

# Jane addams found paper



As a progressive, Jane Addams committed herself as a social servant to the community in an attempt to fulfill the promise of democracy to everyone rather than a small elite group. Addams's dedication to communitarian purposes as opposed to individualist gains can be attributed to her upbringing and her remarkable respect for her father, John Huy Addams. Although John Addams was extremely wealthy, his neighbors appreciated and respected him because of the benefits he brought to their community, such as a reliable mill, a railroad, a bank, and an insurance company (5). Remembering the respect her father earned from their community, Jane Addams did not see her father " as an overbearing capitalist dictator from the Gilded Age but as a self-made steward from an era when leaders put the community's interest alongside their own" (5). Jane Addams's father did, in fact, influence her way of thinking, regarding the devotion to community service. She looked to her father for guidance and support (7) and after he died (the patriarch), Addams was left with a \$60, 000 inheritance, which she decided to use to establish the settlement house in Chicago, Hull-House (10). At the beginning of the chapter, the author raises questions that were prevalent a century ago and that are still important today. The one question I found most interesting is, " Can white, native-born, economically secure Americans ever really understand, much less help, those who are struggling to survive? " (1). Much of the prevalent political culture emphasized Aryan superiority, as well as the concern a changing society would suffer from massive immigration. Even authors, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, recognized the oppression she suffered from as a woman. However, she did not recognize the oppression others suffered in her embracing of anti-immigration as well as racist beliefs. Reactionary to the

<https://assignbuster.com/jane-addams-found-paper/>

massive immigration of this time, Charlotte Perkins Gilman also supported eugenics to improve the human race. Yet Addams did not argue immigrants were inferior to the Aryan people. In fact, three-quarters of her residents at Hull-House were first and second generation immigrants. Not only was Addams sympathetic to the poor, but she also was sympathetic to the plight of immigrants. I find Jane Addams's commitment to social change extraordinary. To answer the question stated previously, I would say, "Yes," because Jane Addams was not under any pressure or obligation to help the poor, especially at a time when the dominant belief was that a person living in poverty resulted from his or her own shortcomings and was no fault of the system. Rejecting social Darwinism, Addams believed that if "poverty was the result of the system, the system needed to be reformed. And if poverty was the result of the individual, the individual's family needed to be helped" (2). Even in regard to immigrants, Addams did not attempt to "Americanize" them but rather supported their distinct cultures and focused on ways to preserve these cultures (23). Because of her service to both the poor as well as to immigrants, I found Addams's work and devotion to a communitarian democracy as a positive to the advancement of society. Jane Addams success in establishing a settlement house stems from her own beliefs regarding the rich and the poor, as well as immigrants. Rather than illustrating a condescending attitude toward these individuals, Jane Addams asserted that the poor help the rich just as much as the rich help the poor. In fact, she often criticized herself and thought she was a "silly, snobbish girl who knew little of real life" (14), which I happen to think is a valid argument. After living in Hull-House, and experiencing "real life" experiences, Addams became disappointed and resentful toward her education because it did not

<https://assignbuster.com/jane-addams-found-paper/>

prepare her for the hardships that may result from life. Based on her own dissatisfaction, Addams asserted that, “ people who knew only about art and literature were as limited in their social effectiveness as people who knew only about daily survival” (21). In her view, a democratic society could only succeed if a balance was struck between education and real life experiences. Along with the balance of education and survival, Addams felt a democracy could only maintain its legitimacy if it required participation by all of its citizens. To me, I thought Jane Addams's crusade in establishing Hull-House was an attempt to fulfill the Democratic promise to a wider audience.