

Jane Addams Works for Better Cities

Jane Addams opened Hull House as a kind of community center in one of Chicago's working class neighborhoods in 1889. This "settlement house" was staffed by Addams and other volunteers who acted as neighborhood organizers and social workers. These are condensed selections from her famous books and articles.

The social organism has broken down through large districts of our great cities. Many of the people living there are very poor, the majority of them without leisure or energy for anything but the gain of subsistence [the bare necessities]. They move from one wretched lodging to another. They live for the moment side by side, many of them without knowledge of each other, without fellowship, without local tradition or public spirit, without social organization of any kind.

Practically nothing is done to remedy this. The people who might do it, who have the social tact and training, the large houses, and the traditions and custom of hospitality, live in other parts of the city. The club-houses, libraries, and galleries are also blocks away.

We find the working men organized into armies of producers [in factories] because men of business ability have found it in their interests thus to organize them. But these working men are not organized socially. Their ideas and resources are cramped. They have no share in the traditions and social energy which make for progress. Too often their only place of meeting is a saloon, their only host a bartender. Men of ability and refinement, of social power and university cultivation, stay away from them.

Personally, I believe the men who lose most are those who stay away.

It is constantly said that because the masses have never had social advantages they do not want them, that they are heavy and

dull. This divides the city into rich and poor; into the favored, who express their sense of social obligation by gifts of money, and into the unfavored, who express it by clamoring for a "share" – both of them actuated [motivated] by a vague sense of justice.

It is inevitable that those who feel most keenly this insincerity should be our young people. I think it is hard for us to realize how seriously many of them are taking to the notion of human brotherhood, how eagerly they long to give expression to the democratic ideal.



They hear constantly of the great social maladjustment, but no way is provided for them to change it. Our young people feel the need of putting theory into action, and respond quickly to the Settlement

house form of activity [as volunteer staffers].

Jane Addams criticized the system of "boss" politics found in many big cities. In some city neighborhoods, she noted, votes were bought at election time for "drinks or dollars." After the election, however, the real needs of poor neighborhoods were mostly ignored by the political system.

The policy of the public authorities of never taking an initiative, and always waiting to be urged to do their duty, is fatal in a neighborhood where there is no initiative among the citizens. The idea underlying our self-government breaks down in such a neighborhood.

The streets are inexpressibly dirty, the

number of schools inadequate, factory legislation unenforced, the street-lighting bad, the paving miserable and altogether lacking in the alleys and smaller streets, and the horse stables defy all laws of sanitation.

Hundreds of houses are unconnected with the street sewer. The older and richer inhabitants seem anxious to move away as rapidly as they can afford it. They make room for the newly arrived immigrants who are densely ignorant of civic duties.

Addams and the volunteers at Hull House put pressure on city officials to improve garbage collection and other services vital to life in any neighborhood. She also took time to observe the lives around her.

To one who has lived for years in a crowded quarter where men, women and children constantly jostle each other and press upon every inch of space in shop, tenement and street, nothing is more impressive than the strength, the continuity, the varied and powerful manifestations of family affection.

Every tenement house contains women who for years spend their hurried days in preparing food and clothing and pass their sleepless nights in tending and nursing their needy children. Every shop is crowded with workingmen who year after year spend all of their wages upon the nurture and education of their children, reserving for themselves but the shabbiest clothing and a crowded place at the family table.

The wonderful devotion to the child seems at times, in the midst of our stupid social and industrial arrangements, all that keeps society human. This devotion to the child is the inevitable conclusion of the devotion of man to woman.

It is, or course, this tremendous force which makes possible the family, that bond which holds society together and blends the

experience of generations into a continuous story.

Addams argued that city governments would have to take a larger, more active role to meet the social needs of the citizens. Cities, she said, should promote recreation, cultural life, and better schools. She hoped that the energy and idealism of young people would light the way to a brighter future for America's cities.



Nothing is more certain than that each generation longs for a reassurance as to the value and charm of life, and is secretly afraid lest it lose its sense of the youth of the earth.

One generation after another has depended upon its young to equip it with gaiety and enthusiasm, to persuade it that living is a pleasure.

The spontaneous joy, the clamor for pleasure, the desire of the young people to appear finer and better and altogether more lovely than they really are, the idealization not only of each other but of the whole earth which they regard but as a theater for their noble exploits, the unworldly ambitions, the romantic hopes – What might they not do to make our sordid [ugly] cities more beautiful and more companionable?

Questions: *What social problems did Jane Addams see in Chicago in the 1890s? What impressed her about the families she met around Hull House? Why did she think young people could be a key part of the effort to improve cities?*

Permission to Copy for Classroom Use

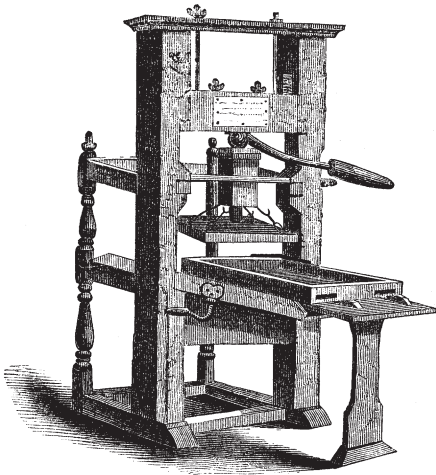
Teachers and students are welcome to download this **History in Their Own Words** selection, free of charge, for noncommercial, educational use. Teachers are welcome to make photocopies of these reading selection pages as needed for students in their own classes. We ask that:

- * You make no changes or additions of any kind to the pages.
- * You leave the copyright information visible on all pages and copies.

You may not post these materials in any form on any other web site or server, or copy their content for use in any other form or publication, whether print or electronic, without written permission from Fasttrack Teaching Materials.

Most of these primary source readings are condensed from the original texts to make them more easily accessible to students. They were chosen for the ideas, values, and insights they offer to young people seeking to understand America's past, the world they live in, and themselves. The selections use the original author's words except where condensation or modern usage requires very slight editing.

PDF files - downloading and printing tips



Internet browsers can print an open PDF file page directly, but the layout and spacing are not always exactly correct.

For best results, right click on a PDF file link that you want. Choose "Save Link As" or "Save Target As" to download the PDF file to your desktop or to a folder. Double click on that downloaded file, so it will open in the regular PDF reader that is on your computer.

Print it "actual size" (100%) from the PDF reader and it should look exactly right!

**For copyright questions, please contact Fasttrack Teaching Materials at
ftm.contact@verizon.net**