

2Pager: Jane Addams' Hull House

Jane Addams was the daughter of one of Illinois' richest men. Instead of leading a life of leisure, however, she dedicated her life to aiding the urban poor. A friend of labor, a proponent of women's suffrage, a foe of city bosses, and an opponent of war, she struggled to make the ideal of civic equality embodied in the Declaration of Independence a reality. Instead of offering charity, she sought to assimilate the immigrant poor into American society and became a pioneer social worker.

Born in 1860, Addams was just two years old when her mother died. Suffering a severe curvature of her spine, she was coddled by her family. Her Quaker-born father, a banker, mill owner, and Republican politician, sent her to Europe twice and to college at Rockford Female Seminary. But like many other members of America's first generation of college-educated women, she felt deeply torn about what to do with her life. "A woman," she wrote, "was practically faced with an alternative of marriage or a career." She could enter teaching, or medicine, or missionary work, or else she could marry and devote her life to homemaking.

She enrolled at Philadelphia's Women's Medical College, but suffered a nervous collapse after her father's sudden death. For eight years she suffered excruciating back pain, nervous prostration, and serious depression. She turned to Philadelphia's leading physician, Dr. S. Wier Mitchell, for help. He prescribed rest cure as treatment, confining her to bed and forbidding all visitors and activities. As he told another patient: "Live as domestic a life as possible. Have but two hours of intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush, or pencil as long as you live."

Addams spent most of her 30s adrift, undergoing repeated rest cures. Then, suddenly she found her mission in life while on a trip to England. She was shocked by the squalor of London's East End slums. In response, she and a friend, Ellen Starr, decided to set up an institution to uplift America's urban poor.

In 1889, they moved into Hull House, a decaying mansion in one of Chicago's most destitute neighborhoods, and provided social services to the city's poor. Hull House offered classes that taught cooking, hygiene, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Hull House also provided child care and a kindergarten and build the first playground in Chicago. Each week 9,000 people, mostly immigrants from 28 different countries, came to the mansion. Her example helped inspire more than 400 other settlement houses around the country.

From Hull House, Addams tirelessly campaigned for an end to sweat shops and a ban on child labor. She convinced many professors at the University of Chicago to produce empirical, social scientific data. She advocated an eight-hour work day and legal protections for immigrants. Addams called for compulsory education, woman suffrage, and improved sanitation. She also sought to organize unions for female workers; to establish a state bureau to inspect factories; and to create the nation's first juvenile court. In effect, she helped create the career of the social worker.

Addams was a key architect of what we would come to call the welfare state. She tirelessly campaigned to end sweatshops and tenement housing, end corrupt boss rule, ban child labor, provide legal protections for immigrants, and establish juvenile courts.

Her memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, was a best-seller when it appeared in 1910. But in 1915, public opinion began to turn against her when she founded the Women's Peace Party, an international organization dedicated to waging "a women's war" against World War I. Elected president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1919, she opposed the peace treaty ending the war as vindictive. In 1931, four years before her death, she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

2Pager: The Progressive Era

Few periods in American history witnessed more ferment than the years between the founding of Hull House and American entry into World War I. This movement touched every aspect of American life. It transformed government into an active, interventionist entity at the national level, most notably under Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, but also at the state and local levels. For the first time Americans were prepared to use government, including the federal government, as an instrument of reform.

Progressive reformers secured a federal income tax based on the ability to pay; formulated inheritance taxes; devised a modern national banking system; and developed government regulatory commissions to oversee banking, insurance, railroads, gas, electricity, telephones, transportation, and manufacturing.

Education also became a self-conscious instrument of social change. The ideas of the educator and philosopher John Dewey influenced the reformers. Progressive educational reformers broadened school curricula to include teaching about health and community life; called for active learning that would engage students' minds and draw out their talents; applied new scientific discoveries about learning; and tailored teaching techniques to students' needs. Progressive educators promoted compulsory education laws, kindergartens, and high schools. They raised the literacy rate of African Americans from 43 percent to 77 percent.

During the Progressive Era, public health officers launched successful campaigns against hookworm, malaria, and pellagra, and reduced the incidence of tuberculosis, typhoid, and diphtheria. Pure milk campaigns also slashed rates of infant and child mortality.

Urban Progressives created public parks, libraries, hospitals, and museums. They also constructed new water and sewer systems and eliminated "red-light" districts, such as New Orleans' Storyville, in most major cities.

To bridge the gap between capital and labor, Progressives called for arbitration and mediation of labor disputes. Meanwhile, many Progressive businessmen called for a new-style "welfare capitalism" that provided workers with higher wages and pensions.

The Progressive era was one of the most creative in the realm of culture and the arts. In the hands of Alfred Stieglitz, photography became an art form for the first time. Architects like Frank Lloyd Wright helped create modern architecture. The first exhibition of modern art, the Armory Show in New York in 1913, was held in the United States.

A new vocabulary characterized this era. Americans would speak about a "public interest" that was opposed by "special interests." They would also speak about "efficiency" and "expertise" in government and "morality" in foreign affairs. For the first time, Americans spoke of "social workers," "muckrakers," "trustbusters," "feminists," "social scientists," and "conservation."

To increase popular control over government, Progressive reformers lobbied successfully for direct primaries; the elimination of boss rule; the direct election of Senators; woman's suffrage; and in many state legislatures, adoption of the referendum, the initiative, and the recall. Reformers also saw adoption of the first restrictions on political lobbyists and the first regulations on campaign finances.

To modernize government finances, Progressives successfully instituted the income tax and established the Federal Reserve System to oversee the nation's economy. To regulate corporate behavior, Progressives enforced new anti-trust laws and established the country's first effective regulatory commissions. They also established licenses for such professionals as pharmacists, veterinarians, and undertakers. To improve social welfare, they lobbied for workmen's compensation laws, minimum wage laws for women workers, and old-age and widow's pensions. To improve public health, Progressive reformers successfully lobbied for water standards, state and local departments of health, sanitary codes for schools, and laws prohibiting the sale of adulterated foods and drugs.

Women's organizations stood at the forefront of the social reforms and policy innovations during the Progressive era. Women activists were especially active in efforts to end child labor and to protest companies that had unsafe working conditions or produced unsafe products. For the most part, Progressives were urban and college-educated, including journalists, academics, teachers, doctors, and nurses, as well as many business people.

Uniting these various reform movements stemmed from a preoccupation with the elimination of corruption and waste and an emphasis on efficiency, science, and professional expertise as the best ways to solve social problems. A book published in 1913, Benjamin Parker De Witt's *The Progressive Movement*, argued that three tendencies underlay progressive reforms: the desire to eliminate political corruption, the impulse to make government more efficient and effective, and a belief that government should "relieve social and economic distress." Progressives wanted to apply the techniques of systematization, rationalization, and bureaucratic administrative control developed by business to problems posed by the city and industry.

For all its flaws and limitations, the Progressive era was instrumental in formulating the rationale for much of the welfare state, including Social Security, unemployment insurance, and aid to single parent families.