

## 📖 Topic Page: [Addams, Jane, 1860–1935](#)

Definition: **Addams, Jane** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

US social reformer. In 1931, she became the first US woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, sharing the prize with Nicholas M. Butler. In 1889, she founded Hull House, Chicago, an early social settlement house. Addams pioneered labour, housing, health, and legal reforms, and campaigned for female suffrage and pacifism.



Image from: [Jane Addams of Hull-House, Chicago, Illinois, ca.... in Germany and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History](#)

Summary Article: **Addams, Jane**  
from *Encyclopedia of American Studies*

Jane Addams, social reformer, settlement house leader, and peace advocate, was born on September 6, 1860, in Cedarville, Illinois, a little town near the Wisconsin border. A member of the first generation of college women in the United States, she graduated from Rockford [Illinois] Female Seminary (later Rockford College) in 1881. She floundered for the next eight years while she tried to find something useful to do with her life. She resisted attempts to make her a teacher or a missionary, and, like more than fifty percent of the first generation of college women, she never married. Finally in 1889, together with Ellen Gates Starr, a college classmate, she founded Hull-House on the west side of Chicago.

Inspired by Toynbee Hall, which she had visited on one of her European trips, Hull-House quickly became the most famous social settlement in America and a center that promoted many of the most important social reforms of the Progressive Era. Jane Addams attracted talented and powerful men and women to the settlement including Florence Kelley, Julia Lathrop, and Alice Hamilton, but she remained the dominant leader at the settlement. She moved the settlement from a place for reading parties and art exhibits in the early years to a center that led the fight against child labor; for the Americanization of immigrants; for better housing, parks, and playgrounds; and for woman suffrage. Woman suffrage was never her primary concern, but rather it was part of her overall reform plan. She assumed that women, given the vote, would support reform causes. Unlike many suffrage leaders she argued for the vote for the most recent and poorest immigrant women who, she claimed, had a vital concern for municipal housekeeping in order to protect their families. She also tried to ease the burden of Americanization by helping immigrant women preserve their old ways and teach their children the skills and handicrafts of the old country.

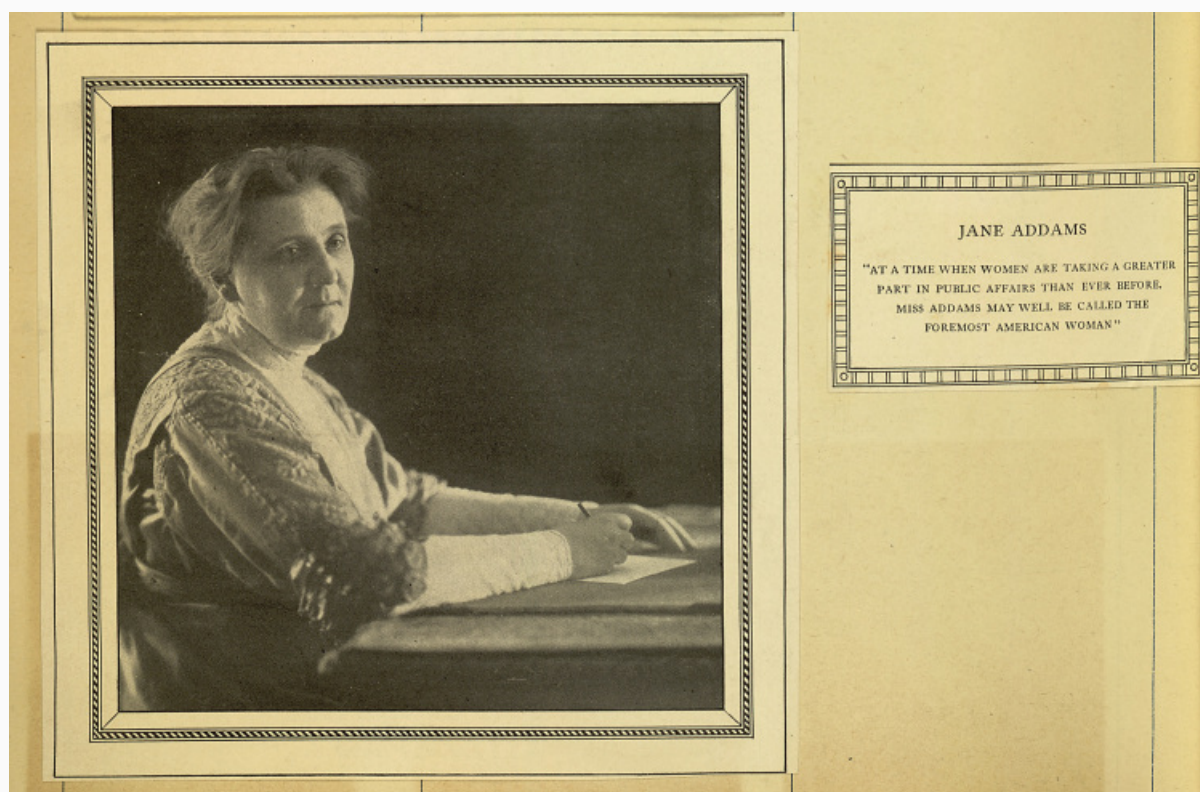
Addams was always a compromiser and conciliator. She worked for what she thought was reasonably possible and she often angered those who felt passionately about any issue. She did not entirely escape the prejudice and racism of her day. Hull-House, like most settlements, was segregated in the early years, although Addams was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and she helped to found a settlement in a black section of Chicago.

Addams reached the peak of her popularity and influence in the years before World War I. She lectured widely to women's groups, college students, and social workers in the United States and Europe. She wrote ten books and more than four hundred articles. She told human-interest stories and translated the social research done at the settlement, on housing or prostitution, into a form that reached a wide

audience. Her most famous book was her classic autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910). In 1909 she became the first woman elected president of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections and the first woman awarded an honorary degree by Yale. She was heaped with honors and called “The only Saint that America has produced.” Yet her saintly and gentle image hid Addams the tough-minded realist, the expert fund-raiser, and the talented business executive who competed with successful men in several fields.

Addams spent the last two decades of her life working for world peace. She became a pacifist not because her father was a Quaker but because she lived in a multicultural and multiethnic neighborhood and she learned that conflict and violence limited reform. Like William James she sought a moral equivalent for war. Addams became active in peace organizations after the Spanish-American War and wrote a series of books and articles, most notably *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907), in which she argued that women, who were naturally more peace loving than men, had a special responsibility to prevent war.

When war broke out in Europe in 1914 Addams helped to found the Women's Peace Party, and in the spring of 1915 she led the American delegation to the International Congress of Women meeting in The Hague, The Netherlands, where women from both the neutral and the belligerent nations tried to stop the war through mediation. When the United States entered the war in April 1917, Addams stood firm and refused to support the American position. It was perhaps the most difficult decision of her life. Her opposition to American participation in World War I cost her public acclaim. As late as 1926 she was called by one group “the most dangerous woman in America.” Awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1931, Addams regained some of her reputation before she died in Chicago on May 21, 1935.



*Jane Addams, photomechanical print and caption. Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911, Library of Congress.*



*Jane Addams sitting in an automobile. 1915. Chicago Daily News Inc., Chicago Daily News negatives collection, Chicago Historical Society, Library of Congress.*



*Hull House, Smith Hall, view north on South Halsted. 1910. Chicago Daily News Inc., Chicago Daily News negatives collection, Chicago Historical Society, Library of Congress.*

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