

**WELCOME!**

**THIS FILE CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL:**

Deegan, Mary Jo. 2007. "Jane Addams." Pp. 3-8 in *Fifty Key Sociologists: The Formative Theorists*, edited by John Scott. London: Routledge.



This digital file is furnished solely for private scholarly research under "fair use" provisions of copyright law. This file may not be copied or posted on or transmitted via the Internet or other media without the permission, as applicable, of the author(s), the publisher(s), and/or the creator of the file. This file was created by Mary Jo Deegan.

## JANE ADDAMS

Feminist pragmatist, social settlement leader and Nobel Laureate, Jane Addams is a recognized world leader with a sweeping mind, personal charisma and an innovative intellectual legacy. She is one of the most important female sociologists who has ever lived. She was a leader for dozens of women in sociology from 1890 until her death in 1935, although after 1920 most of these women were forced out of sociology and into fields such as social work, home economics, applied psychology, pedagogy and administration in higher education.

Jane Addams was born on 6 September 1860 in the small Mid-western town of Cedarville, Illinois. She was profoundly influenced by her father John Addams, a Hicksite Quaker, state senator and mill owner, but she did not know her mother Sarah Weber, who died when Addams was two years old. In 1877 Addams entered Rockford Female Seminary, one of the pioneering colleges for women. After graduating in 1881, she entered an extended period of unhappiness and depression. In August, her father died and his absence left her confused and despairing. She entered the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia in the autumn, but she soon returned to Illinois. Ill and surrounded by family problems, Addams drifted for a year. Finally taking some action, she travelled to Europe in 1883 but she remained frustrated for the next two years until her return to Europe. Accompanied by her college friend Ellen Gates Starr, Addams found a direction for her life after visiting the social settlement Toynbee Hall in London's East End. This group served the exploited working classes and supported artisans who harmonized their interests in art, labor and the community. Toynbee Hall provided a model for Addams and Starr to co-found their social settlement, Hull-House, in Chicago in 1889. Hull-House became the institutional anchor for women's gender-segregated work in sociology and a link with the most important male sociological centre during this era, the University of Chicago.

The 1890s were lively, controversial years at Hull-House, where anarchists, Marxists, socialists, unionists, and leading social theorists congregated. John Dewey, **George Herbert Mead**, and W. I. Thomas, among others, were frequent visitors, lecturers and close friends of Addams. Chicago pragmatism was born through their collegial contacts and intellectual exchanges. A groundbreaking sociological text, *Hull-House Maps and Papers* was published by Hull-House residents in 1895, predating and establishing the urban interests of the early Chicago male sociologists.

Author of eleven books and hundreds of articles, Addams continued her educational efforts through lectures across the country. She led social reform organizations, campaigned for the Progressive Party, and helped to found numerous government agencies. She practised and advocated 'radical democracy', holding that equality must extend beyond citizenship rights and pervade all aspects of economic and social life. This involved a commitment to African Americans and cultural pluralism. She sought not only answers to problems, but answers in the best interests of all, including the poor and disenfranchised.

Her thought and practice is called 'feminist pragmatism': an American theory uniting liberal values and a belief in a rational public with a cooperative, nurturing, and liberating model of the self, the other and the community. Education and democracy are significant mechanisms for organizing and improving society. Feminist pragmatists study 'social behaviour' and believe each person is born with rudimentary and flexible instincts or 'impulses'. Infants primarily learn by observing, imitating and responding to the 'gestures' of others, particularly their parents. They can abstract the meaning of gestures, particularly vocal gestures, and generalize about 'the other, the group, the community, and institutions'. This 'process' allows the individual to develop a 'mind, intelligence, a self, and the ability to take the role of the other'. The self learns organized 'attitudes' of 'the community' towards 'social situations'. People sharing the same neighbourhood and community develop 'shared experience (which is the greatest of human goods)'. The self emerges from others and is not in conflict with others unless it is taught to be in conflict. 'Education' is a major way to learn about one's community, participate in group decisions and become a 'citizen'.

Women who obey the rules governing the home and family follow the 'family claim'. When they work for others outside the home, they follow the 'social claim'. Conflicts between these claims can result in 'social disorganization', where competing values and attitudes on the same situation are legitimated simultaneously. This creates an instability in society, whereby 'women become a resource for social change'. Women in public life can utilize their cooperative worldview to implement the goals of democracy. The female world is based on the unity of the female self, the home, the family and face-to-face interactions with neighbours in a community. Women can take this pattern and extend it to nurturing others, as 'bread givers engaged in bread labor'. Their model for the home and family when extended to the larger social situation is called 'civic housekeeping'.

Women can be leaders in a new 'social consciousness', indicated in 'newer ideals of peace'. A sign of this awakening consciousness is 'the integration of the objective with the subjective'. This is organized through 'social movements in labor, social science, and women'. The modern city is a new location for these social changes.

Women learn 'folk wisdom' and share a culture based on female myths such as the Corn Mother. This unity crosses racial/ethnic lines while it supports and respects differences including variation by class, age, race, religion, education, sexual preference and disability. Democracy emerges from different groups and represents these distinct perspectives, histories, communities and characteristic structures of the self. Social change must articulate and respond to these various groups' commonalities and differences. 'Old women' also learn and pass on legends, cherish the good in others, develop 'woman's Memory' and engage in 'perfecting the past'. Because women are not full members of the male world, they are in an ideal situation to 'challenge war, disturb conventions, integrate industry, react to life, and transform the past'. 'Women's obligation' is to help create and distribute the world's food supply. The modern woman's family claim is built on a 'consumer role' that should criticize and change industry.

Reuniting the woman and society through economic productivity empowers the woman to make better choices in the home and the marketplace. 'New perspectives on women' can develop through the use of rational facts; alternative attitudes; new social situations; the new social sciences, especially sociology; and changed economics. This can occur through the development of 'working hypotheses' that enter a social situation and change it, thereby generating new working hypotheses. This process is called 'social reconstruction'. Women's clubwork is another source for social change and education.

Areas of concentration within feminist pragmatism form separate literatures, including the study of: (1) the city, (2) crime, (3) the use of qualitative and quantitative methodology, (4) the life cycle, (5) social class and labour relations, (6) the process of making and enjoying art and aesthetics, (7) play, (8) education, (9) social movements, (10) ethics, (11) the development of an international consciousness and political apparatus, (12) immigration, (13) African American life and racial discrimination, and (14) feminine values and the natural environment. Each area often involved dozens of scholars and activists, with Addams as a central figure uniting these disparate interests and activities.

As a pacifist prior to the First World War, Addams was lauded as a 'good woman'. With the building of patriotic feeling from 1914 until

America's entry into the war in 1917, she increasingly became the target of animosity and personal attack. By 1917 she was socially and publicly ostracized, moving from saint to villain. Booed off speaking platforms, abandoned by her friends, colleagues and, most notably here, other sociologists, Addams was a social pariah. This was an agonizing time for Addams. Committed to her values, based on 'female' ideals, she maintained her pacifist position. The culmination of her politically untouchable status occurred in 1919, when she was targeted by the US government as the most dangerous person in America. At this point, her major role as a sociologist diminished and, until recently, she was ostracized by succeeding generations of sociologists.

In 1920, women were granted the franchise, and to Addams this was a major victory. Contrary to her expectation of a powerful women's vote, however, this decade led to an eclipse in the former power of women activists, including Addams. Progressive leadership was squelched and the liberal vision of a changing, optimistic and scientifically rational society was less and less acceptable. Sociologists increasingly applied an androcentric perspective to their definition of the field.

Addams gradually resumed her public leadership during the 1920s, but the devastating impact of the Great Depression once again called for radical social analysis and social change. Addams again became a distinguished world leader. Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, she spoke for many of the values and policies adopted during the New Deal, especially in social security and other government programmes that altered American capitalism. Dying in 1935, she was mourned worldwide as a great leader and interpreter of American thought.

In addition to her contribution to Chicago pragmatism, Addams engaged with sociological work in Britain, including empiricism, social surveys, social settlements, Fabian socialism and the Arts and Crafts movement. She was interested in the work of Charles Ashbee, **Beatrice Webb**, **Charles Booth**, Patrick Geddes, John Ruskin, and Canon Barnett. Addams was also influenced by Russian sociologists, especially the pacifism and art of Leo Tolstoy and the analysis of human relationships to the land articulated by Piotr Kropotkin. Addams seriously considered the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, but her dedication to a cooperative rather than a conflict model, based on a triple foundation for human behaviour that included play and art as well as labour, made this approach unworkable for her.

There is a vast literature on Addams, most of it emphasizing her biography, social work and public role in American society. There is a serious lack of study of her intellectual apparatus: her theory of the arts, including the theatre, pageants, drama, literature, sculpture, pottery and the aesthetics of nature; her life-long commitment to political theory; and her vast influence on American race relations, especially those between whites, Mexican Americans and African Americans. This dearth of scholarship in these major areas of her work significantly limits our understanding of her ideas and accomplishments.

A large literature exists in several fields, especially in women's studies, that criticizes white, middle-class women, early social workers, reformers and philanthropists as conservative, exploitative and oppressive. Addams is often the symbolic leader of these various groups and sometimes emerges as a contemporary symbol of the villainy of benevolent ignorance or intentional evil. Thus she is sometimes mentioned superficially in texts where she is stereotyped as a racist, assimilationist, essentialist and atheoretical meddler.

This scholarship contrasts with the early studies of Addams as a sociologist before 1920, when she was highly integrated into the sociological literature, frequently spoke before the American Sociological Society and published in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Addams' stellar leadership in sociology was erased until the publication of my book (Deegan 1988) and a series of related articles on the sociology of Addams and the cohort of women she inspired. Rediscovering her role and influence in sociology has made her increasingly visible and understood within the profession.

Addams' intellectual legacy as a feminist pragmatist has been obscured and sometimes distorted. She articulated radical changes in American life and politics, altering the possibilities for human growth and action for the poor, the working class, immigrants, people of colour, youth, the aged and women. Addams was a central figure in applied sociology between 1892 and 1920 and led a large and powerful cohort of women whom she profoundly influenced. Contemporary scholars often document and either praise or deplore Addams' significant contributions to public life, but her intellectual stature is barely appreciated. Her legacy in sociology is particularly hidden within the mainstream literature in the discipline. Her profound influence on the course and development of sociology is only suggested in most sociological textbooks, books and articles. A growing number of scholars are analysing this great, alternative heritage and tradition in American sociology. They envision a new horizon for a more just and liberated society.

See also: Charles Booth, George Herbert Mead.

### ***Major works***

- Hull-House Maps and Papers* (as 'Residents of Hull-House'). New York: Crowell, 1895.
- Democracy and Social Ethics*. New York: Macmillan, 1902.
- Newer Ideals of Peace*. New York: Macmillan, 1907.
- The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*. New York: Macmillan, 1909.
- Twenty Years at Hull-House*. New York: Macmillan, 1910.
- A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil*. New York: Macmillan, 1912.
- The Women at the Hague* (with Emily Greene Balch and Alice Hamilton). New York: Macmillan, 1915.
- The Long Road of Woman's Memory*. New York: Macmillan, 1916.
- Peace and Bread in Time of War*. New York: Macmillan, 1922.
- The Child, the Clinic and the Court*, intro. by Jane Addams. New York: New Republic, 1927.
- The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House*. New York: Macmillan, 1930.

Addams also wrote a large number of articles in many different areas of specialization.

### ***Further reading***

- Mary Lynn McCree Bryan and Allen F. Davis. 1990. *One Hundred Years at Hull-House*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Allen F. Davis. 1973. *American Heroine*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mary Jo Deegan. 1988. *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1920*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- John C. Farrell. 1967. *Beloved Lady*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press.
- James Weber Linn. 1935. *Jane Addams*. New York: Appleton-Century Crofts.