

History of the Settlement House Movement, Social Work, and Community Parks and Recreation: Recognizing Jane Addams' Cross-Cultural Mistakes and Ada S. McKinley as an African American Pioneer

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Objectives of the Presentation

1

Reassess dominant narratives about settlement house history.

2

Examine Jane Addams' racial blind spots and institutional limitations.

3

Recover the overlooked history of Ada S. McKinley.

4

Explore how segregation shaped historical visibility.

Why This History Matters

Dominant Narrative

Social work and recreation history largely centers on Jane Addams and Hull-House.

Many academic programs identify Addams as the "mother of social work."

Recreation history similarly elevates Hull-House as a foundational institution

Missing Narrative

African American settlement houses and reformers have received little attention.

Their contributions remain marginalized in social work and recreation scholarship.

Central Question

Whose stories have been remembered, and whose have been forgotten?

Central Historiographical Question

Why did some reformers become iconic while others became historically marginalized?

- Historical importance $\neq$ historical visibility
- Historical memory is selective
- Professional histories are constructed rather than neutral accounts of the past.

Four Miles Apart

800 South Halsted Street



3201 South Wabash



Methodological Approach

Historiography (Loewen)

- Challenges textbook narratives.
- Examines how some histories become dominant while others disappear. [

Genealogy (Foucault)

- Investigates hidden histories and silences.
- Questions assumptions of continuous progress.
- Reveals both positive and negative outcomes of historical institutions.

Guiding Framework

History should include complexities, contradictions, and omissions.

Professional Origin Stories

Many textbooks position Hull-House as:

- The birth place of social work and community parks and recreation.
- The center of progressive reform.

Question:

- What histories become invisible when one institution becomes synonymous with an entire movement?

Race and Historical Visibility

Historical visibility depends on:

- Archival preservation
- Institutional power
- Publishing networks
- University recognition
- Professional canons

The historical record reflects systems of power, not simply historical significance.

Whiteness and Canon Formation

Both social work and community parks and recreation history often reproduces a canon centered on White reformers.

Consequences:

- Black institution building appears peripheral.
- African American leaders become exceptions.
- White reform becomes the dominant narrative of progress.

Segregation and Historical Memory

Segregation shaped:

- Service delivery
- Leadership opportunities
- Resource allocation
- Archival preservation
- Historical recognition

Thus segregation influenced not only lived experience but also what later generations remembered

Settlement Houses in Context

By 1911:

- More than 400 settlement houses existed nationwide.

Yet historical attention remains concentrated on a handful of institutions.

Origins of Hull-House

- 1889

Founded by:

- Jane Addams
- Ellen Gates Starr
- Mary Keyser

Mission: neighborhood settlement, education, recreation, advocacy, and community reform

Hull-House and Social Work

Hull-House contributed to:

- Community organizing
- Policy advocacy
- Immigrant services
- Social reform

Its influence on professional social work is undeniable.

Hull-House and Recreation

Hull-House helped pioneer:

- Playgrounds
- Recreation programming
- Youth development
- Community leisure services

Jane Addams became a major figure in recreation history.

Hull-House Innovations

Frequently cited achievements:

- Public playground
- Public baths
- Public gymnasium
- Art exhibits
- Citizenship classes

These innovations shaped both professions.

Recognizing Complexity

This presentation does not seek to diminish Jane Addams. Instead:

- Recognize achievements.
- Examine limitations.
- Understand contradictions.
- Place her within a racialized historical context

Jane Addams' Cross-Cultural Mistakes

Core Argument

Despite advocating for social justice, Addams made significant mistakes regarding race.

Examples

- Limited engagement with African American communities relative to immigrant communities.
- Overlooked African American cultural strengths.
- Reproduced assumptions that aligned with prevailing racial stereotypes of her era.

Key Insight

Progressive leadership did not exempt reformers from the influence of systemic racism

The Ida B. Wells-Barnett Critique

In 1901:

- Addams denounced lynching.
- Ida B. Wells Barnett challenged Addams' assumptions about Black criminality.

The exchange suggests limitations in Addams' racial analysis.

The "Broken Inheritance" Argument

Addams argued African Americans lacked inherited cultural traditions due to slavery.

Problems:

- Overlooked cultural resilience.
- Underestimated Black cultural continuity.
- Reinforced racialized assumptions.

Social Control and Race

Addams contrasted immigrant communities with African Americans.

Result:

- Immigrant culture viewed as socially stabilizing.
- Black communities characterized as lacking equivalent cultural resources.

These claims have generated significant historical criticism.

Segregation within Hull-House

Although not formally segregated:

- Some programs remained overwhelmingly White.
- Black participation was limited.
- Some services imposed racial restrictions.
- African Americans were "hardly represented" in many activities.

The Harriet Rice Case

Dr. Harriet Rice was among the few African Americans associated with Hull-House.

Her experiences demonstrate:

- Social isolation
- Informal exclusion
- Challenges facing Black professionals in White institutions.

Segregation Created Parallel Institutions

A critical historiographical insight

Segregation encouraged African Americans to build:

- Churches
- Civic organizations
- Welfare agencies
- Settlement houses

Black institutions often emerged because White institutions failed to provide full inclusion.

Introducing Ada S. McKinley (1868 – 1952)

- African American social reformer
- Community leader
- Founder and leader of the South Side Settlement House.
- Civic activist

Ada S. McKinley joined social reform leaders such as Jane Addams, Mary McDowell and Harriet Vittum in public demonstrations promoting racial peace during the 1919 Chicago Race Riot.

Yet largely absent from mainstream social work histories.

McKinley's South Side Settlement House

Located on Chicago's South Side.

Significance:

- Served the largest settlement area in Chicago.
- Fully staffed by African Americans.
- Addressed the needs of Black migrants and workers.

Services included:

- Employment assistance
- Shelter
- Health-related services
- Community support
- Civic engagement
- Social welfare programming

Comparable to programs celebrated at Hull-House.

Why Was McKinley Less Visible?

Not because her work lacked significance.

Contributing factors included:

- Racial segregation
- Exclusion from dominant networks
- Unequal scholarly attention
- Historical canon formation
- Archival silences

These processes shaped professional memory.

Segregation and Historical Invisibility

Segregation influenced:

- Which institutions were funded.
- Which records were preserved.
- Which leaders entered textbooks.
- Which histories became professional knowledge.

The invisibility of Black settlement houses reflects broader racialized systems of remembrance.



Rewriting the Settlement House Canon

This presentation:

- Challenges celebratory narratives.
- Complicates Addams' legacy.
- Recovers McKinley's contributions.
- Reveals the role of segregation in knowledge production.
- Broadens settlement house history.



Conclusion and Implications

The deeper question is:

"How did race, segregation, institutional power, and historical memory determine whose contributions became visible and whose became forgotten?"

Conclusion

1. Jane Addams was a transformative reformer whose legacy should be viewed with nuance.
2. Settlement house history has overlooked important African American pioneers.
3. Ada S. McKinley and other Black female social reformers deserve recognition alongside other foundational social work leaders.

Overall, it is important to:

1. Reexamine dominant historical narratives.
2. Incorporate marginalized voices.
3. Teach history as complex rather than heroic.
4. Recognize hidden leaders who shaped the profession.

Questions & Answers

Related publication:

Hounmenou, C., KangJae, J., & Dieser, R. (2025). The Untold Story of Black Social Reformers in Early Social Work History. *Journal of Social Work*.

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