

RECALLING JANE ADDAMS IN THE TIME OF TRUMP

Op-ed Column by Rutherford H. Platt

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On Jan. 21, 2017, while standing with 170,000 fellow "marchers" (we could not budge) on the Boston Common, I recalled Pete Seeger and The Weavers singing to another troubled age: "We are traveling in the footsteps of those who've come before." As millions of us mobilize to resist the political tsunami of the Trump administration, the "footsteps" of great leaders and resisters of the past offer reassuring guidance today: Lincoln, Gandhi, Bonhoeffer, Wallenberg, Mandela, King, and Aung San Suu Kyi, among many others.

To that pantheon of moral courage we may add Jane Addams (1860-1935), the co-founder of Chicago's Hull House, humanitarian extraordinaire, prolific author and speaker, and first American woman awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Although barely known to many Americans today, Addams spoke truth to power during the nation's painful transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, and from a young democracy to a world power.

She and her allies, like Florence Kelley, Julia Lathrop, Dr. Alice Hamilton, Robert Woods in Boston, and Lillian Wald in New York City, fought for the welfare of women and children, factory workers, immigrants, and people of color. With Kelley, Wald, and others, she helped establish the NAACP in 1909 and long supported the vanguard civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois. Her moral influence spread worldwide through her writings, speeches, and organizational leadership. As chair of the 1915 International Women's Congress at The Hague, she conveyed a mediation plan to end the war in Europe to the leaders of belligerent and neutral powers, sadly without success. Her anti-war speech at Carnegie Hall on July 9, 1915 ignited a vicious conservative backlash (a foretaste of the reaction to Martin Luther King's sermon against the Vietnam War at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967).

A century ago, she was "internationally known as the best representative of American womanhood and symbol of the American spirit of equality and justice for all people" wrote Allen F. Davis in *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams*. President Franklin D. Roosevelt – the eighth president to receive her advice – declared that Jane Addams "understands more about the real people of the United States than anybody else does," as quoted by Louise W. Knight in *Jane Addams: Spirit in Action*. The political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain considered Addams to be "one of the greatest public citizens of the twentieth century."

Today, Jane Addams would certainly call out Donald Trump's contempt for all who share what she described as "the thronged and common road where all must turn out for each other." Trump's toxic blend of hate, hypocrisy, and willful ignorance is the antithesis of her worldview. She would likely reject his stands on immigration, health care, tax reform, voting rights, gun control, women, science, militarism, and international relations – not to mention his greed and dishonesty.

So who are the "Janes" of today in the Age of Trump – she or he with the unfailing moral compass, the mobilizer of social action, the consummate author, speaker, and meeting chair, the nemesis of the corrupt, and the voice of the oppressed? Perhaps no single individual – not even an Elizabeth Warren or an Obama – can fill those celestial shoes.

But Addams would certainly reply that since her time a myriad voices of conscience and common sense have been raised. Some are famous seers and activists like Rachel Carson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, Václav Havel, Mikhail Gorbachev, Helen Caldicott, and Bill McKibben. Countless others are unsung advocates for better housing, schools, parks, health care, clean water, gun control, carbon reduction, and social justice.

There have been many echoes of Addams's unflagging faith in democracy and human goodness. How she would have beamed with approval at President Obama's soaring eulogy on June 26, 2015 for the Hon. Reverend Clementa Pinckney and eight others slain at the Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston. In lauding Rev. Pinckney, Obama could have been describing Addams herself: "His calls for greater equity were too often unheeded, the votes he cast were sometimes lonely. But he never gave up. He stayed true to his convictions. He would not grow discouraged."

In this time of Trump, the footsteps of Jane Addams, Rev. Pinckney, and their fellow strivers for justice and democracy offer a promising path of moral resistance.

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