

The New Urban Environment

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JANE ADDAMS, *Twenty Years at Hull House*
1900

Jane Addams (1860–1935) founded Hull House as one of the first settlement houses in the United States. Dedicated to helping Chicago's immigrants on the city's south side, Hull House became the model for the profession of social work. This excerpt is from Addams's popular account of her first twenty years working with Chicago's immigrant communities.

The teacher in a Settlement is constantly put upon his mettle to discover methods of instruction which shall make knowledge quickly available to his pupils, and I should like here to pay my tribute of admiration to the dean of our educational department, Miss Landsberg, and to the many men and women who every winter come regularly to Hull-House, putting untiring energy into the endless task of teaching the newly arrived immigrant the first use of a language of which he has such desperate need. Even a meager knowledge of English may mean an opportunity to work in a factory *versus* nonemployment, or it may mean a question of life or death when a sharp command must be understood in order to avoid the danger of a descending crane.

In response to a demand for an education which should be immediately available, classes have been established and grown apace in cooking, dressmaking, and millinery. A girl who attends them will often say that she "expects to marry a workingman next spring," and because she has worked in a factory so long she knows "little about a house." Sometimes classes are composed of young matrons of like factory experiences. I recall one of them whose husband had become so desperate after two years of her unskilled cooking that he had threatened to desert her and go where he could get "decent food," as she confided to me in a tearful interview, when she followed my advice to take the Hull-House courses in cooking, and at the end of six months reported a united and happy home.

Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press, 1911), 437–438.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

Identify: Describe Addams's goals for Hull House.

Analyze: How did Hull House represent a change in attitudes toward female workers in America? In what ways did it uphold traditional gender roles?