

“To Reveal the Humble Immigrant  
Parents to Their Own Children”  
Immigrant Women, Their American Daughters,  
and the Hull-House Labor Museum

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In 1899, Hilda Satt, the daughter of Jewish immigrants to Chicago, visited Hull-House for the first time. Her father had recently died, and although her mother “faced life with the heroism of the true American pioneer” (Polacheck 44), she was barely scraping by. Hilda hoped that Hull-House, with its low cost cafeteria, activities for immigrant women, men, and children, and focus on neighborhood outreach, would be able to alleviate her family’s dire financial and emotional situation. While the initial visit made some impression, it was Hilda’s second trip to Jane Addams’s settlement house that had the greatest effect on the girl.

Jane Addams took Hilda on a tour of Hull-House, starting off with one of the house’s most innovative projects, the Labor Museum. The Museum featured the traditional crafts of the immigrant communities that made up Hull-House’s neighborhood, and “showed the evolution of cotton, wool, silk and linen” (Polacheck 64). Next to the textiles were descriptions of how each crop was raised, spun, woven, and dyed. The spectators at the Museum were a mixed crowd: immigrants and their children, well-heeled philanthropists, devotees of the then avant-garde Arts and Crafts movement. The Museum was also fully interactive; when Hilda finished looking around, Mary Hill, the Museum’s coordinator “asked me whether I would like to learn to weave something that was typically American. . . . [V]ery soon I was weaving a small Navaho-style blanket” (Polacheck 64).

As Hilda soon learned, the Labor Museum was not simply a show-place for traditional handicrafts. It was also a moneymaking venture: Hull-House sold the products of the people who exhibited their skills in the Museum, and used the money to fund settlement-house projects. However, as Hilda Satt, writing decades later as Hilda Satt Polacheck, pointed out, one of the Museum's primary concerns went beyond consciousness or fundraising. She realized that "Miss Addams found that there was a definite feeling of superiority on the part of children of immigrants towards their parents" who participated in the Museum's exhibits (65). Hilda saw that for these children, mostly in their teens, "the Labor Museum was an eye-opener. When they saw crowds of well-dressed Americans standing around admiring what Italian, Irish, German, and Scandinavian mothers could do, their disdain for their mothers vanished. . . . I am sure the Labor Museum reduced strained feelings on the part of immigrants and their children" (66).

Addams's discovery of this "feeling of superiority" was hardly a surprise to her. She designed the Labor Museum with that result in mind, a fact of which Polacheck, whose memoir, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, was dedicated in "humble gratitude to the memory of JANE ADDAMS" (2), could hardly have been unaware. Jane Addams created the Labor Museum as a way to address a problem that obsessed her contemporaries: the attitudes of American-born children of late-nineteenth-century immigrants toward their parents on the one hand, and the United States on the other—what was often thematized as the conflict between the "Old World" and the "New World."<sup>1</sup> This generation of new Americans was entering adolescence as Addams was embarking on what would be a historic philanthropic project, and by 1900, when Hilda Satt was making her way through the Hull-House Labor Museum, they constituted a huge demographic bubble comparable to the baby boom of the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay I explore how the Labor Museum dealt with the "problem" of American-born teenage children of immigrant parents, particularly the daughters of immigrant women, and how Addams represented that problem in her writing. These children provided a bridge between their parents and the culture of the United States that was often undecipherable to the older generation and also built a wall between themselves and their parents, a wall that popular American cul-

ture helped construct and maintain. For a variety of reasons, Jane Addams wanted to demolish that wall and reunite foreign-born parents and U.S.-born children—she had, as she put it, “an overmastering desire to reveal the humble immigrant parents to their own children” (HH 171–72)<sup>3</sup>—and she imagined that the Labor Museum would go some way toward achieving that goal. But she was fighting a powerful cultural trend: the adolescent children of immigrants were in the vanguard of creating and adopting a new and in many ways unique working-class culture, organized around factory labor and the leisure that their incomes made possible. This culture bore many of the hallmarks of what we still imagine are typical of American teenagers, such as a strong investment in mass culture, particularly music and performance; an open and often playful sexuality; a focus on fun as a self-sustaining reason for activity.

In two texts in particular, Addams addressed the issue of American-born children of immigrants. In *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), a memoir of her life up to the point of the founding of Hull-House, and a chronicle of the work and philosophies of the settlement house, and *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909), Addams’s book-length exploration of the needs of and limitations placed on urban adolescents, Addams embarked on an ambitious project, to reshape public opinion about urban youth, particularly in immigrant communities. Although she did not realize it at the time, Addams was grappling with an issue that concerned (and sometimes even consumed) many of her contemporaries. Debates raged over the proliferation of dance halls, beer gardens, and amusement parks as places that young people spent time in, as well as perceived and actual increases in sexual license and prostitution among young women and drunkenness among women and men. At the same time, these young people thwarted many of the efforts of U.S.-born philanthropists whose attempts to “help” them—that is, not simply lift them out of poverty and the grinding work of sweatshops and department stores, but reform their morals and lead them to middle-class values—they viewed with attitudes ranging from cynical humor to outright contempt.

Addams’s project to reconcile immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters derived in part from a desire to restore dignity to the lives of the older women and to the cultures from which they came, but

it also resulted from a need to reinstitute the traditional parent-child power relations that had been so formative in her own childhood. Adams's mother died when she was a young child, and she admired her father with an almost violent passion.<sup>4</sup> Like her contemporaries, Adams was alarmed at the dissolution of familial hierarchy among new immigrants, particularly given the spending power many adolescent boys and girls had from their jobs in factories, hotels, department stores, pushcarts, and other employment. These changing social conditions eased into being a new way of looking at these young people poised between childhood and full adult status. Adolescence, or, rather, *the adolescent*, was emerging as a new object of theory and prescription, an identity separate from childhood on the one hand and adulthood on the other.

The advances in union organizing in various industries, the institution of compulsory education, and the exclusion of children under sixteen from the permanent workforce created a new category of worker: the adolescent, not yet an adult, but also legally empowered to leave school and earn a wage. Given the sharp increases in living expenses in major cities as immigrants crowded in, adolescent children represented a significant source of family income. In the first decade of the 1900s in New York, fewer than half of working-class families depended upon the father for sole financial support (Peiss 12). The novels of immigrant life that became increasingly popular in the early decades of the twentieth century—Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*, Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*, to name only a few— invariably featured representations of adolescent children at work to help cover basic family living expenses.

Kathy Peiss's groundbreaking work on young women's leisure activities in New York at the end of the nineteenth century underscores many of the arguments I make here. As she points out, four-fifths of wage-earning women in New York in 1900 were single, and one-third were between the ages of sixteen and twenty (34). Although many young women handed over much or even all of their pay to their parents, many others had access to at least some of their income. Unfettered by children of their own and old enough to desire the pleasures the city had to offer, young women broke away from the leisure activities of their immigrant mothers: visiting with friends and female family members,

sharing childcare, gossiping with neighbors (22). A burgeoning adolescent culture organized around leisure and sexuality suffused urban life, marking out a new terrain, “distinct from familial traditions and the customary practices of their ethnic groups, signifying a new identity as wage earners through language, clothing, and social rituals” (Peiss 47).

This identity, I argue, formed at the intersection of adolescent and new American identities: the young women Peiss discusses were, after all, teenagers in a culture in which adolescence was jelling into a meaningful identity category. Unlike the more rigidly gender-segregated lives their parents led, working-class adolescent girls, many of them the children of new immigrants, were creating a heterosocial world for themselves through the flamboyant hats they wore, the dance halls they frequented, the trips to amusement parks and vaudeville, an environment in which, as Peiss argues, “commercialized recreation fostered a youth-oriented, mixed-sex world of pleasure, where female participation was profitable and encouraged” (6).

Or, rather, encouraged by some. As Laura Hapke points out, the lives of young workingwomen were fascinating to their bourgeois contemporaries, and from the 1890s on, “staid publishing houses with a wide middle-class readership brought out numerous tenement tales with sweatshop and box-factory workers, shop girls and cloak models, genteel daughters of failed businessmen reduced to department store work, even former dance hall girls who manage saloons and female stevedores who take men’s names” (4). At the same time, however, among reformers and philanthropists, enthusiasm for the ways in which young women were shaping and responding to work and leisure was muted, to say the least.

Part of this concern was intertwined with anxieties about what adolescence as a gendered social category actually meant, and how this new class of people—of workers and participants in the public sphere—would shape the larger theater of American culture. G. Stanley Hall, already a famous (one might even say notorious) psychologist by the end of the nineteenth century, detailed these anxieties in his two-volume study, *Adolescence*. His characterization of adolescent boys and girls as vital yet vulnerable, resilient yet subject to the “shipwrecks” of the “hot-house demands” of a rapidly changing era, was echoed by many of his

more progressive contemporaries. Reformers such as Belle Moskowitz in New York and Louise De Koven Bowen in Chicago organized their efforts around the needs of teenage immigrant girls. De Koven Bowen's 1910 study of "department store girls" expressed many of the same concerns as Hall, although with the welfare of the girls, rather than "the race" in mind: "It is evident that the long day of twelve or more hours cripples the human system, dwarfs the mind, gives no time for culture and recreation and shortens life" (n.p.). The average age of the young women working in department stores was nineteen, and almost all were American-born daughters of immigrant parents. Department store girls were poorly paid, "constantly surrounded by the articles which are so dear to the feminine heart," but often unable to afford most of them (n.p.).<sup>5</sup>

What Hall, De Koven Bowen, Moskowitz, and Addams all had in common was a belief that adolescents had an innate desire for pleasure and recreation, but that the commercialization of recreation had transformed a healthy and generative need into a corrupted search for cheap thrills. Debates raging over appropriate recreation for working-class youth, particularly young women, stemmed from a variety of sources. The most vocal was the fear of criminality among boys and prostitution among girls. Not all these fears were unrealistic. The largest proportion of urban prostitutes were U.S.-born daughters of immigrants (Rosen 139); in 1900 over one-third of all girls in the New York State Reformatory were daughters of Jewish immigrants, mostly imprisoned for prostitution and petty theft (Perry, *Belle Moskowitz* 22). More often, prostitution was informal and part of a quid pro quo with young women exchanging a night on the town or a day at the beach for sexual favors with their dates.

Nonetheless, given the explosion of recreations for young people, social commentators felt that they had to respond to the phenomenon. Addams saw recreation among youth as a social good, since "one generation after another has depended upon its young to equip it with gaiety and enthusiasm, to persuade it that living is a pleasure" (*Spirit of Youth* 3-4). Working-class women's desire for "frivolous" finery was a way to make that gaiety and enthusiasm visible; as Addams argued, "through the huge hat, with its wilderness of bedraggled feathers, the girl announces to the world that she is here. She demands attention to the fact

of her existence, she states that she is ready to live, to take her place in the world” (8).

Although they saw commercial dance halls as “largely controlled by the brewery, saloon and vice interests,” progressive reformers like Addams, De Koven Bowen, and Moskowitz argued that prohibiting dance halls would do more harm than good (De Koven Bowen, *Public Dance Halls* 3).<sup>6</sup> Rather, what young people needed was “a rationally conceived program of regulated and municipalized recreation resources” and, in a telling phrase that brings us back to Addams, the “general motherhood of the commonwealth” (Perry, “Dance Hall Reform” 724–25).

Implicit in these critiques of modern amusement sites was a nostalgia for older, less sexually explicit modes of recreation. Hall hearkened back to dancing’s formerly “pristine power to express love, mourning, justice, penalty, fear, anger, consolation, divine service, symbolic and philosophical conceptions, and every industry or characteristic act of life in pantomime and gesture” (214). Instead, the “dance of the modern ballroom” constituted “only a degenerate relict, with at best but a very insignificant culture value, and too often stained with bad associations” (214). Similarly, Addams contrasted “the public dance halls filled with frivolous and irresponsible young people in a feverish search for pleasure” with “the old dances on the village green in which all of the older people of the village participated” (*Spirit of Youth* 13).

The Labor Museum participated in the same kind of longing for intergenerational recreation. Concerned about the omnipresence of commerce in young women’s lives, “all that is gaudy and sensual, by the flippant street music, the highly colored theater posters, the trashy love stories, the feathered hats, the cheap heroics of the revolvers displayed in the pawn-shop windows,” Addams wanted to recreate the self-sustaining relationships between parents and children (27). Moreover, while Addams sustained a fantasy of country life as harmonious, in contradistinction to the conflict-ridden family life of the city, she recognized the many examples of “family affection” and “family devotion” that sustained urban life, from the immigrant man who went without a coat in February so that he could afford to keep his son in school to the women who maintained clean and well-stocked homes even as they worked long hours in sweatshops (*Spirit of Youth* 34).

Unlike many of her peers, Addams did not doubt immigrant parents’

commitment to their children's well-being. She testified to the "wonderful devotion to the child . . . in the midst of our stupid social and industrial relations, [and] all that keeps society human" (33). The family as a social unit "blends the experience of generations into a continuous story" (*Spirit of Youth* 34), and close communication and even friendship between generations was the key to preventing the ruin of young women and corruption of young men. Teenage girls in the work world, particularly vulnerable to the predations of the city, were also particularly uplifted by connections to their mothers. As she argued,

The mothers who are of the most use to these . . . city working girls are the mothers who develop a sense of companionship with the changing experiences of their daughters. . . . Their vigorous family life allies itself by a dozen bonds to the educational, the industrial and the recreational organizations of the modern city. (*Spirit of Youth* 47)

But all the companionship in the world would be of no use if the daughters themselves were unable to see their mothers as peers but rather as primitives and sources of embarrassment. Addams devised the Labor Museum as a way not just to reconnect mothers and daughters but to make clear the links between handcraft—the old way that young women derogated—and factory work. The story Addams tells of her inspiration to establish the Museum embodies these issues and suggests a solution to them. Walking toward Hull-House one day, Addams saw "an old Italian woman, her distaff against her homesick face, patiently spinning a thread by the simple stick spindle so reminiscent of all Southern Europe" (172). This image of the persistence of traditional crafts in the face of immense cultural disruption and isolation dovetailed with Addams's concern that older immigrants "so often lost their hold upon their Americanized children," who felt contempt for the "greenness" of their parents' limited mastery of English and alienation from U.S. culture (HH 172).

Addams imagined the Labor Museum as a living history of handicrafts, tracing their development from the most basic techniques to their transformation by mechanization. In its exhibits, the Museum traced specific crafts such as spinning and put varieties of spindles "in his-

toric sequence and order . . . to connect the whole with the present method of factory spinning” (173). By establishing a generic link between artisanal crafts and their industrialized equivalents, Addams hoped to show the factory-working children of immigrants that their labor was not so different from the work their parents participated in and they despised for its “greenness.” By exposing her neighbors to the Museum, Addams also wanted to make possible interethnic harmony based in a belief in the commonality of human experience, since it “enabled even the most casual observer to see that . . . industry develops similarly and peacefully year by year among the workers of each nation, heedless of differences in language, religion, and political experiences” (HH 173).

Strongly affected by the pedagogical theories of John Dewey, particularly his declaration that “education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (78), Addams designed the Labor Museum as an experiential site of learning. Young women in the needle trades could actively relate the physical processes of their own work to the craftwork their mothers were exhibiting. As Addams argued, “If these young people could actually see that the complicated machinery of the factory had been evolved from simple tools, they might at least make a beginning toward that education which Dr. Dewey defines as ‘a continuing reconstruction of experience’” (172). In addition, the Museum allowed immigrant parents, so often in the position of learning from their children about what it meant to be American, or using their children as intermediaries to interpret between them and the Anglo-American world, to reinvest in the parental role of teacher, guide, and transmitter of cultural knowledge (HH 174).

In Addams’s narrative of intergenerational conflict, the teenage counterpart of the old woman at the distaff is “Angelina” who “did not wish to be too closely identified in the eyes of the rest of [her] cooking class [at Hull-House] with an Italian woman who wore a kerchief over her head, uncouth boots, and short petticoats” (HH 176). In a metaphor of generational distance that Addams must have found poignant, Angelina and her mother walked to Hull-House together, but entered through separate doors so that others would not know they were related. The Labor Museum changed all that, however.

One evening [visiting the Museum], Angelina saw her mother surrounded by a group of visitors from the School of Education who much admired the spinning, and she concluded from their conversation that her mother was “the best stick-spindle spinner in America.” When she inquired from me as to the truth of this deduction, I took occasion to describe the Italian village in which her mother had lived, something of her free life, and how, because of the opportunity she and the other women of the village had to drop their spindles over the edge of a precipice, they had developed a skill in spinning beyond that of the neighboring towns. I dilated somewhat on the freedom and beauty of that life—how hard it must be to exchange it all for a two-room tenement, and to give up a beautiful homespun kerchief for an ugly department store hat. I intimated it was most unfair to judge her by these things alone, and that while she must depend on her daughter to learn the new ways, she also had a right to expect her daughter to know something of the old ways. (HH 176)

The change in relationship between the two was immediate and tangible. Rather than rejecting her mother as a relic of the old world, Angelina “allowed her mother to pull out of the big box under the bed the beautiful homespun garments which had been previously hidden away as uncouth; and she openly came into the Labor Museum by the same door as did her mother, proud at least of the mastery of the craft which had been so much admired” (HH 177).

As is clear from Addams’s story, the role of elites in reconciling immigrant mothers and their adolescent daughters is far from uncomplicated. Angelina values her mother because the visitors from the School of Education do. She reflects the values of the educated bourgeoisie in championing handcrafts over factory-made goods for the very reasons that Angelina herself might treasure the products of industrialization: mass-produced objects are uniform, cheaply made, inexpensive, disposable, ephemeral. Angelina is convinced of the worth of her mother’s labor and the culture that she literally wears on her back because Jane Addams argues for the “beautiful homespun kerchief” over the “ugly department store hat” that was the staple of working girls.

Addams’s defense of Angelina’s mother has more than a touch of the imperialist aesthete, who “dilates” upon the “freedom and beauty” of primitive lives while maintaining the sophisticated superiority of her

own cultural practices. But her goals in the Labor Museum went far beyond a sort of ethnic tourism or snobbery against the vulgarities of factory girls. Like the Arts and Crafts innovators for whom the Labor Museum was a touchstone, Addams believed in the “restorative power in the exercise of a genuine craft” (HH 260). Her critique of industrialization was not that the goods it produced were cheap and worthless, but that factory labor itself was depersonalizing and monotonous—that young women had been convinced that tedious industrial work was somehow more glamorous than the emotionally rewarding labor of their mothers. It’s no surprise that Hilda Satt found Hull-House “an oasis in a desert of boredom and monotony” (97).

Indeed, the experience of intellectually tedious but physically exhausting labor was one of the things that united immigrant parents and their American-born children. Addams’s goal in the Labor Museum was not to convince the parents that their ways were superannated but to demonstrate to the children that work could be fulfilling in and of itself, not just as a means to gain spending power in a culture already drenched in commerce. Addams tells story after story of immigrants transformed by the opportunity to practice crafts or destroyed by the denial of that opportunity: the Bohemian goldsmith who succumbs to alcoholism and eventually suicide after working as a coal shoveler; the Russian women who, disappointed at missing a party at Hull-House, were shown the Labor Museum:

[G]radually the thirty sodden, tired women were transformed. They knew how to use the spindles and were delighted to find the Russian spinning frame. Many of them had never seen the spinning wheel, which has not penetrated to certain parts of Russia, and they regarded it as a new and wonderful invention. They turned up their dresses to show their homespun petticoats; they tried the looms; they explained the difficulty of the old patterns; in short, from having been stupidly entertained, they themselves did the entertaining. (HH 174)

Even more significant for Addams was the re-establishment of the traditional role of community elders. In contrast to their usual helplessness in the face of a hostile foreign culture (whose hostility was often mirrored by their own children), the Russian spinners “were able for the

moment to instruct their American hostesses in an old and honored craft, as was indeed becoming to their age and experience” (174). The Museum re-empowered immigrant parents, re-establishing them, as Addams herself pointed out, “into the position of teachers, and we imagine that it affords them a pleasant change from the tutelage in which all Americans, including their own children, are so apt to hold them” (HH 174).<sup>7</sup>

The Labor Museum raises disquieting questions, though. After all, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, even in the best of circumstances, “when efforts are made to the contrary, live exhibits tend to make people into artifacts because the ethnographic gaze objectifies” (415). How much could Addams control the responses of the mostly elite, mostly Anglo museum-goers, whose agendas were very different from the working girls whose mothers were the Museum’s main exhibitors? This is particularly pressing given the timing of the Museum, which opened the same year in the same city as the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition, which has been widely discussed as a central site for the kind of objectifying ethnographic gaze Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes.<sup>8</sup>

How much did the Labor Museum participate in what Svetlana Alpers has called “the museum effect—the tendency to isolate something from its world, to offer it up for attentive looking” (27)? How much did it “turn cultural materials into art objects” (Alpers 31), or transform immigrants into specimens? In some ways, the Labor Museum exemplifies what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls “in situ” ethnographic display, which is designed to “include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social, and cultural settings” (389). In the Labor Museum, are immigrants themselves the objects, “confined to a pictorial, timeless ethnic space” (Haenni 511)? Undoubtedly, they have been removed from their original environments and cast into a new context.

At the same time, this analogy glosses over some significant differences between the Labor Museum and typical ethnographic display. Unlike the ethnographic exhibits of the World’s Columbian Exposition, or the St. Louis World’s Fair just over a decade later, the Museum made no effort to recreate an “authentic” “ethnic” environment. Addams consciously mixed and matched craftspeople of different national back-

grounds practicing similar crafts to show the similarities between them, rather than showcasing the irreducibility of ethnic and “racial” identity.

Ethnographic display makes clear distinctions between observers and observed, encouraging spectators to see themselves as essentially different from those on display while at the same time assuring them that they are watching authentic “ethnic” activity, as though the exhibitors have no idea that they are there. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that “live displays, whether recreations of daily activities or staged as formal performances . . . create the illusion that the activities one watches are being done rather than represented,” itself a false image that allows viewers to believe that they are watching everyday life, rather than a performance (415). By contrast, the Labor Museum dissolved the line between audience and performers. On the one hand, the craftspeople in the Museum were represented as experts, and the work they did as separate from their everyday lives as factory workers, homemakers, pushcart peddlers and so on. At the same time, Addams’s goal was to shrink the distance between immigrants and the American born, not calcify it. As Hilda Satt’s experience shows, museum-goers were allowed to become craftspeople themselves, if only for the afternoon, and the immigrants’ children were encouraged to see the links between their own factory labor and their parents’ manual skills. Finally, the intended spectators of the Museum were the children of the “exhibits,” not the separate class of viewers constructed by other kinds of ethnographic display. The educational process of the Labor Museum was not organized around a kind of Anglo-paternalism, but rather around the smoothing out of self-conscious difference between the women and men weaving, spinning, throwing pots, and so on, and the teenaged girls and boys who filed through the Museum, forming connections between their work and the previously degraded work of their parents.

Ironically, the Hull-House residents, mostly members of the same college-educated elite class as the bourgeois visitors to the Labor Museum, themselves constituted the primary ethnographic display on offer at the settlement.<sup>9</sup> As Shannon Jackson points out, “the daily living practices of the residents—the so-called private realms of experience—were perpetually on display” to anyone who visited (152). At Hull-House, most domestic activity typical of the American-born middle class was carried out in public spaces so that the cafeteria in which residents and

guests all ate, and the public reception rooms that functioned as parlors for residents, turned downstairs life for residents into an ongoing *public* experiment. While the work of the spinners, weavers, potters, and the like was seen by Anglo observers as representative of larger cultural structures (for example, as Jackson observes, “the spinning of a neighborhood woman named Mrs. Brosnahan came to stand for ‘Irish spinning’” [260]), the immigrant neighbors of Hull-House saw the day-to-day activities of house residents—the food they ate, the way they interacted with visitors, their leisure activities—as metonyms for the folkways of the native-born bourgeoisie.

The Labor Museum also existed as a peculiar inversion of the status of the fine art museums that came into existence after the Civil War: the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Art Institute of Chicago alone were founded between 1870 and 1874. As Alan Trachtenberg has demonstrated, the fine art museum “established as a physical fact the notion that culture filtered downward from a distant past, from overseas, from the sacred founts of wealth and private power” (144–45). The kind of art worthy of display in a museum—old, European, removed from (while idealizing through representation) common people—was institutionalized in opposition to the everyday world of crafts. The Labor Museum turned these assumptions inside out. The folkways the Museum exhibited *were* from the past and from overseas, but rather than being separated from their producer and their audience, the “works” (in both senses of the word) on display at the Labor Museum demonstrated the continuity between past and present, not the division implicit in fine art display.

However, like fine art museums and the various world’s fairs, the Labor Museum made a clear distinction between industrial and pre-industrial cultures. Moreover, Addams participated in an evolutionary discourse that represented immigrants and poor as occupying a lower sociobiological rung on the developmental ladder than their U.S.-born Anglo superiors. The Labor Museum “placed performances in sequence, one national performer after another, to document a developmental history,” from the most “primitive” to the most “developed,” although still preindustrial (Jackson 254). Addams constructed a transcultural narrative of handcrafts that informed the exhibits in the Museum: “It was

possible to put these seven into historic sequence and order and to connect the whole with the present method of factory spinning. . . . Within one room a Syrian woman, a Greek, an Italian, a Russian, and an Irish-woman enabled [museum-goers] to see that there is no break in orderly evolution if we look at history from the industrial standpoint” (HH 173).

This is not the whole story, though. Rather than drawing an impassable line between artisanship and mass production, Addams folded all forms of production into the narrative of what she called “industrial history.” Lectures at Hull-House and the Museum drew analogies between the evolution from spindle to wheel spinning with the development of the sewing machine and even heavy industrial machinery (HH 173). In addition, Addams argued that just as “George Eliot has made us love the belated weaver, Silas Marner,” art and literature can illuminate to us the lives of industrial and sweatshop workers, reducing the gap between artisans and mechanics (173). Human history, she observed, is short, and “human progress is slow,” so that the division between handloom and weaving machine is infinitesimal (HH 173). More importantly, the transgenerational reunion of mother and daughter was a microcosm of the historical pedagogy of the Labor Museum, itself a microcosm of Hull-House’s agenda.

Perhaps the most difficult critique of the Labor Museum, and of Hull-House in general, is the charge that Addams was participating in a kind of genteel sensationalism, exploiting immigrants for the benefit of bourgeois settlement workers and other reformers, who could garner a sense of self-satisfaction by transforming immigrant poverty and “backwardness” into spectacle. Ruth Crocker’s claim that *Twenty Years at Hull-House* “aestheticized the poor” and represented them in enough detail only “to teach the residents different lessons about life” (179) is a penetrating criticism of much late-nineteenth-century poverty relief, and Addams was certainly formed by the philanthropic conventions of her era. For many of her contemporaries, after all, the ghetto was a place to go slumming, “a liminal site of commercial entertainment . . . both potentially dangerous and safely classifiable within middle-class tourism” (Haenni 494).

I would argue, though, that Addams conceived of the Labor Museum *not* as a tourist attraction or a site of the objectification of “primitive” immigrant crafts. Indeed, looking back on her formative experiences

with urban poverty in the East End of London, the mature Jane Addams felt deep ambivalence about what we might call the “tourism of degradation” that she witnessed as a young woman: “A small party of tourists were taken to the East End by a city missionary to witness the Saturday night sale of decaying vegetables and fruit” (HH 61). At the time, Addams was profoundly affected by this scene, and “while I was irresistibly drawn to the poorer quarters of each city [she visited on her two-year tour of Europe], nothing among the beggars of South Italy nor among the salt miners of Austria carried the same conviction of human wretchedness which was conveyed by this momentary glimpse of an East London street” (HH 62). On reflection, though, Addams recognized the manipulative and objectifying elements of her tour of the East End, which was “a most fragmentary and lurid view of the poverty of East London, and quite unfair,” since it gave no sense of the reality of the lives of the inhabitants or the “gallantry” of poverty relief workers who lived side by side with East Enders. It is this very “fragmentary and lurid” representation of Hull-House’s neighbors that the Labor Museum attempted to disrupt, in the eyes of both native-born spectators and the children of immigrant participants.

In her experiences with the Labor Museum, Addams attempted to grapple with several seemingly different but in fact interrelated problems. While poverty was almost overwhelming to immigrants, material needs were not their only concerns.<sup>10</sup> Many immigrant parents felt bewildered by the world into which they had brought their families and in which their children were flourishing, seemingly at the expense of the past. The knowledges they had brought with them were rendered irrelevant at best, and their American-born children repudiated them. In *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, Addams remembers even in her own childhood being “often distressed by the children of immigrant parents who were ashamed of the pit whence they were digged, and who counted themselves successful as they were able to ignore the past” (HH 42). For Addams, whose veneration of Abraham Lincoln was equaled only by her near-worship of her own father, the past was not to be rejected but mined for strategies for social interaction and coexistence.

Moreover, Addams was familiar with the groundbreaking work of Henry George, whose 1879 book *Progress and Poverty* argued that not only did industrial progress under free market capitalism not improve

the lot of the poor, but in fact “the cause of increasing poverty [was] advancing wealth” (251). George’s theories challenged the entrenched beliefs in laissez-faire economics and social Darwinism, and laid the groundwork for a more progressive approach to poverty relief. Jane Addams was clearly writing under his influence when she argued that “the present industrial system thwarts our ethical demands, not only for social righteousness, but for social order” (HH 166). But George’s significance to Addams is philosophical as well: George’s disarticulation of industrial advances from social progress gave her the imaginative space to reinvest the past, both her own and those of the immigrants with whom she worked, with positive value.<sup>11</sup> She recognized from the very beginning of her work at Hull-House that “in regard to entertaining immigrants [she needed to] preserve and keep whatever of value their past life contained” (HH 169).

Addams’s investment in the past was not a form of genteel Luddism. Industrialization was not in and of itself destructive, but the alienation from the products of one’s labor on the one hand and the commercialization of the culture on the other certainly were. The transformation of both work and leisure into commodities deeply disturbed Addams. In terms of labor, she insisted that even in factories, workers “must be connected with the entire product—must include fellowship as well as the pleasures arising from skilled workmanship and a cultivated imagination” (*Spirit of Youth* 127). The rationalization of industrial labor robbed workers of a sense of skill and a sense of self. But the commercialization of recreation was even more destructive to a democratic culture, since it captured not just a person’s work hours but her imaginative life as well. The spending power of thousands of young new Americans constructed a new kind of city life in which adolescents had “only two possibilities, both of them commercial: first, a chance to utilize by day their new and tender labor power in its factories and shops, and then another chance in the evening to extract from them their petty wages by pandering to their love of pleasure” (8). Consumer capitalism gave and consumer capitalism took away; just as it created the conditions by which children of immigrants had money to burn, it provided plenty of opportunities to burn it.

The Labor Museum provided an alternative model of production and

consumption. First of all, artisanal work could itself be recreational in the best sense of the word. Addams argued that “a long-established occupation may form the very foundations of the moral life” (HH 178), and cited examples of immigrants who staved off despair by participating in traditional crafts. In contrast to the enervation of factory work that “calls for an expenditure of nervous energy almost more than it demands muscular effort” (*Spirit of Youth* 108), craftwork engaged both body and mind.

Moreover, the Museum itself became a site of industrial production. In the wake of successful exhibits, the Museum “finally included a group of three or four women, Irish, Italian, and Danish, who have become a permanent working force in the textile department which has developed into a self-supporting industry” (HH 177). To this extent, then, the Labor Museum was more than a memorial of past skills or a monument to the “primitive.” After all, most of the participants in the Museum’s exhibits participated in the industrial world and the marketplace in one way or another—they were hardly cut off from modern modes of production and consumption. At the same time, the Museum could instruct the children of immigrants in the possibilities of labor beyond the experience of piecework:

If a child goes into a sewing factory with a knowledge of the work she is doing in relation to the finished product; if she is informed concerning the material she is manipulating and the processes to which it is subjected; if she understands the design she is elaborating in its historic relation to art and decoration, her daily life is lifted from drudgery to one of self-conscious activity, and her pleasure and intelligence are registered in her product. (*Spirit of Youth* 122)

The Labor Museum was neither a nostalgic revisiting of the past nor a repudiation of modernity. Rather, it was a palimpsest of labor in which each tool illuminated all the others. The factory loom was not a corruption of a hand tool in and of itself, but instead the most recent development in the history of the work people do. The Labor Museum constructed a bridge between “old” and “new,” existing alongside contemporary industrial methods and offering a model of participation in the cash economy that did not insist on alienation from one’s labor.

Ultimately, the Labor Museum was designed and operated as a chan-

nel of communication between immigrants and their American-born children, using the vocabularies of labor as a common language. More than a “way to bond New World industry to Old World folk culture” (Dougherty 376), the Museum was an instrument of family reunification beyond the pieties and threats of the mainstream. Addams recognized the immense changes that were altering not just the fabric of American life but also the texture of that fabric: the years of adolescence were taking on new meaning, new associations, new sensations. Like her contemporaries, Addams saw the relations between immigrants and the dominant culture as metaphors for larger social structures, but she did not interpret this analogy through the language of primitivism or eugenics. From the conflicts and divided loyalties that defined the new bonds (and new separations) between immigrant women and their American-born children, U.S. culture could recognize its own new class of adolescents; in the reconciliation that the shared heritage of labor afforded, America could see its own solutions.

The reunion of mother and daughter was a microcosm of the historical pedagogy of the Labor Museum, itself a microcosm of Hull-House’s agenda. And in Hull-House, Addams hoped to construct an alternate world for the immigrant poor in which conflict between classes and ethnicities was ameliorated by shared work and shared residence. In the final analysis, then, the Labor Museum offered a blueprint of how adults might truly connect with their teenage children, how those children might respect the past while participating fully in the present, and how industrial work might educate and nourish a labor force numbed by the blandishments of consumer capital. In a lesson that could inform us all, Addams designed the Museum to remind young first-generation Americans that their parents “might yield to our American life something very valuable,” and remind immigrant parents that in adolescents they might again recognize “the value and charm of life” (*Spirit of Youth* 3); that is, for life and work to have some meaning, they must be infused with both (self-)respect and pleasure.

## NOTES

1. This theme is explicit, for example, in Anzia Yezierska’s autobiographical novel, *Bread Givers* (1925), which is subtitled “a struggle between a father of the Old World and a daughter of the New.”

2. In 1900, there were over 1.5 million native-born citizens of foreign parentage in Illinois (31% of the total population of the state), over 2.4 million in New York State (33% of the state's population), and over 1.4 million in Pennsylvania (almost 23% of the state population). Native-born white Americans between the ages of five and twenty constituted 29% of the population in Illinois, 25% in New York, and 29% in Pennsylvania.

3. All quotations from *Twenty Years at Hull-House* will be indicated by (HH) followed by the page number.

4. In the "sincere tribute of imitation," the young Jane tried to flatten her right thumb to make it more closely resemble that of her father, which was worn down by his work as a miller (HH 26). (See the account in James Salazar's chapter in this volume 259). Similarly, her feelings of awe toward him caused her (equally enjoyable?) paroxysms of shame at and pleasure of confession to her lies, since he so strongly disapproved of falsehood.

5. Of the two hundred girls De Koven Bowen surveyed, 173 lived at home. Of those 126 gave all their wages to their families. They made between \$2.50 and \$11 per week, mostly making between \$4 and \$8. The low pay often tied girls to their families, since De Koven Bowen estimated that a girl could not live on her own or even with roommates for less than \$8 a week.

6. De Koven Bowen was particularly concerned by the intersection of capitalism and vice in the dance halls. She argued that "hundreds of young girls are annually started on the road to ruin, for the saloonkeepers and dance hall owners have only one end in view and that is profit" (*Public Dance Halls* 3). However, the young women were not blameless, since in the dance halls they could be seen to "sit on men's laps and allow them all kinds of indignities" (6).

7. That immigration to the United States reverses the power relations between parents and children is a truism of immigrant narratives. Writing as a young woman, Hilda Satt (later Polacheck) observed that "the idea that the mother knows less than the children very soon destroys respect" ("Old Woman" 5). Similarly, in her influential account of her own experience as an immigrant, Mary Antin noted that immigrant parents "must step down from their throne of parental authority, and take the law from their children's mouths," which led to the "sad process of disintegration of home life" (213).

8. For a sample of the analyses of the World's Columbian Exposition as objectifying ethnography par excellence, see Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*; Julie K. Brown, *Contesting Images: Photography and the World's Columbian Exposition*; Benedict Burton, "Rituals of Representations: Ethnic Stereotypes and Colonized Peoples at World's Fairs"; Aram A. Yengoyan, "Culture, Ideology, and World's Fairs: Colonizer and Colonized in Comparative Perspectives"; and Micaela Di Leonardo, *Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, American Modernity*.

9. In many ways, the female residents of Hull-House were a kind of exotic. Unlike most of their middle-class peers, these women were mostly unmarried and college educated; John P. Rousmaniere puts the number of women educated in colleges and female seminaries (both graduates and not) living in settlement houses at between 60% and 90% (47).

10. To illustrate that immigrants had needs beyond the material, Addams tells a story of a “Bohemian widow who supported herself and her two children by scrubbing,” who, having heard a stirring lecture against materialism and nationalism “hastily sent her youngest child to purchase, with the twenty-five cents which was to have supplied them with food the next day, a bunch of red roses which she presented to the lecturer in appreciation of his testimony to the reality of the things of the spirit” (HH 172).

11. Addams’s excavation of the past was personal as well as cultural and historical. Anticipating Freud, she ascribed to “the theory that our genuine impulses may be connected with our childish experiences, that one’s bent may be tracked back to that ‘No Man’s Land’ where character is formless but nevertheless settling into definite lines of future development” (HH 19).

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