

DOCUMENT 19.1

Jane Addams | Civic Housekeeping, 1910

In the following excerpt from her memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, Jane Addams describes the activities of the Hull House Woman's Club, formed by the residents of the neighborhood served by the settlement house. In an effort to improve their surroundings, club women took it upon themselves to investigate the city's poor garbage collection service in their wards and its possible connection to high death rates in the area.

Explore

The Hull-House Woman's Club had been organized the year before by the resident kindergartner [teacher] who had first inaugurated a mothers' meeting. The new members came together, however, in quite a new way that summer when we discussed with them the high death rate so persistent in our ward. After several club meetings devoted to the subject, despite the fact that the death rate rose highest in the congested foreign colonies and not in the streets in which most of the Irish American club women lived, twelve of their number undertook in connection with the residents, to carefully investigate the condition of the alleys. During August and September the substantiated reports of violations of the law sent in from Hull-House to the health department were one thousand and thirty-seven. For the club woman who had finished a long day's work of washing or ironing followed by the cooking of a hot supper, it would have been much easier to sit on her doorstep during a summer evening than to go up and down ill-kept alleys and

get into trouble with her neighbors over the condition of their garbage boxes. It required both civic enterprise and moral conviction to be willing to do this three evenings a week during the hottest and most uncomfortable months of the year. Nevertheless, a certain number of women persisted, as did the residents, and three city inspectors in succession were transferred from the ward because of unsatisfactory services. Still the death rate remained high and the condition seemed little improved throughout the next winter. In sheer desperation, the following spring when the city contracts were awarded for the removal of garbage, with the backing of two well-known business men, I put in a bid for the garbage removal of the nineteenth ward. My paper was thrown out on a technicality but the incident induced the mayor to appoint me the garbage inspector of the ward.

Source: Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 284–85.

Interpret the Evidence

- Why did Addams and the other club women decide to tackle the garbage problem in their neighborhood?
- What does this action suggest about the role that residents played in improving their own neighborhood?

Put It in Context

How does the women's investigation reflect the progressive notion of civic housekeeping?

reflected a class bias, and they tried to lift up poorer blacks to ideals of middle-class womanhood. In doing so, they challenged white supremacist notions that black women and men were incapable of raising healthy and strong families. By 1916 the National Association of Colored Women, whose motto was "lifting as we climb," boasted 1,000 clubs and 50,000 members.

White working-class women also organized, but because of employment discrimination there were few, if any, black female industrial workers to join them. Building on the settlement house movement and together with middle-class and wealthy women, working-class women founded the National Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) in 1903. The WTUL was dedicated to securing higher wages and