

Jane Addams and the Promotion of Peace and Social Justice Among the Masses

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INTRODUCTION

Jane Addams was the first American female to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. She was a co-recipient with Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University. Addams was a social reformer, founder of Hull House in Chicago, and the leader of the women's peace movement in the first half of the twentieth century. She authored a number of books, including her popular autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull House*. Addams is considered one of America's foremost female intellectual leaders and a pioneer in the practical application of progressive education ideas to everyday life.

BACKGROUND

Born on September 6, 1860 in Cedarville, Illinois, and later educated at Rockville Female Seminary in Illinois (renamed Rockville Women's College), Addams later established herself as one of the leading females in the areas of social reform, women's suffrage, and war opponent. A powerful writer and thinker in her own right, Addams' ideas were largely influenced by University of Chicago philosopher and educator John Dewey. In the 1890s, before he moved on to Columbia University, Dewey's pragmatism opened Addams' moralistic and religious training to the hard fact that conflict was a reality of everyday life, but one capable of transforming social disruption into progress and harmony. In the late 1890s and at the turn of the new century, Addams quickly understood the role that powerful financiers and political privilege played in maintaining class divisions. The bitter class warfare of the last decades of the nineteenth century, along with economic depressions, convinced Addams that benevolent change based on peace and justice education was possible to improve American society and the state of the world.

Addams' journey to social reform and education for world peace actually began in the 1880s during a trip to Europe. Accompanied by two former college classmates, one being Ellen Gates Starr, Addams traveled to London where she came in contact with Frederick Harrison, a follower of the famous Positivist, Auguste Comte. In June 1888, while touring London's East End she saw first-hand the immense poverty resulting from industrialism. Moved by this experience, she visited Toynbee Hall, a university settlement house founded by Canon and Mrs. Samuel A. Barnett in 1884 for the purpose of redressing the horrible consequences of industrial urbanization. At Toynbee, she witnessed students from Oxford and Cambridge universities teaching groups of workers and learning the values of working-class culture. It was here that she began to develop her own view that "uncontrolled industrial capitalism was the primary cause of domestic and international violence" (Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace*, 27-28).

HULL HOUSE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Returning to America, Addams shared her vision with Starr regarding prospects for establishing their own settlement house in one of Chicago's poorer neighborhoods. Coming upon the dilapidated Hull Mansion on Polk and Halstead Streets, the two reformers moved in during September 1889. The decaying mansion was located in the center of the Nineteenth Ward, one heavily populated with newly-arrived Greek, Italian, Russian, and German immigrants. Brimming with reform idealism, Addams and Gates insisted that social justice is an extension of peace. They sought to connect their experiment with the well-educated, financially independent and expose them to the rough conditions of overcrowded immigrant neighborhoods. The immigrant occupants of Hull House attempted to improve themselves through the art of sacrifice and society

at large by learning about the slums in urban society and putting their education to good use. Unlike the church missions, Hull House was not intended to dispense charity. It was created to generate opportunities for self-help. Built on Dewey's educational philosophy of instrumentalism, Hull House became the social and educational life support center of the neighborhood.

In the early years of the Progressive Era, Hull House's success became legendary. Addams' personal ability to attract a number of creative intelligent men and women to the cause paid dividends. Individuals such as a peace reformer Alice Hamilton, Julia Lathrop, Florence Kelley, Edith and Grace Abbott, Gerard Swope, Robert Morse Lovett, Francis Hackett, William L. Cheney, Harriet Monroe, Lyman Gage, and Henry Demarest Lloyd flocked to Hull House to assist in teaching the immigrant population about adjustment and improvement in American society. It was also a two-way street, as Addams was most effective in convincing the legion of college-educated, upper class reformers that cultured individuals could learn as much from the immigrant neighborhood experiences as the recipients of their knowledge and generosity.

PEACE ACTIVITIES

While Hull House would remain her most lasting educational contribution to social change, her activities on behalf of world peace also proved influential. An opponent of war and disciple of Tolstoy, Addams had previously joined the American Anti-Imperialist League during the Spanish-American War of 1898. Having read Tolstoy's pacifist tract *My Religion*, she was "convinced that if the new social order [peace and justice] ever came, it would come by gathering to itself all the pathetic human endeavor which had indicated the forward direction" (Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, 17-18). A member of the League's Chicago branch, Addams warned schoolteachers about the way patriotism was now being employed to elevate the virtues of militarism through songs and flag salutes rather than the more noble civic responsibility of community service. In 1915, she helped found the Women's Peace Party and served as its elected chairperson. From April to June 1915, Addams presided at the International Congress of Women held at The Hague, Netherlands. She was elected president of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace. Prior to U.S. military intervention in 1917, Addams traveled throughout Europe with Aletta Jacobs and Rosa Genoni, proposing mediation plans at the capitals of the belligerent nations. After the war, the group reconvened in Zurich and Vienna, establishing the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. The Women's Peace Party became the U.S. section and Addams was elected the League's first president. She held that office until 1927, after which she served as honorary president until her death in 1935.

During the war, Addams lectured on the preservation and conservation of food and its increased distribution to war victims. Her concern for life was how she defined herself as teacher. In 1916, she published what she considered her best work, *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*. In discussing the female psyche, Addams argued that memory, as well as intuition, are special female powers AS IN, MEN DON'T HAVE THEM?. The work is largely an analysis of the social value of women who chose careers that were not considered normal and who decided to live unconventionally. Women opposed to war were excellent examples of this feminist wisdom to challenge the dictates of a male society. They possessed the insight "to nurture and teach children the true meaning of love and how to reconcile differences without resorting to violence" (*The Long Road*, 57-59). This view was largely a continuation of earlier arguments made while at The Hague in 1915. "Quite as an artist in an artillery corps commanded to fire upon a beautiful building like the *duomo* at Florence would be deterred by a compunction unknown to the man who had never given himself to creating beauty and did not know the cost of it," she analogized, "so women, who have brought men into the world and nurtured them until they reach the age for fighting, must experience a peculiar revulsion when they see them destroyed" (Addams, et al., *Women at the Hague*, 61).

In the postwar years, Addams was America's leading female peace advocate. During the Red Scare of 1919, patriotic groups unfairly called her "the most dangerous woman in America." As an educator and reformer, she opposed military preparedness and the recently-established Reserve Officers Training Corps program for colleges and schools. She also promoted protection of civil liberties, fair treatment for Conscientious Objectors, support for disarmament treaties, and, on behalf of the major peace groups in the United States, led the call for the mediation of international disputes. Despite intermittent attacks by patriotic groups, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Legion who continued questioning her wartime loyalty, Addams remained firm in her commitment to peace as justice.

PEACE EDUCATION VIEWS

If Addams' activities bear ample testimony to her beliefs, her actual writings serve as a valuable passageway to her views on peace education. The entire crux of her thought can be summed up in this fashion: educating the public about social and economic justice is the only way to achieve global harmony. As a critic of the unchecked excesses of industrial capitalism and war, Addams insisted that "under an enlightened industrialism peace would no longer be an absence of war, but the unfolding of world-wide processes making for the nurture of human life" (*Newer Ideals of Peace*, 3-4). Her views were ably articulated before World War I in an important work entitled, *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907). It represented her most important prewar peace education tract. In this work, Addams rejected "idealistic" pacifism and argued that only a "dynamic" version was natural or rational for the modern world. She similarly rejected, "a priori, artificial, idealistic, and deterministic accounts of human nature as static," and she demanded that the personality be regarded as "incalculable." Her educational reform program changed from relief to "nurture" and to an emphasis on "life and its possibilities." She called for a "genuine evolutionary democracy" that would expand to meet the constant growth of human needs and relationships. She contrasted social orders founded upon "law enforced by authority" with social orders founded upon "liberty of individual action and complexity of group development," and she unequivocally stated her preference for the latter (*Newer Ideals of Peace*, 60-67, 86, 119, 124, and 213).

While *Newer Ideals* was primarily a comparative analysis of the lives of urban working-class men and women of different nationalities and her optimism at the prospects for an emerging internationalism replacing old nationalist alignments, Addams' peace education had been evolving prior to the book's publication. Her first publication, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), became a clarion call to all progressive educators linking peace with social justice. Social ethics for her was awareness on the part of business leaders and politicians for meeting the social and economic needs of the lower classes in modern industrial society. It meant a redistribution of the profits for the general welfare which in turn would open the doors to better international relations. Using Hull House as an example, Addams encouraged educators to foster a collective sense of social morality. "In this effort toward a higher morality in our social relations," she stated, "we must demand that the individual...lose the sense of personal achievement, and...realize his activity in connection with the activity of the many" (Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 275). It was imperative that schools develop programs promoting this point of view.

A couple of years after *Newer Ideals* appeared her highly acclaimed autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, was published in 1910 (updated and republished in 1930 as *The Second Twenty Years at Hull House*). In this work, Addams encouraged educational reformers to examine their own efforts to eliminate barriers between classes that were caused by industrialism, and how best to promote harmony among all nationalities and races. Her notion of social ethics reverberated to the international sphere as well. It was her constant belief that all national leaders have a moral obligation to address economic and territorial disputes leading to war. She

again reminded teachers that wars inevitably lead to adverse reactions at home under the false pretense of patriotic allegiance.

The encapsulation of Addams' peace education views were best summarized in the 1922 publication of her book *Peace and Bread in Time of War*. Because of women's historic role in nurturing, protecting, and conserving human life, Addams' made it her life's work to extend these traditional values to the international sphere. What was so crucial was that at the lower grades schoolchildren were taught by a preponderance of female teachers. It was incumbent upon them to impress upon young minds the importance of preserving life by seeking peaceful solutions to international disputes. More importantly, her views became the basis for modern female peace activism. Addams saw the relationship between women's rights and peace issues and was able to make the connection between institutional violence, militarism, and the social and economic exploitation of women. She was responsible for discarding the old Victorian notion that women were simply the guardians of moral standards in society and sought nothing more. The educational agenda she mapped out in *Peace and Bread* called for full equality for all citizens and was directly linked to a warless world.

Peace and Bread represented Addams' clearest definition of what pacifism meant to educators: teaching toleration and accepting nonviolence as the proper means to achieve peace and justice. Although this work was a compilation of the speeches she presented on behalf of the United States Food Administration during the war the caveats it contains about teaching peace remain important. As an educator and reformer, she perceived "Peace as a social dynamic based on individual acts of common decency rather than cold, detached stipulated agreements among national states" (Addams, *Peace and Bread in Time of War*, 33-36). For Addams, war was unnatural, anti-progressive, and immoral. It precluded spontaneity; it was a throwback to an archaic stage of social history; and "it was fought to maintain the balance of power, a concept that glorified stasis and left no room for innovation" (Quoted in Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine*, 143-145).

CONCLUSION

An educator and reformer Jane Addams was a product of the Progressive Era in American history. This was a period when the forces of modernization, characterized by industrialization, immigration, and urbanization, presented untold challenges and calls for social and economic change. She tied herself to the reform movement of her times and the increasing professional role women would undertake in the fields of education, social work, and world peace. Her peace education views directly challenged the elitist, organized movement for international cooperation. What separated her views from the elite-minded peace advocates was the emphasis she placed on domestic change. For world peace to become a reality, it was necessary to address the social ills at home that were brought about by the unchecked needs of industrial capitalism. The way to call attention to this problem was through educational awareness. A speaker, writer, organizer, and respected leader on behalf of women's rights and international peace, Addams popularized her own reform ideas and generated an awareness for change in urban-industrial American and on the world stage. When she died in Chicago on May 21, 1935, she was a widely respected national and international figure. During her adult career, she unswervingly devoted herself to humanitarian causes and never deviated from her duty to remind educators that with peace comes social improvement. That is why she earned the title, "America's Beloved Lady."

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