



## *Social responsibility of individuals in Jane Addams (1860–1935)*

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Jane Addams was an intellectual and activist during the Progressive Era in the United States who advocated for a high level of social responsibility among citizens in a democracy. For Addams, democratic social responsibility went beyond the minimal requirements of participation in voting and serving on juries. Addams advocated for lifelong social learning and interpersonal engagement across intersectional differences as the standard for a robust society. In her view, modernity is marked by a need for a social ethic over the historic emphasis on personal morality.

For Addams, part of the social responsibility was to have meaningful interactions with other people including those who were different from ourselves. Addams claims, “We are learning that the standard for social ethics is not attained by travelling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the thronged and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another’s burdens.” Addams viewed a rich cosmopolitan existence as fueling a dynamic democracy. Individual could not be passive but it is their social responsibility to seek out opportunities to engage one another directly or through the arts. As the leader of the social settlement, Hull House in Chicago, Addams scheduled numerous evening social gatherings not simply for amusement but because she thought it was imperative for people of different ethnicities, classes, and generations to have exposure and thus develop a better understanding of one another. In turn, this understanding across differences leads to a responsibility to act on behalf of others. Consistent with Progress Era values, Addams and the community she led at Hull House undertook numerous civic actions to improve the lives of her immigrant neighbors, once she garnered an understanding of their challenges and needs. Addams did not view these actions as extraordinary, but rather as their social responsibility.

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**Keywords:**

cosmopolitanism, social ethic, social responsibility