

## **US HISTORY**

### **Jane Addams and The Hull House**

Read the articles, "Jane Addams and the Women of Hull House" and "The Settlement House Movement". Use the information to answer the following questions on a separate paper. Please answer in complete sentences and write neatly.

1. What was Toynbee Hall and how did it affect Jane Addams?
  2. What was life like in immigrant neighborhoods?
  3. Jane Addams and Ellen Starr first invited the neighbors to Hull House for receptions, teas and lectures. Why do you think these activities were not successful?
  4. After the first few years what purposes did the Hull House serve?
  5. Who else, besides the poor, did Jane Addams help with Hull House?
  6. How did political ward (area or district) bosses hinder her progress?
  7. Later in life, what was Jane Addams' cause?
1. Why were settlement houses established?
  2. How is the government like a mother?
  3. What modern-day profession was developed from settlement house workers?
  4. What were the greatest successes of settlement houses?

Jane Addams was an extraordinary woman for her times. She was often criticized for being too involved with immigrants and the poor. But, because of her will and belief that these people deserved help she soon made it acceptable for other women to work outside of the home in settlement houses.

Jane Addams is an example of how one person can change the world in which she lived. She had no idea that she would be so famous. She just did what she felt was right and good. Could you be a modern day Jane Addams?

1. List five problems of today's cities.
2. How could you work to directly help solve these problems?
3. Pretend you are in charge of a modern day Hull House in downtown San Jose. List five events (classes, activities etc.) you would offer to the people in that neighborhood.

## JANE ADDAMS AND THE WOMEN OF HULL HOUSE

### JANE ADDAMS

"Saint Jane" they called her, "the Genius of Hull House," "the First Lady of the Land," and "the most useful American." "A traitor," others said, "a fool," "Red," "the most dangerous woman in America." She began life in an average upper-class home, but by the time of her death, she was the most famous woman in America, the author of ten books, the recipient of fifteen honorary university degrees and the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Who was this woman who could engender such lavish praise as well as such virulent criticism?

Laura Jane Addams was the eighth of nine children, born in 1860 to a mill owner and his wife in Cedarville, Illinois. John Addams made a very good living, but even his wealth could not prevent five of his children from dying before they reached adulthood. Jane's mother died when she was two, so she was raised at first by an older sister and then by Anna Haldeman, her stepmother. Anna taught Jane to appreciate music and literature, while her father gave her a life-long interest in history. John Addams was a state senator, an ardent abolitionist and friend of Abraham Lincoln. Jane idolized him to the point that she would sometimes refuse to walk downtown beside him for fear that people would wonder how such a tall, handsome gentleman could be related to such a skinny, pigeon-toed "ugly duckling."

As Jane grew, her curved spine straightened and she developed into a beautiful, serious, gentle young woman. It was the fashion in the 1880s for the daughters of prosperous parents to go to college. Jane wanted to go East to Smith College, but her father refused to let her go so far from home. She enrolled in nearby Rockford Female Seminary instead. Rockford Seminary combined domestic training with religious and cultural instruction. "The chief end of Woman's education is not simply to shine in society," said Anna Sill, the school's president, "but to elevate and purify and adorn the home." She wanted her students to learn "the great Christian lesson, that the true end of life is not to acquire the most... happiness or knowledge, but to give oneself fully and worthily for the good of others...." <sup>1</sup>

Jane entered college life with enthusiasm and total commitment. She was an excellent student, class president in her senior year, and editor of the school magazine, but she resisted being turned into a missionary like many of her classmates. While she took the required religion courses, she also studied Greek, Latin, German, geology, astronomy, botany, medieval history, civil government, geography and American literature. Rockford did not become an accredited college until a year after Jane graduated, but because she had taken so many extra courses, she was allowed to return and receive a bachelor of arts degree. She really wanted that degree so she could go on to study medicine at a prestigious college in the East. These plans, however, were thrown into confusion when her beloved father died suddenly in the summer of 1881. Her grief was intense, but nonetheless, she enrolled in the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania that fall. She lasted less than a year. Poor health and a waning interest in medical studies forced her to drop out and go back home.

For the next eight years she lived the aimless, unsatisfying life of a wealthy, unmarried, cultured young lady. Having abandoned her medical career, Jane Addams faced the same dilemma as other women graduates of her day. She had been given a refined education but it had little practical use in solving the overwhelming problems of the industrial, urban world. She wrote that she felt like many of her friends, "whose uselessness hangs about them heavily," and who search desperately for something worthwhile to do with their lives.

In the end, she did what many of them did: she took care of her older sister's children, she got sick, and she went on two long trips through Europe to study art and music.

Toward the end of her second trip she happened to meet an Englishman who told her about Toynbee Hall. This was a large house located in the midst of a London slum where a group of university-educated men lived. They hosted recreations, clubs, and classes for the poor people in their neighborhood. They hoped that by living and working among the poor they could extend to them an appreciation of the fine arts that had only been available previously to the rich. It was during this visit to Toynbee Hall that Addams solved the problem of what to do with her life: she would live among the poor of Chicago and serve them as best she could.

Returning to America, Addams and her best friend, Ellen Starr, launched a campaign to win support for their project from the wealthier people of Chicago. With the donations they collected, they bought a decaying, old mansion which they named Hull House. It was located in the middle of a crowded immigrant district. Dark, airless tenement houses stretched down the narrow, dirty street on either side of the house. Children had nowhere to play but the garbage-strewn sidewalks. Nine churches competed with 250 saloons for whatever time and money their parents had left after sweating through twelve-hour days. Addams and Starr immediately set about repairing the house and then decorating it with fine furniture and art objects that they had collected in Europe. They then moved in and invited their Greek, Italian, Russian, German, Sicilian and Polish neighbors to drop in for a visit.

Neither Addams nor Starr had drawn up an organized plan of activities for Hull House. It would be smarter, they thought, to host a few activities and see how the neighbors responded. They invited Italian women in to view their pictures of Italian art, held receptions and teas, and announced lectures to be given on literary topics. The response was not overwhelming. Most of the neighbors who came just wanted to see what these strange young ladies were up to. So they changed their style and started holding German or Italian cultural parties. Neighbors flocked in to eat dessert, sing, dance, play games, or just chat. Before long, the neighbors found many uses for the strange young ladies. An Italian woman dropped off her children before she went to work, a Polish man invited them to his wedding, and a young girl frantically called them to come and help deliver her friend's baby.

The range of activities at Hull House constantly expanded during the first five years. By 1893, there was a day nursery for the children of working mothers, a gymnasium, playground, and craft clubs for older children, cooking and sewing classes for immigrant women, a boardinghouse for young working girls, and a dispensary to care for the sick. But Addams did not abandon her idea of bringing art to the poor. She also established an art gallery, an amateur theater, and a music school.

Addams' concern was not restricted to the poor and underprivileged. She knew that the overprivileged also needed Hull House. She invited rich young women, who like herself had received fine educations but had little opportunity to use them in any meaningful career, to join her in residence. By living at Hull House, they experienced daily the depth of poverty, exploitation, and ignorance that the urban poor suffered. The result was that many of them committed their lives to improving the lives of the poor. The list of women who were inspired by their years at Hull House is a list of the foremost reformers in the Progressive Era.

The activities of these and many other reformers, aided and inspired by Jane Addams, made Hull House the most famous settlement house in America and made Addams the most famous and respected woman of her time. Hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles reported Addams' every speech and action. They portrayed her as an American saint, overflowing with kindness, generosity, and self-sacrificing love. What they overlooked, probably because it didn't fit the stereotype, was her shrewd business sense and administrative ability. She had a knack for getting straight to the heart of the problem.

For example, Jane Addams figured out that her neighbors got sick and lost their babies so often because of the heaps of rotting garbage lying in the streets. So she got herself appointed garbage inspector and rose every morning before six to follow the garbage collector on his rounds. She noted the hundreds of rules he broke, but when she presented her evidence to City Hall, nothing was done about it. Further investigation showed that a corrupt political ward boss named Johnny Powers was the problem. He used his power to reward his friends and punish his enemies. Since cleaning garbage out of slum streets did not benefit him financially, he simply ignored the problem. He angered Addams again when she tried to convince the Chicago School Board to build another public school in her overcrowded neighborhood. Powers got the school board to reject her plea in favor of a parochial school whose supporters could be of use to him. Infuriated by his abuse of power, Addams organized a vigorous campaign to unseat him. She fought him in two elections but failed to oust him. Too many voters either owed him money or favors, or did not realize their squalid neighborhoods were partly his fault.

This excursion into public affairs proved to Addams that she could not fight urban poverty alone. Like club women all over America, she began to participate more and more heavily in political affairs, using her popularity to focus the nation's attention on the plight of the urban poor. In 1909, she joined Florence Kelley and others in founding the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She was elected the first vice-president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She believed that if women had the vote they could use it to fight prostitution, child labor and sweatshop conditions. In 1912, she seconded Theodore Roosevelt's presidential nomination at the Progressive Party convention. Her speech was the only one listened to quietly by all the delegates, and was given as loud and as long an ovation as Roosevelt himself.

In 1915, her interests expanded into international affairs. Jane Addams was elected chairman of the new Woman's Peace Party and president of the International Congress of Women. Her opposition to World War I was complete and irreversible. She had clearly explained her position in a book published in 1907 but few people understood how committed she was to peace at that time. When America decided to join the Allies in 1917 and Addams spoke out against the move, the woman who two years before had been called a "saint" and a "genius," was now called a "fool" and a "traitor." But she refused to be bowed by these attacks and spent the war years traveling around the country giving lectures on ways to increase food production to feed the starving victims of the war. In 1919 Addams pressed on again with her peace activities and was elected president of an organization that Florence Kelley had helped to found: the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She traveled all over the world presiding over its conferences.

Back home, Jane Addams helped found the American Civil Liberties Union in 1920 and served on its National Committee for a decade. Her work at Hull House and her bold stand against war won her the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. By now Jane Addams was an old woman and her unpopular opposition to the war was fading from memory. Once again she became the "Mother of America" and when she died in 1935, the entire nation mourned.

## THE SETTLEMENT HOUSE MOVEMENT

The women of Hull House were not unique. They are merely the most famous examples of a movement that swept America during the Progressive Era. Settlement houses like Hull House were started in nearly every major city in New England and the Midwest. In 1891, there were six; by 1910, there were over 400. They were staffed by young, usually college-educated men and women who felt they had to do something to help solve the alarming problems of big, industrial cities.

Millions of immigrants flooded into America after the Civil War, providing cheap labor for factory-owners and swelling the slum districts of every large city. They joined the native-born poor in wretched tenement houses which often had no sewage disposal system or adequate ventilation. There were no organized day care centers for children of working mothers, no place for older children to play except the streets, not nearly enough schools or hospitals, and no art museums or concert halls at all. There was an abundance of disease, however, along with pickpockets, prostitutes, alcoholics, and ruthless sweatshop owners. All this in the land of the free, the land of opportunity, the great American democracy, the last best hope on earth. Settlement workers felt they had to do something practical to solve these problems. So they moved into the slums and set up houses to serve as the headquarters for neighborhood improvement clubs.

Many of the most successful settlement houses were run by women. Few of these women had the time or interest for marrying and raising a family, but this did not mean they rejected a woman's traditional role. Instead of caring for a single family, they took on the whole neighborhood as their family. If the father's role was to go out and earn a living, the mother's role was to keep house, nurture and protect her children, and bring art, music, and literature into the home. All these motherly duties settlement house women did for their neighborhoods. What is government, Jane Addams would ask, except housekeeping on a grand scale? Settlement house workers cleaned up their neighborhoods by pressuring city councils to build healthier apartment houses and hook up every one to a sewage system. They protected the children by fighting for child labor laws, better schools, convictions for brothel owners, and special handling of juvenile delinquents by the courts and prison. They encouraged appreciation for the fine arts by establishing neighborhood brass bands, literary discussion groups, and community celebrations using the music, dance, and folk art from the immigrants' original countries.

As settlement house workers got to know their neighborhoods, they began to realize that broad social and economic forces contributed to the poverty and crime in their areas. By systematically studying these forces and then working with, or creating, government agencies to deal with particular problems, they established a new profession: the social worker.

The settlement house movement slowed down after World War I. This was caused in part by public schools and government agencies taking over the work that the settlement houses had been doing. Some critics charged that the settlements had failed, but Jane Addams and Lillian Wald did not agree, pointing to the many laws they had gotten passed and civic organizations they had founded. They admitted, however, that improvements came slowly and unevenly. Battles that appeared to be won one day had to be fought all over again the next.

Florence Kelley got the Illinois legislature to enact a law forbidding child labor in 1893, only to have the State Supreme Court rule it unconstitutional in 1895. She persevered in her campaign and was finally rewarded in 1916, when the federal government outlawed child labor. But again the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional two years later. Not until 1938, was a law written in such a way that the courts would uphold it.

In the end, settlement house workers' greatest success was in changing the attitudes of both the ordinary people and the government. They convinced many that social conditions, not personal weakness, was the greatest cause of poverty. Settlement house workers proved that public charities could not solve massive urban problems all by themselves, that government had to get involved. They persuaded many white, native-born Americans to accept African-Americans, Hispanics, and European immigrants as their equals. Finally, they laid the foundation for many of our present attitudes about community participation and reform, as Allen Davis describes:

Settlement workers usually combined an idealistic faith in the future with a hard-headed realism about how change is accomplished in a democracy.... It would be easy to conclude that the settlements failed, but they did win victories and change attitudes. All those who today join the war on poverty or try to rehabilitate the nation's cities are influenced, whether they know it or not, by a generation of settlement workers who dared to dream that American cities could be safe and stimulating for all citizens... <sup>1</sup>

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