

# Twenty years at hull house and up from slavery argumentative essay samples

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Both Jane Addams and Booker T. Washington are incredibly important figures in the realm of providing positive social change in America, offering individual and institution solutions to the problems of economic destitution and social discrimination, respectively. Addams, with her Hull House, sought to provide a center for women and immigrants to have a place to stay, learn languages and trade, and have a place to stay when no one else would have them. Washington, with his Tuskegee Institute, was much more focused on vocational training and providing a newly freed black population with a better chance to enter proper American life during the Reconstruction. While the specific aims and purposes of their respective institutions were somewhat different, both figures sought to rectify the social and economic injustices against the poor, minorities, women and immigrants who could not overcome these systemic obstacles on their own.

Booker T. Washington, in his work during the Reconstruction, felt the need to determine a solution to the " Negro problem." After the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, America was beset with a huge influx of freedmen who required a sense of direction and purpose; without marketable skills or experience in the free world, these individuals had a tremendously difficult time finding ways to survive and succeed. Booker T. Washington, with his Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, sought to solve this problem by offering vocational skills to these freedmen, focusing more on job training than academic scholarship. Washington's venture was incredibly risky: " I knew that, in a large degree, we were trying an experiment--that of testing whether or not it was possible for Negroes to build up and control the affairs of a large education institution. I knew that if we failed it would injure the

whole race" (Washington 70). To that end, the Tuskegee Institute had a decidedly specific political aim: to prove to the American people that blacks deserved their newfound freedom and to gain legitimacy for them in a nation that was uncertain about what to do with them now that they were free. At the Institute itself, Washington's philosophy of independence, freedom and personal responsibility was in full force in the school's curriculum and training. Tuskegee trained teachers in order to teach classes at Tuskegee, but also made sure that his students learned practical skills, such as farming or carpentry, which were typically found in the rural South, where the school was based. Washington acknowledged the sheer practicality of learning these trades in order to simply get a job, but he also recognized the dignity and beauty in a hard days' work: " Nothing ever comes to me, that is worth having, except as the result of hard work" (Washington 91). Work study programs were created for the students in the school to contribute to the school's maintenance itself, including the buildings, most of which were constructed by the students. Student expenses were paid for through work in construction, domestics and farming for the campus. Many students grew crops and raised livestock, crafted and sold goods, and did other work in order to maintain a wage or pay for their tuition at the school. In this way, Tuskegee was truly a worker's college - Washington chose to help blacks overcome the systemic problems of social and economic poverty by showing his students how to make a living for themselves.

Central to this philosophy of self-sufficiency at Tuskegee was Washington's assertion that individuals needed to be able to find economic independence on their own: " I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by

the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed" (Washington 19). To that end, Washington sought to use Tuskegee as a place in which freed blacks were taught the resources they needed to make their own way in life and give them responsibility: " Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him" (Washington 83). This prioritizing of vocational studies and trade work was meant to instill in his students a sense of accomplishment and motivation for working. This emphasis on practicality and self-reliance is part and parcel of Washington's philosophy for making social advances in the lives of newly freed African Americans.

While Washington's goal was to argue for independent work and a somewhat libertarian view of freedom and the ability to make it on one's own, he also believed this cultivated a better overall society: " In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" (Washington 107). In offering ways to actualize blacks into doing practical, demonstrable work on their own, Washington hoped to allow his students to contribute to the greater collective destiny of the nation at large: " No man who continues to add something to the material, intellectual, and moral well-being of the place in which he lives is long left without proper reward" (Washington 137). This, of course, was explicitly tied to the issue of African-Americans, who needed to prove to the rest of the nation that it was not a mistake to set them free, and that the black community will work to enrich the country as a reward for granting them their freedom:

“ I think that the whole future of my race hinges on the question as to whether or not it can make itself of such indispensable value that the people in the town and the state where we reside will feel that our presence is necessary to the happiness and well-being of the community” (Washington 137).

Jane Addams, on the other hand, had much different ideas about her institution when she started Hull House in 1889, along with her partner Ellen Gates Starr. The first settlement house in the United States, Adams and Starr transformed an old, run-down mansion in the Near West Side of Chicago into a halfway house for poor immigrants to be fed, educated, sheltered and cared for. Residents of the house could enjoy cultural events and social services, and Hull House itself provided a means by which people hoping to make a new life in the New World could find a way to support themselves. The neighborhood in which Hull House resided became so enamored of Addams' work that it came to be known as the “ Hull House Neighborhood” (Addams 181). The Hull House itself became a bastion of learning, culture and community-building, providing the people of Chicago's Near West Side with the ability to come together, whether immigrant or native, and learn needed skills or research new discoveries.

Jane Addams was chiefly focused on the rights of women and immigrants, values which extended to her administration and running of Hull House. Hull House's aims and objectives were disparate and often surprisingly academic, with multiple uses as a research center, a place for study, and more. In addition to these scholarly pursuits, Hull House was also a practical center for developing the Hull House Neighborhood as a whole, researching issues

such as housing, utilities, truancy, midwifery and ailments such as typhoid and tuberculosis (Addams 194). Hull House was well known for its amenities, including offering night school for adults, art galleries, gymnasiums, music schools, bathhouse, and groups for theater and job hunting (Addams 282). The comprehensiveness by which Hull House went about its curriculum was a testament to Addams' desire to see everyone, rich or poor, benefit from a full and complete education: "The common stock of intellectual enjoyment should not be difficult of access because of the economic position of him who would approach it" (Addams 288). Unlike Washington's dedication to teaching African-Americans just enough to ply their trade into a living, Hull House essentially worked as a settlement house to fully house, keep and educate its students, while also contributing to the development of its community around them, regardless of social or economic class. Addams' chief hope with Hull House was that they "might extract from life's very misfortunes a power of cooperation which should be effective against them" (Addams 89). This macro-level thesis for Hull House sought not just to protect and house a certain population, but create betterment for the entire city, if not society as a whole.

While Washington's focus was chiefly on vocational work, Hull House, under Addams' administration, focused greatly on art and culture as well. Hull House's Art program was particularly significant and worked to allow students to take their time and work out what they wanted to do for a living, in addition to cultivating their personalities and character as best as possible. To Addams' estimation, art was essential to solving the social problem of the barriers between native-born American citizens and newly-

arrived immigrants, providing tools for a conversation about Chicago's diversity and the ability for self-discovery and interaction with others.

Addams held art in great esteem, believing that the secret to unlocking personal potential was through gaining the freedom to spend time on these pursuits:

“ I remember a happy busy mother who, complacent with the knowledge that her daughter daily devoted four hours to her music, looked up from her knitting to say, 'If I had had your opportunities when I was young, my dear, I should have been a very happy girl” (Addams 48).

Addams' emphasis on arts and creativity in Hull House evinced her desire to resolve the problem of the American youth population who did not have an outlet for the passions that lay within them: “ art, when shut away from the human interests and from the great mass of humanity, is self-destructive” (Addams 79). Through the facilities of Hull House, these young women were given this chance to develop their art, while also connecting innately to the neighborhood around them.

Ultimately, Jane Addams' goal with Hull House is not simply to provide greater opportunities for women and immigrants, but to help cultivate community development in the city of Chicago. Addams notes the vast economic and social inequalities that exist within individuals even in the same neighborhood, as neighbors “ are held apart by differences of race and language which the residents can more easily overcome” (Addams 83).

Addams said that Hull House is “ an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city” (Addams 83).

Citing the fast pace and aimlessness of city life, which was only recently being discovered in light of the growth of cities like Chicago in the Industrial Revolution, Addams realized that there must be a place for people to escape the demands of the city and form closer ties with their community, as well as take the time to foster new skills within themselves. This, then, would help to address the systemic and pernicious problems of social miscommunication between races, classes and nationalities, finding common ground in the pursuit of knowledge and creativity: “ A Settlement is above all a place for enthusiasms, a spot to which those who have a passion for the equalization of human joys and opportunities are early attracted” (Addams 120). Through these commonalities, the institution of the city could be further improved and its people more willing to work towards communal goals.

Comparing Addams’ approach to Washington’s, the two definitely worked from different premises and points of view regarding how they should help their respective disenfranchised populations. Addams, with her Hull House, found not only a way to arm immigrants for the workforce, but to house them and educate them in a comprehensive way. Given the emphasis on housing in her work, Addams and her staff had a much more hands-on influence on the lives of her charges. Addams’ Hull House model was much more utopian and community-based, in which everyone helped each other regardless of direct compensation through money, prestige or other direct rewards - her ultimate desire to actualize “ this dream that men shall cease to waste strength in competition and shall come to pool their powers of production” (Addams 94). Given this perspective, it is clear that Addams would take a dim view to Washington’s independently-minded, competitive



students.

Washington, meanwhile, sought merely to give African-Americans the ability to pull themselves up by their bootstraps; he recognized that the best way to improve conditions for black people who were newly freed was to get them into the workforce, so they could work out things for themselves. Washington believed the solution for his students was to stand out from the pack by being skilled and willing to compete; Addams eschewed competition by fostering community in the many creative and academic outlets of Hull House. In the philosophy of Addams, society would be bettered by everyone coming together in the 'common joys' of art, music, and theatre, all working together to solve collective problems; the blacks of the rural South did not have that luxury, and so Washington armed them for a competitive world by teaching them to be self-reliant.

In their operation of Hull House and the Tuskegee Institute, respectively, Jane Addams and Booker T. Washington are important figures in revolutionizing the system of education in America for their respective populations, though they did so in different ways. Washington, through the advocacy of vocational-only studies, sought to ensure the independence and self-reliance of the newly freed African-American who needed to prove his own worth in a world that would provide little help after being emancipated. Addams, on the other hand, offered a more comprehensive, aesthetic and scholarly view to education, providing the settlement house model as a means to overcome the racial and social inequalities found within the Hull House Neighborhood in Chicago. Washington's view was much more generalized to newly freed blacks in the American South, while Addams

sought to revolutionize the society around her through her dedication to arts, culture, medicine and language. In both of these approaches, Addams and Washington made concerted efforts to change the social and economic problems of both the individuals they taught and the institutions in which they resided.

## **Works Cited**

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull-House*. Dover Publications, 2008.

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