

Addams, Jane Encyclopedia Article

Addams, Jane

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Addams, Jane

Jane Addams (1860–1935) is remembered primarily as the feisty American founder of the Settlement House Movement, which sought to challenge the industrial and urban order of the period to achieve social and environmental reforms. Inspired by a visit to London's East End and Toynbee Hall, a "settlement house" addressing the needs of the urban poor, Addams and her friend Ellen Starr cofounded Hull House in the slums of Chicago in 1889. Hull House became the central organizing hub and political force to provide social services to the exploding number of immigrants coming to Chicago to work in the unregulated factories. The living and working conditions around industrialized Chicago were horribly unsanitary, unhealthy, stinking, and crowded, and the politics were fairly corrupt.

Addams's Hull House confronted questions of housing, sanitation, and public health, areas not typically seen as being connected. A major campaign attacked the inadequate and inequitable garbage collection in the neighborhoods of crowded tenements. Addams's unsuccessful bid for the contract to collect the city's garbage gained so much publicity that the mayor appointed her to be Chicago's garbage inspector. In this role, Addams was so successful in raising public awareness of the situation that restructuring the garbage collection system quickly rose to the top of the agenda of both City Hall and the reform movement. She was also a mover and a shaker in the areas of labor reform, especially around fighting for industrial safety, humane worker conditions, and labor unions, and against child labor. Much of her work led to the right to vote for women. In 1910 Yale University awarded Addams the first honorary degree ever bestowed on a woman. In 1931 she received the Nobel Peace Prize, becoming the first American woman to receive a Nobel Prize.

Jane Addams. (©Bettmann/Corbis. Reproduced by permission.)

Bibliography

Internet Resources

Jane Addams Hull House Museum. Available from http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/hull_house.html