However, the public has its say, too, and they buy fewer and fewer Fords. Thus, after 19 years and $7 billion earned, Ford decides to move on from the Model T.

The more Ford's desire for profit, the more he acts as a tyrant, just as the title of the book suggests. Even though the executives are correct about creating new products, Ford refuses to entertain anyone who disagrees with him and instead simply throws them out of his kingdom, demonstrating his slipping humanity.

CHAPTER 52

To create a new product, Ford faces a dilemma, as most of his machines only make the Model T. Ford is forced to shut down his plant to refashion the machines, and 100,000 men are laid off as this happens, including Abner. John again finds Abner a job as a sweeper in the welding factory; he makes $6 a day. As Abner works, he observes huge machines being replaced or remodeled in the factories.

Ford's desire for profit leads him to make new models, but as a result, Ford completely disregards his workers. Shutting down the factories on a whim is a clear indicator of the cruelty of the capitalist system, as thousands of men no longer have means of providing for their families as a result.

After five months, the factories reopen and the new **cars** are in production. The New Model A is advertised in all the **papers**: it is more stylish and has "a bit of the European touch," which Ford resents. The old-time American style is gone, and the new car is so successful that Ford makes a million cars in the first six months.

Ford clearly values the older American styles, as he is resentful of anything that isn't traditionally American and nostalgic. Yet at the same time, his desire for profit wins out over these ideals, demonstrating how it is easier to achieve prosperity and security by throwing out some of one's morals.

CHAPTER 53

When the factory reopens, Abner Shutt returns to spindle-nut screwing, and his children continue to climb the social ladder. John is promoted and receives a monthly salary; he marries the daughter of his department head, Annabelle, and buys a home in an elegant neighborhood. Daisy now works in an office of a company that makes cushions for Ford **cars**, earning $23.50 a week.

Daisy and John continue to fulfill the promise of Abner's American Dream, as they rise higher and higher above his social standing and wages. However, it is notable that Abner doesn't find the same opportunity; after more than two decades of loyal service, Abner is in exactly the same position in which he started.

Hank's business is also thriving, but recently he landed himself in jail for manslaughter. He was defending his employer's property—a truckload of liquor—and because Hank has powerful friends, he is able to get witnesses to testify that they were playing pool with Hank at the time.

Hank represents a counterpoint to John's and Daisy's success. While they find success through hard work, Hank shows that he can achieve the American dream through criminality, laying bare the corruption in some of America's institutions.

Tommy continues his career as a football player and also continues to criticize Ford—and even the people working in the factories are starting to criticize Ford, too. Meanwhile, The KKK has become inactive and the *Dearborn Independent* is no longer in circulation, so Abner has no means of finding out what is wrong with the country and no way to counter Tommy's criticisms.

Abner's thought process here underscores the power of media bias and misinformation. Even though people around Abner like his son and his fellow workers are trying to discuss what is wrong with Ford and the country, Abner believes that the only reliable sources of information are a publication that has proven disreputable and the hate group that recruited from its subscription list.

CHAPTER 54

Herbert Hoover succeeds Calvin Coolidge, and all the captains of industry support him. But in the first year of Hoover's presidency, there is a panic on Wall Street and billions of stocks crumble into nothing. Because of this, people no longer have money to buy things like **cars**. The first panic lasts several days, and then there is a lull. Ford decides to give a statement to **newspapers** that he's going to raise the minimum wage in his plants to $7 a day, hoping to raise confidence in the market. But a few workers point out that since the $5 minimum was established 16 years earlier, the cost of living in Detroit has doubled. In addition, while Ford pays some men the new minimum wage, he also fires 55,000 of them.

As the first panic hits in late 1929, the Great Depression begins. This disproves the journalists' and economists' theories that there would be no more depression or poverty. Ford even tries to harness the power of the media in order to instill confidence, knowing how biased information can affect people's views. But his duplicitousness illustrates that Ford is simply motivated by a desire for profit, and the capitalist system has caused a sweeping and unforgiving economic downturn.

CHAPTER 55

The first panic on Wall Street affects John Shutt very little. He is a specialist in welding at the new plant, he has a very good salary, and he has a home in a neighborhood that protects him from meeting people poorer than he is. He and Annabelle belong to a system of feudalism: a hierarchy of rank based on income. They avoid those of lower levels and persistently seek to attain higher levels of wealth.

Here, the book spells out how the constant desire for profits and wealth leads people to a dehumanizing social structure. John and Annabelle care only about ensuring their own social standing and don't recognize that they have become part of a tyrannical system that oppresses poorer workers during economic downturns.

The Ford empire is not a metaphor: Ford is a feudal lord with wealth and the power of the press. The more John works for Ford, the more John prospers; the more John prospers, the more he admires Ford and works hard. Abner and Milly, on the other hand, are "serfs," happy to watch their children join Ford's ranks and rise above themselves.

Just as John Shutt willingly upholds a capitalist system that benefits him, so too does Ford act as a king intent upon maintaining his own power. He uses the press and his wealth in order to manipulate people like Abner and Milly, who are content with lesser social standing and meager living conditions as long as they can watch their children rise.

CHAPTER 56

The panics on Wall Street continue, and sales begin to fall. Fear spreads throughout all industries, and profits vanish. The Great Depression lasts through Herbert Hoover's whole term, and he doesn't know how to fix it. His solution is to have Congress provide relief to his wealthy friends in the banking industry, but the money simply stays in the banks because no one has the credit to get a loan.

Hoover's actions continue to expose the failures of the capitalist system. Hoover wants to ensure that his wealthy friends can remain in business, but this comes at the expense of supporting poorer people who don't have the same kind of safety net.

Many Americans' first cost-cutting step is to stop buying new **cars**. And so a year after the crash, 175,000 of Ford's workers are unemployed in Detroit alone. Abner keeps his job, but one day he hears that the bank in which he keeps his savings may go out of business. Abner explains to his foreman that he needs to go to the bank to retrieve his savings, but the foreman—who has been instructed to fire 12 men that day—simply fires him. Abner is shocked.

Abner's firing—simply while trying to get to the bank in a crisis—illustrates the true inhumanity of the system. Abner is simply worried about his savings, but this somehow provides enough justification to fire him without any unemployment benefits or other kind of protection.

CHAPTER 57

Abner is once again out on the street, and he isn't able to get money out of his bank, so he drives to other motor plants to look for work. Men who were fired from Ford's could go to one of the factories that made cushions or tires for Ford and get work at a meager $2 or $3 a day. Still, Abner isn't even able to find any of these jobs. Abner is 53, and very few businesses are hiring people at his age.

This anecdote illustrates the necessity for unionization and wage regulation. Essentially, Ford is able to fire people and then rehire them for lower-paying jobs. He is exploiting people's desperation to make any money, and as a result the work is completely devalued and workers aren't able to make enough money to live.

John and Hank keep their jobs, but Daisy has just married a bookkeeper who works for Ford. Afterwards, Daisy's superior tells her that they were firing all married women. Because her husband's work is also reduced to two days a week, they sell their **car** at a huge loss and moved in with Abner and Milly.

Daisy becomes the first of Abner's children to lose her job due to the crisis. Far from gaining the American dream and rising above Abner, she is promptly fired from Ford's simply because she is a married woman and ends right back with her parents.

CHAPTER 58

The Shutts desperately try to figure out how to get money. They can't even afford the taxes on their own house, nor can they sell their home or furniture because many people are doing the same thing and no one is buying anything. Instead, the Shutts decide to rent rooms to workers, but the men who stay with them often scam them and leave without paying rent.

Here, the Shutts truly begin to recognize that the capitalist system doesn't protect people like them. Instead, it deprives them of their most basic needs and makes them even more vulnerable to crime.

In the first winter of the Great Depression, old Tom Shutt dies, and the Shutts are able to give him a nice burial. But when Abner's mother dies a year later, they don't have the money to bury her—a fact that breaks their hearts. Meanwhile, Abner forgets that Hank is a bootlegger and a gangster and lets Milly take whatever money Hank brings. But even Hank's business isn't doing very well, as no one can afford the more expensive liquors anymore. Meanwhile, Tommy decides study economics at college, to understand the forces in the world that have left his family so destitute.

The Shutts continue to feel the dire effects of the Great Depression. Not being able to bury Abner's mother strips them of dignity, and Abner no longer feels that he has to hold on to his own morals when it comes to receiving money that his son earns illegally. But perhaps the greatest indication of disillusionment lies with Tommy, who recognizes the problems with the way the American economic system works and attends college in order to investigate it.

CHAPTER 59

After three years living in his elegant home, John Shutt loses his job at the Ford Motor Company. He and Annabelle immediately panic, as they have little cash and they have to pay $160 a month to cover their mortgage, furniture, and new **car**. John tries to get a job at whatever wage he can, and he is hired in the same department from which he was fired. Though he does the same work, instead of getting $300 a month, he now works for $6 a day and can only work three days a week. Forced to give up the house and the furniture, John and Annabelle move their belongings into one half of a two family house—the exact type of house in which John grew up.

John's situation at work further illustrates the need for a union and regulations. Ford is able to fire workers and then hire them back at a fraction of the cost because they are so desperate for any work at all—but in taking this work, they are not making a living wage. If they worked as a union, however, they would be able to negotiate better wages. Additionally, the fact that John ends up in the same type of house in which he grew up illustrates their disillusionment with the American Dream: that despite the promise of prosperity and opportunity, the economic systems have wiped out his hope of social mobility.

Annabelle grows resentful of John; she is frustrated that he was giving money to his family while she felt that Hank wasn't supporting the family at all. Hank has recently been arrested for voter intimidation while working for a candidate supported by Henry Ford. Annabelle grows angry with Ford, realizing that John's firing was just a trick to get him to work for much less money. She thinks sarcastically that great capitalists like Ford don't care about money, they just wanted to provide people with good **cars**.

Annabelle becomes disillusioned with Ford's corruption here. She recognizes that his ability to fulfill the American Dream has come at the expense of his morals and the well-being of his workers. He also clearly helps politicians get elected through illegal means like voter intimidation, so that the politicians can then implement policies that benefit Ford's business.

CHAPTER 60

As the depression wears on, Ford meets hard times as well. While he was making more than $100 million in profits in 1924, 1925, and 1926, in 1931 he loses $53 million, and the following year he loses $75 million. Though Ford has $300 million in cash reserves, he's worried about how long the depression will last.

Ford's perspective during the Great Depression indicates how the capitalist system also degrades the wealthy. Ford is so concerned about maintaining his wealth that he doesn't use his massive reserves to care for his workers; instead, he is only thinking of himself.

Meanwhile, public sentiment turns sharply against Ford. People point out Ford's hypocrisy when he tries to convince the public that he is a philanthropist, even though he is clearly worried only about his own business. Ford wants the public to believe that good times are on the way back, but his optimism rings false because his actions don't match his words. He says that he is going to hire 20,000 new men, but when workers show up for the jobs, he uses armed guards with clubs and guns to turn the workers away.

The public begins to recognize that Ford has lost some of his idealism. Rather than actually help workers in this time of dire need, he simply wants to project an image of helping others. At the same time, he takes actions that directly harm the people who want to work for him, as he not only tells them that he has jobs for them, but then he also violently turns them away when they simply want to make a living.

CHAPTER 61

Though Ford has been known as a model employer for years, now his practices are being questioned. His **assembly line** is using more machines so that one man can do the work formerly done by 20 men. The other 19 are then fired on violations like forgetting to wear a badge, or for staying too long on the toilet. When they're fired, there is no appeal. Sometimes factory supervisors don't even fire workers; they simply tell the workers that they aren't needed at the moment and those workers have no way of making money or getting another job.

The machines on the assembly line represent another way in which technology does not mean unilaterally positive progress. Even though it allows Ford to be more efficient, it does so at the expense of working-class people, as many of them lose their jobs as a result. This also highlights the need for union protection, as the company can fire or furlough workers for essentially no reason without any kind of unemployment benefit.

With every month of the economic depression, conditions in the factory get worse. Supervisors drive the remaining workers until they injure themselves in their exhaustion. The supervisors overseeing the speed of the **assembly line** often overrule the safety department. The company even has its own hospital and there is a saying in the factory that one man dies on the assembly line every day.

Even though the assembly line has revolutionized Ford's production, speeding up too much has led to massive amounts of injury and even death. And without a union, there is nothing to ensure that the conditions in Ford's plant are safe and humane.

CHAPTER 62

Ford is now the richest man in the world. He started out with ideals, but at 70 years old, he is now "helpless in the grip of a billion dollars." Shut off from the outside world by security guards, Ford's only associates are yes-men; he rarely talks to strangers because he has made a fool of himself in the **newspapers** so many times. He also made workers dependent on him, but now he has fired many of them and left them to fend for themselves. As a result, people are starting to believe that Ford bears some responsibility for the 5,000 unemployed workers that the city of Detroit is supporting, especially as Ford does not have to pay any taxes to Detroit because his factory lies outside the city.

Here, the novel examines the differences between how Ford lived when he began his enterprise and how he lives now. The contrast illustrates that both Ford and his workers have lost their humanity because of the constant desire for profit. The fact that Ford is "helpless" in the "grip" of his fortune suggests that he has lost agency in the capitalist system, and that his fortune has more control over his actions than he does. His workers, meanwhile, have completely lost their ability to gain basic human needs.

CHAPTER 63

Ford hires a well-known boxer in the navy, Harry Bennett, to head his security department. It is Bennett's job to organize and train 3,600 private police who guard the gates of the plant, watch the work in the departments, report any violations of their regulations, and identify and root out union organizers from the workforce. In this way, Ford essentially sets up an intelligence bureau with spies. Bennett hires Hank Shutt as one of these spies, and Hank makes a good deal of money in this job—so much that he brings Abner and Milly money which allows them to afford food and shelter while Abner is unemployed.

Again, Ford demonstrates how he cares more about maintaining his fortune than he does about providing his workers with livable wages. Ford even spends huge amounts of money hiring people like Hank and Harry Bennett rather than spending money rehiring unemployed workers or providing the existing workers with a more livable wage. Ford's wealth and Hank's newfound success also exposes the irony of the American Dream: that the only people who can make a living during the Great Depression are ex-criminals and those who give up their morals, while honest, hard-working people are unable to make that same living.

CHAPTER 64

Ford's son, Edsel, has four children who will inherit Ford's vast empire. Ford worries constantly about gangsters abducting his grandchildren and holding them for ransom, thinking, "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Ford relies on Harry Bennett to guard the children and investigate anyone who is a part of his security team. The more protective measures he takes, the more Ford realizes how much his billion dollars is taking control of his life.

In this chapter, the novel emphasizes how capitalism and Ford's intense desire for wealth has robbed him of happiness and humanity. This quote, from Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part 2, *suggests that Ford has attained the wealth and power of a king, but with it, he has become plagued by anxiety and insecurity.*

CHAPTER 65

Having sold his **car**, Abner continues to walk from factory to factory on the chance that someone might be hiring. One day, he notices a meeting going on under a banner that says, "Ford Workers Assemble." A speaker explains that he was employed at Ford's for many years and was outraged by the speed-up of the **assembly line** and the lack of security at the plant. The man's words encourage Abner, and when the man says that they are organizing a protest march to Dearborn, Abner realizes that he has seen news of this march in the **papers** and that the man is a communist. Still, Abner is excited by the man's speech.

Here, Abner gets more acquainted with the labor movement at Ford's. Rather than thinking what he as a single person can ask for at the plant, he recognizes the benefits that the movement can have for his own life and the lives of the workers collectively. At the same time, he starts to unconsciously understand the media bias surrounding the labor movement. While the news derides the workers as "communists," Abner sees that their wants are not so different from his own.

On March 7, 1932, Abner joins other workers on the march to Dearborn. A speaker reads the workers' demands: jobs for those who were laid off or unemployment benefits until they had work again, and the slowing of the **assembly line**. The listeners shout in support. Organizers declare that they are unarmed and warn that if anyone commits acts of violence the marchers will forfeit public sympathy, which they do not want to do. The marchers then begin to walk toward the River Rouge plant.

The workers' demands highlight so many of the basic conditions that were lacking in their jobs at Ford: job security, wage minimums, and safe and humane working conditions. And their commitment to protesting without violence contrasts with Ford's strategy, where he uses his security guards to brutalize workers who have helped build his fortune and degrade those who are trying to achieve these basic human rights.

CHAPTER 66

Abner and the rest of the marchers arrive at the town border of Dearborn, which is essentially Ford's jurisdiction: the mayor is backed by Ford, and the chief of police was a former Ford security officer. Policemen and Ford security guards order the marchers to disperse, and the marchers demand that the police let a group enter the town and present their petition to Ford. Suddenly, some of Ford's security guards start throwing bombs and shooting at the workers, and a man at Abner's side collapses with a bullet in his stomach. Abner runs away as fast as he can.

The shooting at Dearborn—known historically as the Ford Hunger March or the Ford Massacre—provides the most shocking example of Ford's dehumanization. He is so concerned about his profits and preventing his workers from unionizing that he is even willing to have his security kill some of the unemployed workers in order to protect his wealth.

Abner reads about the rest of the march in the **paper**: Harry Bennett drove out into the crowd and began firing a revolver; someone threw a rock at his head and sent him to the hospital; immediately, Ford's security fired a machine-gun into the crowd, wounding 50 men and killing four. Many of the protesters were also arrested, while not a single policeman or security guard was injured.

The story of the rest of the march further emphasizes Ford's indifference to his workers. His desperation to prevent workers from unionizing led to mass violence in the face of reasonable demands and peaceful protests, illustrating how he is motivated only by his desire to maintain a fortune.

CHAPTER 67

When Abner thinks about the march, he realizes that he shouldn't have been there. He believes that if Ford only knew about the march, Ford would have spoken to the workers. Abner also reads in the **papers** that the leaders of the march were the worst "Red agitators" in the Detroit area, and he is horrified that the men lured him to the march. Abner realizes that John might have been helping to defend the plant or Hank might have been in the crowd spotting Ford's enemies. Daisy scolds Abner for attending the march, explaining that he could have gotten his kids fired from their jobs.

Abner and Daisy's response to the march only highlights the problems with the capitalist system and the great need for a union. Daisy worries that Abner's presence at the march could have cost John and Hank their jobs, but it is exactly for this reason—job protections—that Abner and the other marchers were marching. The novel once again highlights the bias of the media as well, as the criticism of the workers as "Red agitators" biases Abner against them, even though he agreed with their demands.

CHAPTER 68

In the same month, Ford issues two new models of the Model A **car**, but soon after there is another bank crash in Detroit. Ford is the only one with enough money to save them, and so he takes over the banks. Meanwhile, Ford's workers' jobs are cut to one or two days a week, and the minimum wage is reduced to $4 a day. Ford still says that the way to prosperity is through high wages, even while he cannot pay those high wages.

Ford recognizes that providing his workers with better wages is the best remedy for economic hardship. And yet he seems not to listen to his own advice: he is more interested in saving the powerful corporations that guard his wealth than the workers who have earned him that wealth.

Abner looks for work until his legs give out; he then has to beg Hank for money. Milly is bedridden most of the time, and they no longer have money for a doctor or medicine. Daisy runs the house now, though she is unhappy after having a baby that she didn't want. Instead of achieving her dreams of being a stenographer in an office, now she is married to a poor clerk who only works two days a week. In addition, there are tens of thousands of homeless men and very little relief from the government because the government also does not have money.

This passage paints a bleak picture both of the Shutt family's disillusionment specifically and Americans' disillusionment as a whole. Abner, Milly, and Daisy were not able to achieve their bright dreams of working hard, gaining opportunity and prosperity, and leading a happy, wholesome family life. And at large, people recognize how the government's policies and lack of regulation has failed them as a whole, because people are unable to survive the country's economic turmoil and the government is unable to help them.

In 1932, Republicans nominate Hoover again for the presidency, while the Democrats nominated Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the governor of New York State. F.D.R. begins making eloquent speeches over the radio and promises to try a new economic strategy. But the Shutts have sold their radio, and the **papers** report that F.D.R.'s economic policy would not change the depression. Ford advertises in his plant to vote for Hoover, and Abner does so.

Ford and the media's influence on Abner's vote underscore the problem with media bias and ignorance. Even though F.D.R.'s plan is aimed at supporting workers like Abner, he has no way of knowing this because of the way in which the newspapers present F.D.R.'s policies. As a result, Abner continues to vote against his own interests, not recognizing that Ford, too, has a vested interest electing Hoover over F.D.R. and that his interests might not match Abner's own.


CHAPTER 69

Not knowing what else to do about his dire economic need, Abner decides to write a letter to Clara Ford (who is known as a great philanthropist) to ask for help. He explains, in very poor grammar and spelling, about his history with Ford and the poor state of his family, asking if he might be able to get a job at the plant.

Abner's letter illustrates his tendency towards individualism in place of unionization. Rather than gaining power as a collective, Abner goes in search of benefits only for himself. Even if Abner were successful, it would only highlight the problems with fighting for better conditions in this manner, because no one else would receive the same benefit as Abner.

CHAPTER 70

Abner sends the letter to Clara without telling his family and continues to look for work in the meantime. After verifying Abner's history with Ford, an agent comes to the home to verify Abner's need. The investigator sees that Milly is very sick, as Abner stated, and learns from her that Abner did know Ford personally. As a result, the company hires Abner for two days a week at $8 a day—which sounds like heaven to people who are nearly starving. Abner immediately forgets all his grievances; he believes again that Ford is the greatest and best of men.

While Abner is able to receive great benefit from sending the letter to Clara Ford, he also highlights the problem with individualism. Not every worker is able to gain a job or proper wages in this fashion, demonstrating the need for workers to band together in order to fight for their rights and fair wages. Abner also reveals just how much he has been deprived of basic human rights and needs if he feels lucky to be working for a meager $16 a week.


CHAPTER 71

In spite of Ford telling his workers to vote for President Hoover, F.D.R. wins the election. Almost at once the finance industry breaks down completely, although people argue whether to blame Hoover or Roosevelt for this. Once in office, F.D.R. decides to provide relief for the country's poorest people. When those people immediately spend it on things like food and clothing, the industries start to pick up again. Ironically, after regaining success, the banks then turn against F.D.R. and call him a dictator.

F.D.R. recognizes how the capitalist system and constant desire for profits has led to the economic crisis. Rather than giving money to the banks, as Hoover did, F.D.R. provides relief to those who need it the most, knowing that they will spend it and stimulate the economy. This strategy is similar to Ford's initial policies: providing people with high wages stimulates the economy and gives people the power to buy his cars. The same holds true here, illustrating the need to ensure people have livable wages.

Ford, too, turns on F.D.R., despite the fact that Ford also regained success with the president's policies. F.D.R.'s administration establishes the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which prevents manufacturers from pursuing blind overproduction and protect workers from wage-cutting. Ford refuses to take part in this, leaving it to the government to boycott his **car** if they don't like his policies. Abner doesn't pay attention to these political developments; he is simply preoccupied with working and saving money to withstand another economic downturn.

The NRA is F.D.R.'s attempt to regulate businesses and ensure that workers are being paid fairly. Two years later, however, the Supreme Court declares the NRA unconstitutional; however, historians credit the law with spurring the growth of unions. Abner's ignorance of these policies demonstrates another obstacle to unionization: working-class people are often so concerned with making a living that they don't have the time or energy to fight for proper regulations and labor rights.

CHAPTER 72

At this time, Tom Jr. gets involved in a club at college that is opposed to "War and Fascism." As a result, old members of the KKK come to Abner's door and inform him that his son is a "Red" (a communist). They explain that they are happy to help Abner beat his son and that they have started a new group called the Black Legion that is devoted to opposing communism and anarchy. Meanwhile, in Dearborn, Ford organizes a group called the Knights of Dearborn that helps him do political work, spying, and any "rough stuff" that he might need. This group instills paranoia in the plant, as workers are constantly observing and spying on each other—even three men talking together represents a conspiracy.

Reading the Dearborn Independent *years ago continues to have far-reaching consequences on Abner's life. The KKK keeps tabs on both Abner and Tom, and as a result, Abner comes into contact with an even more violent group. At the same time, Ford also resorts to violence in order to maintain his power and sense of safety. He also tries to sow division between the workers so that they do not group together to unionize.*

CHAPTER 73

Tom Jr. graduates from college with a great sense of idealism. Daisy is the only one who attends Tom's graduation ceremony, and as they drive home Tom tells her about economic forces and corruption he studied. Wages always drop faster than profits and never come back as quickly, and he wants to ensure that the country can achieve greater economic equality. Daisy replies that he talks like a "Red," and Tom agrees that the **newspapers** would probably call him one, but he knows that the laborers are getting a bad deal.

Tom Jr. quickly becomes the central representative for the labor movement in the book. He recognizes that the capitalist system is hardest on the working-class, because their wages do not keep up with the profits of entrepreneurs like Ford. Daisy's response to Tom continues to highlight the effects of media bias, as she immediately believes Tom is a communist simply for supporting the labor movement because of the way that newspapers write about these issues.

CHAPTER 74

As Daisy and Tom Jr. drive home, she asks what he's going to do next, and he says he's going to get a job at Ford's. Daisy warns Tom against being a troublemaker at Ford's and says that Tom should not talk about his plans to Hank.

Daisy's warning that Tom Jr. shouldn't talk to Hank about his involvement in the labor movement foreshadows the danger that Tom will face there, given Ford's desperation to avoid unions at his factories and his willingness to resort to violence in order to stop the labor movement.

CHAPTER 75

Despite their differences, Abner is glad to have Tom Jr. back at home. Tom immediately gets a job at Ford's—illustrating the advantage of being young, strong, and charismatic. He starts working on pinion gears at $5.65 a day and soon buys himself a Ford **car** (if workers buy any other kind, the bosses quickly find something wrong with their work). Tom works hard and studies the regulations so as not to cause a stir. Gradually, he starts to get to know the workers, and soon men start quietly meeting in one another's homes at night to discuss their grievances.

Tom quietly begins to stir up the labor movement at Ford's, knowing that the benefits of organizing far outweigh the potential dangers because it gives workers better rights and protections. Additionally, the passage points out more subtle tyranny within the Ford plant: supervisors essentially force workers to own Ford cars rather than any other, which limits the workers' freedoms while driving up Ford's own profits—another example of how the constant striving for wealth harms the workers.

CHAPTER 76

As Tom Jr. holds more and more meetings with Ford workers, he argues that too large a share of the product of industry goes to the owners, who spend it on new investments, rather than to the workers, who could spend it on necessities like food and clothing. Even the New Deal policies aren't working: many people are still unemployed, while production levels continue to rise. For this reason, Tom and many others start to discuss the idea of unionizing the auto industry, so that they have the power of 200,000 men to negotiate with Ford.

Tom provides proof for the failure of unfettered capitalism for the workers; even the New Deal policies under F.D.R., which provided relief to the unemployed and tried to spur economic recovery, still aren't able to regulate profits in a way that provides more jobs. In addition, Tom starts to advocate for unionizing because he recognizes that only 200,000 men standing strong will be able to match Ford's wealth and power.

CHAPTER 77

That summer, John regains his former job as the industry picks up again. Terrified of experiencing another slump, John and Annabelle try to amass as much wealth as possible, which frustrates Tom Jr. That winter, Milly dies of cancer, and the Shutts are able to give her a nice burial.

John and Annabelle underscore the problem with the capitalist system. Rather than trying to change the underlying policies and problems of the country's economic system, they instead do all they can to pursue their own fortune. Tom recognizes this, which is what drives him to pursue unionization rather than follow their lead and exacerbate the economic inequality in the country.

CHAPTER 78

Hank is annoyed at Tom Jr.—he doesn't want to turn in his own brother for organizing, but he is also worried that Ford might think Hank is involved in Tom's plans. Hank asks Daisy to try to convince Tom to find a job some other place, but when Daisy approaches Tom, Tom insists that he has become friends with the workers, who need his help organizing. Tom suggests that he could pay Hank a few hundred dollars to report on what happens in the service department. This offer terrifies Hank, however, because he knows that both he and Tom could be killed if they conspire against Ford.

The book continues to explore the different ways in which capitalism degrades the lives of the rich and the poor. Hank provides evidence that Ford is not above killing people in order to avoid unionization. His tyrannical policies have also turned brothers against each other and potentially caused them to put each other in danger.

CHAPTER 79

In mid-winter, Tom Jr. gets into a **car** accident on an icy road and is more than an hour late for work; when he arrives, his boss promptly fires him. Tom is blacklisted, meaning that he cannot work for any big industry in the Detroit area because Ford refuses to provide references for him. Fortunately, Tom has some money saved up, so during the day he attends committee meetings, and at night he meets with workers in absolute darkness to organize. They know that meeting not only imperils their job, but also their lives.

Tom's firing over his involvement in the labor movement highlights exactly the need for that labor movement. At this time, Ford has a huge amount of power over workers—not only in their ability to make money at Ford's, but in their ability to make money anywhere in Detroit. This power instills so much fear in workers that they feel unable to even meet together during the day when they might be recognized.

CHAPTER 80

Tom Jr. intends to marry a college friend named Dell Brace, so she moves to Detroit and gets a job with the city's welfare department. Tom introduces her to the family, and though they are wary of her politics—like Tom, she is a "Red"—Daisy and Abner instantly like her. Abner is surprised to see that she is obviously very refined (her father is a state senator in Iowa) but she is very plainly dressed and very kind. Abner knows that "agitators" are dangerous, but when he talks with Tom and Dell he doesn't disagree with anything they say.

Abner reinforces the problems with media bias. He is so convinced that "Reds"—communists—are dangerous, and so convinced that Tom and Dell are communists, that he doesn't fully recognize how much he agrees with their views. The misinformation and slant of the news has caused him to be completely ignorant of what Tom actually stands for, and makes him unable to realize that he actually agrees with it.


CHAPTER 81

The labor movement spreads all over the country, and the United Auto Workers (the auto workers' union) is now paying organizers, so Tom Jr. goes into the neighborhoods of the Ford plants and meets workers in their homes. Before long, the police take him into custody and ask him to name the people with whom he's working. Word soon goes out that Tom is missing, and the union starts to phone every police headquarters non-stop so that no police business can occur as long as they have Tom. When the police refuse to acknowledge that they arrested Tom, union organizers start calling the Ford company to ask about Tom, keeping Ford's phones busy as well.

Tom's arrest exposes the police's corruption. As Sinclair noted in an earlier chapter, they are completely loyal to Ford, and thus make unfounded arrests. Tom is simply meeting with other workers to discuss unionizing, but this is treated as a crime. Tom's plight also demonstrates the power of unions, even when the workers at Ford haven't unionized yet. Through collective action, the UAW organizers are able to counter his unjust arrest by stopping up the phones.


CHAPTER 82

The police eventually release Tom Jr. Meanwhile, Ford feels like a prisoner himself, trapped by the billion dollars he has earned. His fortune tells him that he is widely hated by half a million unemployed people, and that there is a conspiracy to take his wealth from him. Though he was once a bright farm boy, now he has become morose and bitter. He has also become the worst employer: he pays the worst wages in the industry and maintains the cruelest **assembly line**.

The novel continues to construct parallels between its rich and poor characters. Like Tom, Ford feels that he is losing his freedom and humanity. No longer does he carry the optimism of his youth; now he has lost his morals in the pursuit of profit. The fact that it makes him feel like a prisoner shows that the system doesn't even truly benefit him—it only makes him feel trapped.

Ford worries about his greatness, power, and wealth being taken from him; he still believes that the Jews are behind all his troubles. Additionally, the former editor of the *Dearborn Independent* (and the man who wrote its anti-Jewish articles) is now Ford's publicity man and controls all his contacts with the outside world.

Misinformation still plagues Ford's life, as he has become completely entrenched in his conspiracy concerning the Jewish people. Just as it does for Abner, this has real-world consequences, because it causes him to be paranoid about his fortune and also affects how he comes into contact with the outside world.

CHAPTER 83

Ford wonders how to stave off communists and Jews. He looks to Germany, where Nazism and fascism are becoming popular movements, and where the German government is reprinting Ford's anti-Jewish pamphlets. Hitler's organizer in America, Fritz Kuhn, meets with Ford and explains that they need a "pure, native, hundred percent American movement" to get the communists out of the White House. He tells Ford that all he needs to make this happen is money, and if he gives the one percent of his fortune, they can elect one of their agents as the President of the United States. Ford agrees.

Ford's involvement with the Nazis continues to illustrate the severe consequences of misinformation and ignorance. Because Ford was convinced by anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, the Nazis now use Ford's own writings in order to convince the German people of Nazi ideology. This also demonstrates how Ford has completely forgone American idealism and his morality, as he is teaming up with a party that will soon become synonymous with inhumanity as well as America's political enemy.

CHAPTER 84

One evening in spring, Tom Jr. meets Dell in a diner; he is going to speak at a labor meeting shortly, and Dell refuses to let him go alone. At the same time, Ford is getting ready for a formal occasion that evening; it is at the home of people who have been wealthy for generations. Even though Ford is 100 times as rich, he still looks at them in awe. A half hour later, Tom and Dell get into their old **car** and go to the meeting while Ford and Clara get into their limousine.

In this final stretch of chapters, the novel bounces back and forth between these two events: Tom's labor meeting and Ford's formal gathering. The contrast between them illustrates the mass inequality in American society, and how the capitalist system has dehumanized both of these groups. In Ford's case, the book highlights here how even though he is extremely rich—richer than the people whose party he is attending—he is still envious of their fortune, demonstrating how even his massive degree of wealth has not made him happy.

CHAPTER 85

Ford arrives at an elaborate mansion; a footman escorts them into the house and he and Clara enjoy cocktails and decadent hors d'oeuvres. They then move to the dining room, which is elegantly furnished with oil paintings, hand-cut glass, and polished mahogany. At the labor meeting, the chairman tells the audience that no liberties have ever been won without a struggle—they have to make sacrifices to win their rights as workers. The chairman then introduces Tom Jr.—the son and grandson of factory workers who has seen the trials of the working class under capitalism. Tom tells his audience that the only way to save the workers is to organize and unite.

*While the Fords enjoy the lavish perks of wealth, Tom and the other workers are fighting for basic human decency and fair wages. The descriptions of the elegant mansion, the footmen, and the various décor also recalls the title of the novel—*The Flivver King*—to show that Ford has become more than a wealthy entrepreneur. He has quite literally become a king, set apart from the working class who do not enjoy a fraction of the same benefits.*

CHAPTER 86

Ford enjoys several courses of decadent food prepared by the hostess's chef, including terrapin-soup, quail, and an alligator pear salad. Meanwhile, Tom Jr. explains that the **car** industry can produce twice as many cars as the American people need; factories drive men like racehorses during active periods, then turn the men out to the breadlines the rest of the time. Tom explains that under the New Deal, profits increased 50 percent while wages increased only 10 percent, so the issues that caused the depression are worse than ever.

Here, Tom ties together the threads of argument running throughout the story explaining why the capitalist system is problematic. Ford can keep creating cars in a concentrated timeline because he drives his workforce so hard, and then he can discard his workers the rest of the time. This intense pursuit of profit is exactly what exacerbated the Great Depression, as people's buying power did not keep up with the amount of goods that they were producing. Thus, Tom argues that the profit system needs to change in order for workers to maintain a decent standard of living.

CHAPTER 87

The final course of the evening is ice cream made to look like **car** wheels, after which Ford enjoys coffee in delicate china cups. In the labor meeting, Tom Jr. argues that the only way to organize is to make one union, so that different types of workers don't fight amongst themselves for jurisdiction. Tom passionately tells his audience that they have to demand their share, and to keep demanding it until it is granted. While Ford talks a little bit about politics and the market, the meeting disperses and everyone hurries back to their car, intent on not being recognized in the rainy night.

After highlighting the problems with the capitalist system in the previous chapter, Tom emphasizes the need for labor unions. Only by working as a collective, rather than organizing into different factions of workers, do they have the power to stand up to Ford's wealth. Meanwhile, those at the meeting recognize that they are doing so at great personal risk, because if they are recognized, they could be fired or even killed, emphasizing how so many of their rights have been taken away.

CHAPTER 88

Tom Jr. and Dell get in their **car** to return home, and friends follow them in another car. Discovering that they have a flat tire, Tom and Dell stop and quickly change the tire, growing a little anxious. At the party, Ford and the other guests go to the ballroom, where three fiddlers begin to play. The guests begin to dance old American styles, and Ford is warmed by the charming scene of gallant men and ladies in silk.

The scenes at the party continue to emphasize how Ford has become this backward-looking tyrant. It reinforces the irony of what Ford has done: even though he wanted his technology to change the world, he is frustrated with its cultural progress and wishes to go backwards.

CHAPTER 89

The dancing continues in the ballroom as the gentleman lead the ladies and a prompter calls out instructions. Ford thinks that they are a "civilizing force." Tom Jr., meanwhile, returns to his car and drives home. When their friends split off from them, Dell grows even more concerned, looking anxiously out the rearview mirror as rain streams down.

Sinclair continues to build a contrast between Ford and Tom to show their inequality. While Ford is relaxed and happy in his old-fashioned and wealthy world, Tom and Dell fear for their safety, wherein a flat tire could cause huge amounts of trouble for them.

CHAPTER 90

The final dance is an old quadrille. As Ford dances, he beams with pride and joy. While Tom Jr. and Dell drive home, another **car** suddenly forces him off the road. Five men emerge from the car and swarm Tom's car. Tom gets out and tries to defend himself, while Dell screams for help. One of the men throws her to the ground and jams her face into the mud, while the other men beat Tom mercilessly before jumping into their car and speeding away.

This split scene in particular demonstrates how the capitalist system has ripped people—but particularly the working class—of their humanity. While these men beat Tom for requesting basic human rights, the king who sanctions these actions is a world away, completely carefree, concerned only with his diversions.

CHAPTER 91

Ford thanks his hosts for a delightful evening, while Dell crawls through the mud in pain and fear. She tries to scream, but there's mud stuck in her throat. She finally finds Tom Jr.'s unconscious body. She turns him on his side so that he won't choke and tries to find lights along the boulevard. Ford and Clara return to their limousine, very pleased by the evening.

Again, Ford's comfort contrasts sharply with the violence that Dell and Tom experience in this scene. Even their cars—the symbols of American industry and the profit system—reflect their conditions. Dell and Tom are in an old broken-down car while Ford is driven home in a limousine. Ford has completely relinquished his morals in pursuit of his prosperity, and the fact that he is ignorant of people being beaten and perhaps even killed on his behalf reflects his immorality.

CHAPTER 92

In the backseat of the limousine, Ford tells Clara that their hosts probably just wanted money from him, but Clara tells him not to be so cynical. He says that the dancing was nice, but he laments that they've probably switched to jazz now that he's left. As they pass through a stretch of land, they see a woman (Dell) staggering towards the road to intercept them and ask for help, but the limo swerves out of the way and Ford barely notices her. Clara tells Ford that he should be happy, as he's done a great deal of good in the world. "The **Flivver** King" replies that he doesn't know if anybody can do any good in the world.

The final chapter puts a final point on both Ford's journey and the book's critique of the capitalist system. Ford has completely lost his ideals and is now a miserable, cynical "king" who cares only about maintaining wealth and power. This comes at the cost of caring about those below him like Tom and Dell, who are also dehumanized by the capitalist system—literally beaten down for trying to organize. This also emphasizes the need for unionization; Tom as a single person cannot fight Ford, but with the power of a collective the workers can overcome this brutalizing force. And lastly, even Ford recognizes that the current economic system may not actually work. In acknowledging that he's not sure if anyone can do any good in the world, Ford emphasizes that it might be time for a change to an economic system that can do some good.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Emanuel, Lizzy. "*The Flivver King*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 30 Oct 2020. Web. 30 Oct 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Emanuel, Lizzy. "*The Flivver King*." LitCharts LLC, October 30, 2020. Retrieved October 30, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-flivver-king.

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MLA

Sinclair, Upton. The Flivver King. Charles H. Kerr. 1999.

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Sinclair, Upton. The Flivver King. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr. 1999.