*McClure’s Magazine* makes Muckraking Mainstream- 1902

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt gave a speech and inadvertently coined the term “muckraker”. In all actuality, he was referring to a movement in journalism that had begun years before. The term “muckraker” refers to the new kind of investigative journalism that sprang up I the United States in response to the political and economic corruption that ran rampant in the Gilded Age. The investigative pieces opened the eyes of the American public to a need for reform.

*McClure’s Magazine* was a monthly publication founded in 1893 by Samuel McClure and John Phillips. Political issues and literature were not topics that the average American concerned themselves with. By lowering the price of their magazine to fifteen cents (five cents lower than the average publication), McClure and Phillips wanted to bring enlightenment and new knowledge to the lower classes of American society. Originally, *McClure’s Magazine* was not intended for investigative journalism; that focus would come later.

McClure and Phillips “published the work of leading popular writers such as Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson and Arthur Conan Doyle.”[[1]](#footnote-1) But despite their diverse interests and lower prices, for the first nine years, sales for *McClure’s Magazine* were very disappointing.

Then, in 1902, they began publishing a brand new featured segment entitled “A History of the Standard Oil Company”. This nineteen part series (written by then-unknown author Ida Tarbell) made *McClure’s Magazine* tremendously popular and boosted sales enormously. Following the success of “Standard Oil”, McClure and Phillips began to hire more writers to submit similar investigative pieces. By 1903, *McClure’s Magazine* had unknowingly made investigative journalism, or muckraking, mainstream.

In 1906, some of the key writers quit over disputes between them and Samuel McClure over editing and creative pursuits. Magazine sales began to lag, and soon McClure and Phillips were deeply in debt. They were forced to sell the magazine to creditors in 1911. There was a brief revival for about ten years in 1921, when it ran as a women’s magazine but *McClure’s* was out of print by 1932.

1. John Simkin, Spartacus Educational Publishers Ldt., Accessed September 7, 2012, <http://spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAmcclureM.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)