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# THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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Resource Packet

PURE FOOD AND DRUG ACT



## PURE FOOD AND DRUG ACT

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, there were no federal regulations on food safety, meaning that companies could make a fast profit by adulterating, or contaminating, foods with other ingredients to improve their color or decrease the cost to make them. At the time of Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, some of the most unsafe foods were meats and chocolate. The latter often contained all sorts of dangerous ingredients, including brick dust, copper sulfate, and powdered tin.

Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Harvey Washington Wiley, Chief Chemist of the Bureau of Chemistry at the United States Department of Agriculture, and muckraking journalists like Upton Sinclair who began to expose the dangers the American public faced in their foods, the federal government pushed forward two important bills in Congress: the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act, both of which Roosevelt signed on June 30, 1906.

Roosevelt considered the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act as one of the most important accomplishments of his presidency. As he said in his last message to Congress on January 22, 1909, "The enactment of a pure food law was a recognition of the fact that the public welfare outweighs the right to private gain, and that no man may poison the people for his private profit."

Primary sources pertaining to the Pure Food and Drug Act and food adulteration are available in collections across the country. Students and teachers can find eight pages of primary sources in the Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library related exclusively to food safety and various government regulations. **This resource packet includes 15 primary sources related to Theodore Roosevelt and pure food.**

### 1 The Alchemist of the Past and the Alchemist of the Present



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**Source 1** is a cartoon from *Puck* magazine depicting the alchemist of the present, Dr. Cashdown Mixer, collecting payments. On the wall, "recipes" for different foods and beverages like coffee and honey can be seen. Encourage students to carefully consider the recipes. What do they notice about the ingredients? Look especially at the margarine recipe!

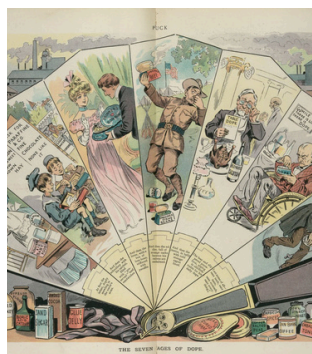
**DATE:** 1884-04-02 **CREATED BY:** Friedrich Graetz

*Courtesy of Science History Institute*

### 2 The Seven Ages of Dope



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**Source 2** is a cartoon from *Puck* magazine that illustrates the life of an individual from childhood to old age, showing the adulterated products he experiences throughout his life. Encourage students to look at the different adulterated foods. What sounds the worst to them? Some examples include Boric Acid Catsup and Glue Jelly.

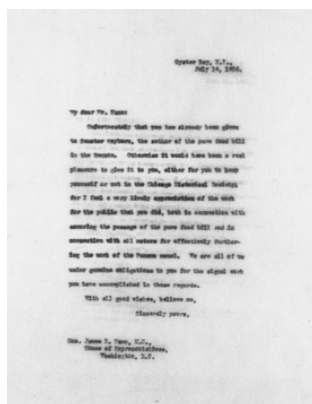
**DATE:** 1906-03-28 **CREATED BY:** S. D. Ehrhart

*Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*

### 3 Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to James R. Mann



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**Source 3** is a letter from Theodore Roosevelt to James R. Mann, a U.S. Representative from Illinois, who inquired about the possibility of being given a pen for his work in connection with the Pure Food and Drug Act. Roosevelt informs him that unfortunately the pen had already been given to Senator Weldon Brinton Heyburn from Idaho, who championed the bill in the Senate. What pen do you think Roosevelt is referring to?

**DATE:** 1906-07-14 **CREATED BY:** Theodore Roosevelt

*Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*

## 4 A Nauseating Job, But It Must Be Done



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**Source 4** is a cartoon of Theodore Roosevelt holding a muck rake labeled “investigations” and raking up the “meat scandal.” The term “muck rake” came from one of Roosevelt’s favorite books, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and described a character who was focused on raking the muck and the dust and debris by his feet instead of the celestial crown he was being offered. The term was not intended as a compliment, but it became synonymous for investigative journalism, as exemplified by Upton Sinclair. Encourage students to think about the application of muckraking to Theodore Roosevelt. Did the cartoonist mean it as a compliment?

**DATE:** c. 1906 **CREATED BY:** Saturday Globe (Utica)

*Courtesy of Albert Shaw, A Cartoon History of Roosevelt’s Career, pg. 145*

## 5 Cutting Another Notch in the Big Stick



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**Source 5** is a cartoon that depicts Theodore Roosevelt cutting another notch into his big stick—or listing another accomplishment of his presidency. Five things are listed: meat inspections, the Panama Canal, railroad rate regulation, the Pure Food and Drug Act, and federal control of railroads. Which do you think is the most important accomplishment of Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency?

**DATE:** c. 1907-04 **CREATED BY:** Elmer C. Donnell

*Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*

## 6 Chemist Roosevelt at Work



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**Source 6** is a cartoon in which Theodore Roosevelt is depicted as a chemist looking at milk under a microscope. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 helped to regulate food and beverages like milk, which were often adulterated, or contaminated, with impure ingredients like chalk or even formaldehyde. How do you think this cartoonist feels about Roosevelt’s involvement in the Pure Food and Drug Act—is it positive or negative?

**DATE:** 1907-06-26 **CREATED BY:** Joseph Harry Cunningham

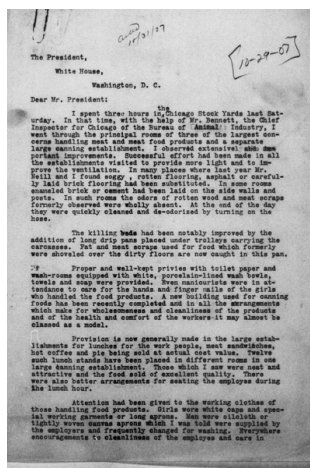
*Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*

## Resource Packet: Pure Food and Drug Act

### 7 Letter from James Bronson Reynolds to Theodore Roosevelt



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**Source 7** is a letter from James Bronson Reynolds, member of a special presidential commission to investigate the Chicago Stock Yards, to Theodore Roosevelt just slightly a year after the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act were passed. Reynolds notes there is improvement since his last visit regarding sanitation like “drip pans placed under trolleys carrying the carcasses,” but there is more to do. Encourage students to consider the changes made since the passage of those two bills. How did they help improve the quality of meat for consumers?

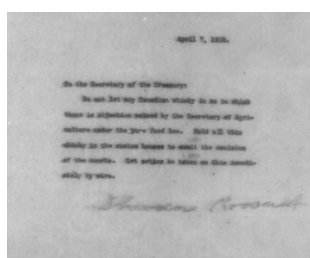
**DATE:** 1907-10-29 **CREATED BY:** James Bronson Reynolds

*Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*

### 8 Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to George B. Cortelyou



[Download](#)



**Source 8** is a letter from Theodore Roosevelt to George B. Cortelyou, the Secretary of the Treasury, asking him to hold all Canadian whiskey in the customhouses due to an objection raised by Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson under the Pure Food and Drug Act. What do you think the problem with the whiskey was? Why is it important that companies list the ingredients in their products clearly on their packages?

**DATE:** 1908-04-07 **CREATED BY:** Theodore Roosevelt

*Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*

### 9 Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Charles J. Bonaparte



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**Source 9** is a letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte asking him and the rest of the department in the government “to cooperate heartily in the enforcement” of the Pure Food and Drug Act. Roosevelt also notes, “One of the prime measures of the Administration—one of those in which it most emphatically believes—is the pure food law.” Roosevelt would later list the Panama Canal as his greatest accomplishment during his presidency. Which do you think is more important?

**DATE:** 1908-07-28 **CREATED BY:** Theodore Roosevelt

*Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*



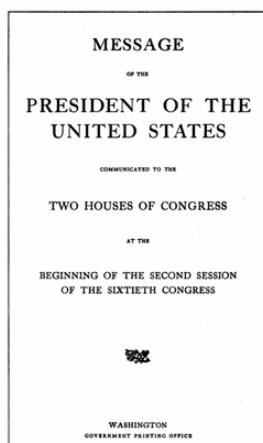
## Resource Packet: Pure Food and Drug Act

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### Message of the President of the United States Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress at the Beginning of the First Session of the Sixtieth Congress



[Download](#)



**Source 10** is a message from Theodore Roosevelt to Congress in 1908 in which he details the accomplishments of his administration. He made several comments about the Pure Food and Drug Act, including “The pure food legislation has already worked a benefit difficult to overestimate” and “The dangers to public health from food adulteration and from many other sources . . . should be met and overcome.” How has food safety improved in the past 100+ years? What are ways it can still improve today?

**DATE:** 1908

**CREATED BY:** Theodore Roosevelt

*Courtesy of Google Books*

11

### Salt Fish and Stock Food Seized in Washington, D.C., and Condemned Under the Pure Food Law, to Be Taken to Crematory for Destruction



[Download](#)



**Source 11** is a photograph of food in barrels and bags on horse-drawn wagons that did not pass regulations under the Pure Food and Drug Act and therefore could not be sold and had to be destroyed. What happens today if food is determined to be contaminated? How do the government and companies make sure consumers stay safe?

**DATE:** 1910-01-25 **CREATED BY:** Unknown

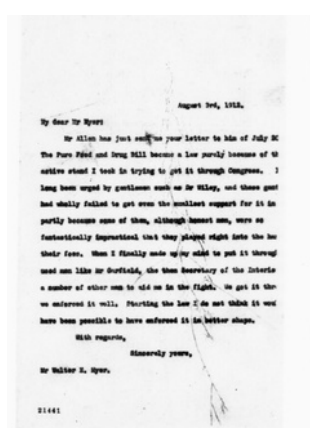
*Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*

12

### Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Walter E. Myer



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**Source 12** is a letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Walter E. Myer in which he defends his role in the success of the Pure Food and Drug Act. Roosevelt suggests that his decision to “put it through” made the difference, while still acknowledging that people like Dr. Harvey Washington Wiley had long been proponents of the law. Encourage students to think about Roosevelt’s role in the Pure Food and Drug Act. Would it have succeeded without his efforts as president?

**DATE:** 1912-08-03 **CREATED BY:** Theodore Roosevelt

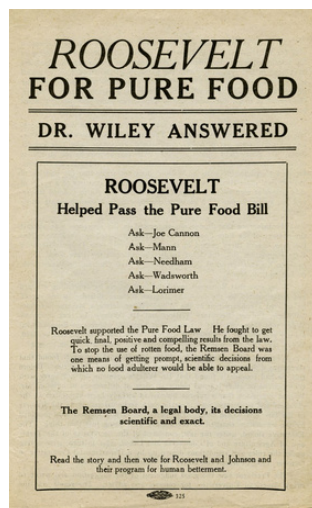
*Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*

## Resource Packet: Pure Food and Drug Act

### 13 Roosevelt for Pure Food



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**Source 13** is a report published by the National Progressive Committee defending Theodore Roosevelt's involvement in the Pure Food and Drug Act against Dr. Harvey Washington Wiley's claim during Roosevelt's 1912 campaign that he was against the act. The first page of "Roosevelt for Pure Food" encourages the reader to ask Joe [Joseph Gurney] Cannon, [James R.] Mann, [James C.] Needham, [James Wolcott] Wadsworth, and [William] Lorimer about the president's efforts to pass the law. Who do you think these people are? Do you think they are the right people to vouch for Roosevelt?

**DATE:** 1912

**CREATED BY:** Unknown

*Courtesy of Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Historic Site, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University*

### 14 Women Buying Meat at the Butcher's



[Download](#)



**Source 14** is an illustration of women buying meat from butchers. Do you think that it looks like a clean environment? Does the food seem safe to eat?

**DATE:** c. 1913

**CREATED BY:** Edward Penfield

*Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*

### 15 FDA History – Sure Cure Cartoon



[Download](#)



**Source 15** is a cartoon of Uncle Sam holding a bottle that reads, "Old Doc. Wiley's Sure Cure for All Adulterations, Fake Foods, Quack Remedies." What point do you think the cartoon is trying to make? And do you think the picture of Dr. Harvey Washington Wiley is accurate based on this [photograph](#) of him?

**DATE:** Unknown

**CREATED BY:** Unknown

*Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons*

## Resource Packet: Pure Food and Drug Act

### IMPORTANT DATES

- **February 26, 1906:** Upton Sinclair publishes *The Jungle*.
- **June 30, 1906:** Theodore Roosevelt signs both the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act.
- **January 1, 1907:** Pure Food and Drug Act becomes effective.
- **1907:** The United States Agriculture Department issues Food Inspection Decision (FID) 76 permitting seven synthetic organic dyes for use in food.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### Books

- Blum, Deborah. *The Poison Squad: One Chemist's Single-Minded Crusade for Food Safety at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Penguin Books, 2019.

#### Articles

- “*The Jungle*, Muckrakers, and Teddy Roosevelt.” NEH Edsitement, Accessed November 21, 2024.  
<https://edsitement.neh.gov/curricula/jungle-muckrakers-and-teddy-roosevelt>.
- Khomina, Anna. “Pure Food and Drug Act Passed: On This Day, 1906.” The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. Last modified June 30, 2017.  
<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/news/pure-food-and-drug-act-passed-day-1906>.
- Klein, Christopher. “How Upton Sinclair’s ‘The Jungle’ Led to US Food Safety Reforms.” History. Last modified May 10, 2023.  
<https://www.history.com/news/upton-sinclair-the-jungle-us-food-safety-reforms>.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**Research more about your favorite foods in the 1900s:** See if your favorite foods were foods that were adulterated (or contaminated) in the early 1900s. You can look at page 117 and following of this [bulletin](#), which is an analysis of different foods in 1902. As an example, one instance of bologna was “preserved with boracic acid,” while one can of green peas was “copper colored.” Was your favorite food marked as preserved or adulterated in the 1902 report?

**Find out how your state handled food safety before and after the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act:** As one example, the North Dakota legislature passed the [Adulteration of Food Act](#) in 1903, which only covered foods processed in the state itself, but it significantly improved the quality and safety of foods in North Dakota. How did your state address the pure food movement?

**Think about food safety today:** What foods are the healthiest to eat? What makes them safe? What foods are best to limit or to avoid entirely? If desired, draw a picture of healthy foods and contrast them with unhealthy foods.