



## Jane Addams: Spirit in Action

*Louise W. Knight*

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**Jane Addams: Spirit in Action** Louise W. Knight

**In this landmark biography, Jane Addams becomes America's most admired and most hated woman—and wins the Nobel Peace Prize.**

Jane Addams (1860-1935) was a leading statesperson in an era when few imagined such possibilities for women. In this fresh interpretation, the first full biography of Addams in nearly forty years, Louise W. Knight shows Addams's boldness, creativity, and tenacity as she sought ways to put the ideals of democracy into action. Starting in Chicago as a co-founder of the nation's first settlement house, Hull House—a community center where people of all classes and ethnicities could gather—Addams became a grassroots organizer and a partner of trade unionists, women, immigrants, and African Americans seeking social justice. In time she emerged as a progressive political force; an advocate for women's suffrage; an advisor to presidents; a co-founder of civil rights organizations, including the NAACP; and a leader for international peace. Written as a fast-paced narrative, Jane Addams traces how one woman worked with others to make a difference in the world. 32 black-and-white illustrations

## Jane Addams: Spirit in Action Details

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# **From Reader Review Jane Addams: Spirit in Action for online ebook**

## **Susan Berchiolli says**

wonderful book, learned so much. Both scholarly and imminently readable, well-researched and captivating.

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## **Maze Branch Oak Park Public Library says**

Donna led this discussion on May 27, 2014.

Everyone found the story of Jane Addams and Hull House (as well as Jane's other activities) very interesting. However the book was not as well written as it could have been.

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## **Jim Cullison says**

An excellent biography of an exceptional American, "Spirit In Action" furnishes a swift yet insightful examination of the life and accomplishments of one of the greatest women in U.S. AND world history. You will be educated and inspired by what you find between the pages of this especially well-written volume. A particularly timely read.

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## **Conchetta says**

It took me a long time to finish this book even though I liked it very much. Jane Addams was so much more than the founder of Hull House. Besides supporting immigrant rights and workers rights she was a suffragist, and a pacifist. She was open to the ideas of others while maintaining her own core principles. When I read of the early twentieth century I am struck by how many issues are still with us a hundred years later. At least some things are different. There are child labor laws and voting and civil rights.

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## **etherealfire says**

Library Hardcover

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## **Marks54 says**

This book is a biography of Jane Addams. I had read an earlier book by Knight on Addams and liked it sufficiently to try this one. I was a bit disappointed by the book. Addams is an extremely interested person and this biography, while very flattering of Addams does not really present this person as the force of nature

that she must have been It starts with a full recognition of her lifetime accomplishments and then tells her story with an eye towards show how these pieces came together as a young upper middle class woman moved into a big house on Halsted Street and opened up her doors to all comers. She become world famous and her main books have remained continuously in print. One can still visit Hull House. She barely earned a BA from Rockford College and yet was a founding contributor to American pragmatism - John Dewey was a colleague, even though she never held a university position. She was called "the most dangerous woman in America" because of her pacifism (although it is not clear who coined that phrase) and was one of the first Americans to win a Nobel Peace Prize, along with Nicholas Murray Butler - the developer of the modern Columbia University. She took the measure of multiple US Presidents and held her ground at great personal risk and at a time when most of her acquaintances did not hold their ground. She did all of this before the advent of modern media and did so as an older single woman who was neither beautiful nor glamorous.

..... doesn't that make you wonder what was going on with this amazing person?

This book fills in facts that I did not know and ties together the varied facets of Addams's life in terms of the various roles she assumed as she grew in fame and wisdom. After finishing it, however, I still don't feel that I know much about Jane Addams and why she did such wonderful work. I guess I will need to keep working through her books.

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## **Andy Miller says**

Jane Addams is one of the most interesting and impressive women in American history. This biography spends much time on her early life; she grew up in a close and loving family(though she lost her mother at an early age)but yet, she was denied her dream of going east to college and perhaps medical school because of her father and her times. She did go to all an women's college where she flourished.

The biography is filled with great tidbits, my favorite is that while in college she was in a speech contest and one of her rivals was William Jennings Bryan!

Shortly after that, Addams founded Hull House, one of the original settlement houses. She ended up spending her significant inheritance in funding the House. Adams lived in the house where there were classes, programs and efforts to improve the lives of those living in poverty. One thing that came through in this biography is that Addams truly loved people, her life was absent the patronizing attitude of many reformers. One lament of Addams was that people restricted themselves to their own class and people of their own political thought, one reason she chose to locate Hull House in the middle of a lower income neighborhood.

The book complements Addams' balance between helping people on an individual level with acting at a national level to enact social and legal reforms that would help many. The book describes her political activism which helped set the stage for the Progressive era and which later helped lead. Addams lived in complicated times with complicated issues, some of the more interesting chapters dealt with tensions between sometimes complimentary and sometimes competing issues such as women's suffrage, racial suffrage, economic reform

In 1912 Theodore Roosevelt courted her political support in his campaign for President on the Progressive ticket. She agreed, was chosen to speak at the convention(one of the first women to do so) but Addams was

dismayed when she learned that Theodore Roosevelt cut a deal with Progressives from the south to exclude African Americans from the convention. There's a great chapter on her internal conflict on this issue as well as the political conflict at the convention, among Progressives she was relatively unique as being just as committed to racial equality as to other progressive issues.

The biography follows Addams' shift to focusing on her pacifist beliefs. At the time Addams was widely popular but her speeches and articles opposing World War I cost her much popularity. The book describes the personal hurt she suffered and the hurt that her causes suffered. It was yet another insight into her nuanced life.

Addams' lifestyle and sexuality are also addressed. She never married and her closest partners and companions were women. Knight concludes that no one can answer whether Addams was gay, but does an interesting connection of Addams' lament over her perception that young Americans were too preoccupied with sexual fulfillment at the expense of moral leadership with Addams comments about sex that could arguably apply to her life. This includes her admiration of Ghandi (she tried to meet at one time) and her identification with his lifestyle of avoiding sex.

This was a great book, my only complaint is that the biography does not meet the standard of its subject. After the biography finishes with her early life, it seems to become devoid of Addams the person. It becomes more of a political analysis which is too bad because much of Addams' strength and inspiration was her personality and life and friendships. Events such as her nephew (who was very close to Addams) disagreeing with her opposition to World War I and then serving and ultimately being killed are addressed but not in the personal way that the book began and in the way that Addams' life deserved.

Given that, this is a good book about a great person

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## Wealththeow says

A masterful biography of Jane Addams, a reformer who worked from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. Addams was raised by rich and cultured parents, but she yearned to minister to the poor. After her father blocked her admission to Smith (the first college in the US to offer women a bachelor's degree) and she found medical school bad for her health, she resolved to work in a settlement house instead. From the English example, a settlement house was meant to be an oasis of art and learning in a low income area. Addams poured her personal fortune into founding Hull House in Chicago, making it the first settlement house in the US. Although she began by offering classes and a library, living amongst Chicago's poor opened her up to all the other areas she could be of use. She devoted the rest of her life to speaking, writing, protesting, organizing, and (eventually) voting for peace and social justice. Addams's true genius seems to have been in empathy, understanding, and helping others to become their best self: she was a masterful organizer, and founded and served on the boards of everything from the NAACP to the ACLU. She advised (or pestered) eight US presidents, pushed through laws at the state and federal levels, led Hull House until 2 years before her death, and worked on a truly international level when most Americans still considered "international" to mean "including Europe and Japan."

Before reading this biography, I'd had no idea of her scope and reach. She's famous in Chicago--I actually worked in a youth group that met in Hull House--but to me that settlement was the extent of her activities. I'd

also had no idea how much she had thought about ethics and philosophy. Knight brings together her friendships, work, and words together to create a portrait that seems as real as a living being.

I love the postscript, both as a summing up of Addams's work and for its call to action, and have included most of it here:

On the whole, history confirmed that the fears of conservatives were unfounded. The end of child labor, which Congress banned in 1938, did not force major industries out of business; women's ability to vote did not destroy the family; federal old-age pensions, the federal minimum wage, and state unemployment insurance did not destroy the American capitalist system. The US's membership in the UN after WWII did not destroy the country's national sovereignty, although conservatives continue to claim that it has, or will soon.

On the other hand, seventy-five years after her death, many of the problems worked on by Addams and other reformers, of both genders and of every class and race, remain unfinished. At home, we still have poverty, obstacles to labor organizing, an inadequate minimum wage, discrimination against immigrants, unjust immigration policies, human trafficking, inadequate affordable housing, racism, and sexism. Around the world we still have war, although the work of the UN has prevented or shortened some conflicts. And the injustices that burden women around the world continue...

Meanwhile, the two institutions Addams did so much to help create live on. Hull House is the largest social service agency in Chicago. WILPF, the oldest women's international peace organization in the world, is still headquartered in Geneva and still works for peace and freedom."

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### **Irene says**

Copious footnotes verify every claim in this biography of this amazing American: political activist, social reformer, early feminist, champion of racial equality, lecturer, author, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. I appreciated that the biographer resisted the temptation to fabricate dialogue or, for the most part, avoid speculating about the thoughts or feelings of Jane Addams. I am in awe of this woman who, prior to reading this book, I was aware of only the highlights of her story.

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### **Leslie Goddard says**

What an elegant, readable biography. Knight does a terrific job at the challenging task of providing enough biographical detail without getting bogged down in unnecessary details. Her insights are always thoughtful and extremely helpful in exploring what made Addams so beloved and so vilified. I wish more biographies were as insightful and readable as this.

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### **Tamara says**

Why didn't we learn about Jane Addams in school? This woman was extremely influential, an important

thinker and theorist, the founder of social work, an anti war activist, and a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Read about her in for Women's History Month. Do it.

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### **Pamela Burdick says**

I have always been a great admirer of Dr King and Gandhi. I have their books and quotes and artwork with their likenesses. Upon reading this book, I have found I was missing Jane Addams' information as well. She is flawed and fascinating and this book shows her evolve and grow in her beliefs as her knowledge of the world grew, eventually earning her the noble prize.

I always hoped the two men I admire for their belief in non violent social change would have included more issues if they had been allowed longer lives.

Jane Addams did get the chance to grow and include racism in her platform, she fought for peace, yet stood up when she needed. She fought her own confusion about societies role for women. She grew, she changed.

These people are all heroes, the women who brought so much to our world were written out of history we need to hear more of their stories!

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### **Jody Mena says**

A fascinating, multifaceted account of the life of an extraordinary woman! I knew Jane Addams was an important figure in turn-of-the-century politics and social reform, but I had no idea just how MUCH she contributed and accomplished in her life. I was thrilled and inspired as I turned each page, inspired by this woman who literally changed the world - several times over - in an era when women could not even vote. A wonderful thing about this biography was that it richly combined Addams history and accomplishments with her personal life, thoughts and feelings, gleaned from her writings, and presented it all on a backdrop of the social events and climates within which she made her mark on the world. Several times I was actually moved to tears as her courage and vision leaped off the page. She really is someone that I admire deeply, and her example makes me want to be a better woman. I highly recommend this book to everyone, Jane Addams was a major key the in shaping the world we now live in, and was also a truly remarkable human being!

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### **Dan says**

This is a solid cradle to grave biography of Jane Addams that also fills a void in my knowledge of American history.

Jane Addams was a famous social justice champion who founded the Hull House in Chicago at the turn of the century. She also sponsored many other worthwhile causes in her life including the Women's suffrage movement. In 1931 she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

There is a lot of material covered in this book's 200 plus pages. The author's writing flows and she knows her subject well. Fortunately the book does not have an academic tone either.

As far as criticisms, there are times in the book where more depth is needed when discussing the myriad of causes that Jane championed. An absence of quotes from contemporaries about how they perceived Jane Addams was disappointing. This does not lend itself to that “show me” quality that I like to see in non-fiction. The last criticism that I have is that there were no real foils in the book other than her step mother. We heard numerous times in the book that Jane Addams was a villain to some but this was not properly explored. More foils would have made for a more dramatic read.

With that said if you are interested in Jane Addams or American history in the early 20th century this is an enjoyable read.

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### **Carol Lynn says**

Even though I lived in a Chicago, I did not know any details of her life or even what a Settlement House actually is.... This book greatly expanded my knowledge. I was surprised that although a significant part of her life and work, there were so many other accomplishments she achieved. I appreciated the talented writing and strong research, and I highly recommend.

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