

Women and the fight for reform

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Women and the Fight for Reform Women in the late 19th century, except in the few western states where they could vote, were denied much of a role in the governing process. Nonetheless, educated the middle-class women saw themselves as a morally uplifting force and went on to be reformers. Jane Addams opened the social settlement of Hull House in 1889. It offered an array of services to help the poor deal with slum housing, disease, crowding, jobless, infant mortality, and environmental hazards. For women who held jobs, Hull House ran a day-care center and a boardinghouse. Addams was only one of many early reformers to take up social work. Jane Porter Barrett, an African American, founded the Locust Street Social Settlement in Hampton, Virginia, in 1890. Her settlement offered black women vital instruction in child care and in skills of a being a homemaker. Lillian Wald, a daughter of Jewish immigrants from New York City, began a visiting-nurse service to reach those too poor to pay for doctors and hospitals. Her Henry Street Settlement offered a host of vital services for immigrants and the poor. Wald suggested the formation of a Federal Children's Bureau. By the end of the 19th century, many women reformers focused on the need for state laws to restrict child labor. Young children from poor families had to work late hours in mines and mills and were exploited by plant managers. No state laws prevented the children from being overworked or abused. One of the first to challenge the exploitation of orphaned or dependent children was Sophie Loeb, a Jewish immigrant from Russia. Once her father was deceased, she watched the desperation of her mother as the family slipped into poverty. As a journalist, Loeb campaigned for widow's pensions when this was still a new idea. Helen Stuart Campbell, born in 1839 in New York, began her public

career as an author of children's books. Then she used novels to expose slim life's damaging effect on women. In 1859 she wrote a novel about two women who break from their dependence on men and chart new lives. Campbell also wrote how easy it was for women's lives to be ruined by poverty and despair. Some women went beyond advocating reform to promoting revolution. There are many other famous women who helped lead the fight to reform. Like Florence Kelley. In 1891 Kelley worked with Addams at Hull House and became an investigator for the Illinois Bureau of Labor, and then was appointed the U. S. Commissioner of Labor. In 1891 Kelley returned to New York City and worked with Wald's Henry Street Settlement and helped create the U. S. Children's Bureau. In 1921 secured passage of the Infant and Maternity Protection Act. More than anyone else, Ida B. Wells exposed lynchings as a crime against humanity. Her 40 years of unrelenting effort failed to stop the crime and did not produce a federal anti lynching law. However, lynchings decreased by 80 percent after her campaign began, and her documented evidence on the crime of lynching and her commitment to justice roused the world's conscience. By the time Wells died in 1931, other women and men had picked up her touch. Word Count: 570