

file J Addams

MEMORANDUM

To: HRC
Fr: Sabrina Corlette *SC*
Re: Jane Addams
Da: August 23, 1996

As you suggested, I talked to Sid about Jane Addams and Hull House. The following contains good snippets from our conversation, as well as additional research I have pulled together.

NOTE: The curators of the Smithsonian exhibit on women and politics sent over the attached brochure.

The Formative Years

Born in 1860 in Cedarville, Illinois, Addams was part of a political family. Her father, John H. Addams, was an Illinois State Senator known for his honor and his friendship with President Lincoln. He gained the unique distinction of having never been offered a bribe in all his years of Chicago politics. Her mother died when Jane was very young.

John Addams was a great admirer and friend of President Lincoln. Jane Addams met the President when she was a young girl, and Lincoln would address correspondence to John as: "My dear double-d Addams." Jane's father was an abolitionist, who for a time harbored an escaped slave during the pre-Emancipation years.

Jane was always able to sympathize with the victims of society -- perhaps because she felt herself to be a misfit -- "an ugly, pigeon-toed little girl whose crooked back obliged her to walk with her head held very much upon one side." At school, she encountered a strong missionary tradition, and felt a compelling desire to prove herself as a woman in a man's world.

She learned about the settlement house movement on a trip to London, where she visited Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house in the world. It was this visit that inspired Hull House.

Hull House

On September 18, 1889, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened the doors of Hull House Settlement in Chicago. At the time, Chicago was, as muckraker Lincoln Steffens wrote, "first in violence, deepest in dirt; loud, lawless, unlovely, ill-smelling,

new; an overgrown gawk of a village, the teeming tough among cities."

Hull House was part of a broad movement to solve urban social problems by having reformers "settle" and work in poor and immigrant neighborhoods. It was the first of its kind in America. Addams believed that different classes in American society could learn from each other and that this "power of cooperation" would strengthen American life.

Addams and her Hull House "associates" quickly became involved in the political arena. They pushed through labor legislation, set up juvenile courts, provided school playgrounds, worked for adequate enforcement of housing and sanitation laws, improved the public school system, agitated for woman suffrage and served as an "embryonic Civil Liberties Union" to preserve due process. (Addams went on to be one of the founders of the American Civil Liberties Union.)

To Addams, Hull House was also a simple matter of neighborliness. "It is natural to feed the hungry and care for the sick. It is certainly natural to give pleasure to the young, comfort the aged, and to minister to the deep-seated craving for social intercourse that all men feel."

A Community Center for Chicago

Hull House had classes that served as adult education and job training programs as well as a means of "Americanizing" newcomers.

The Music School gave formal musical training to children and adults. It provided a classical music background, trained a marching band, and preserved and performed traditional music from the immigrant community. Benny Goodman, a boy from the neighborhood, learned music and got his start at Hull House concerts. He always said he had been "saved by Hull House."

Within a month of its opening, Hull House established a kindergarten and day nursery, providing immigrant working mothers with vital child care. Later, the Children's House was built with two bedrooms, a dining room, bath facilities, and a "sunshine porch" with wire netting providing a safe space for small children.

The Hull House Boy's Club, built in 1906, provided trade shops in photography, printing, metal work, telegraphy, and electrical construction. It gave boys a place to "belong" and structured, safe recreation.

With ties to the University of Chicago's home economics department, Hull House used home economic and nutrition concepts

in the coffee house, and classes were offered to both boys and girls. Immigrant mothers were taught "American housekeeping" in cooking, sewing and laundry classes.

Ellen Gates Starr was a woman of great artistic talent who believed in the power of art to uplift everyday life. She studied bookbinding in Europe and opened a bindery at Hull House where she taught classes in arts and crafts.

By 1907, Hull House covered an entire city block. It contained: the Butler Art Gallery with space for clubs and classes and a branch of the public library. The coffee house and gymnasium were added in 1893. The Children's House with kindergarten, nursery, and music school was built in 1895. The men's residence was added to the art gallery, and a special building was built for the Jane Club, a cooperative residence for working girls. The theater was built in 1899. The Hull House apartment building with a Men's Club and Women's Club was added. There was a dining hall for residents. The Boy's Club and the Mary Clare Nursery also were added by 1907.

On Suffrage

Addams was a strong advocate of woman's right to vote. In August 1912, she was asked to second the endorsement of Theodore Roosevelt at the Bull Moose Party's Convention in Chicago. On her way to the convention hall, she was met in front of the Chicago Art Institute by 500 women. They marched down Michigan Avenue carrying signs saying, "Votes for Women." She was a member of the Illinois Suffrage Society.

On the Rights of African Americans

The daughter of an abolitionist and admirer of Lincoln, Addams was a strong advocate of the rights of African Americans. She was a founder of the NAACP, and good friends with Ida B. Wells, reformer and author of the ground-breaking study of lynching in the South, On Lynching.

On Labor

Union locals organized at Hull House, and residents Mary Kenney, Ellen Starr and Florence Kelley won passage of laws to protect women, ban child labor, and make the workplace safer. In fact, Illinois laws became models for reform. Because of prodding from Hull House reformers, Illinois began the first government-sponsored factory inspections in the country, with Florence Kelley (future head of the National Consumers' League) as the first chief factory inspector.

Public Health/Sanitation

Progressive-era reformers attacked the lack of proper city sanitation as a major cause of disease. According to a local reporter in 1898, "The streets and alleys of the ward were notoriously filthy, and the contractors habitually neglected them....Miss Addams herself applied for the position of garbage inspector, and, to the astonishment of [the ward boss]...received the appointment. Within two months the Nineteenth Ward was one of the cleanest in the city."

On Peace

In 1915, Jane Addams, Carrie Chapman Catt and other activists formed the Woman's Peace Party. She was also an early founder of the American Union Against Militarism, a group founded to keep the United States out of World War I.

Jane Addams was the acknowledged leader of the women's peace movement in the United States, serving first as president of the Women's Peace Party and later as head of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1931 she became the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Peace.

The Critics

Because of her activities on behalf of labor laws and the rights of the poor, Addams was the target of suspicion and hostility from many businessmen and conservative politicians. When she later became involved in the peace movement, she earned the vitriol of patriot groups. The American Legion called her un-American. The Daughters of the American Revolution asked her to leave their organization and castigated her as "a factor in a movement to destroy civilization and Christianity."

Quotes

"Politics is...housekeeping on a grand scale." Jane Addams

Wanted Hull House to be: "easily accessible, ample in space, acceptable and tolerant in spirit." Jane Addams

"Old-fashioned ways which no longer apply to changed conditions are a snare in which the feet of women have always become readily entangled." Jane Addams

"What [Jane] saw of youth on the city streets ended up as a program of school playgrounds; what she learned of children in trouble with the law ended as the first juvenile courts in the nation." Henry Steele Commager

"You utter instinctively the truths we others vainly seek."

William James, in a letter to Jane.

Addams was "the only saint America has produced." John Burns
(British labor leader)