More Than Municipal Housekeepers: How Women's Organisations Fought Environmental Inequalities in Chicago circa 1890-1990

Claire Elizabeth Sims

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

Department of History

University of Essex

May 2022

Abstract

Women have played an integral role in American environmental history, particularly in urban and industrial cities. Their significant contributions to combatting the seriously harmful effects of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation must be discussed in detail to demonstrate how they overcame barriers to activism and were a powerful force in protecting the lives, environments, and health of their cities. This thesis will examine how the experiences of women involved in challenging environmental inequalities in urban settings, specifically Chicago, from the 1890s to 1990s were shaped by gender, race, and class, and, crucially, how they used these themes of race, gender and class to promote their causes. The groups and individuals that will be discussed include women's city clubs such as the Chicago Women's Club, The National Association of Colored Women, The Chicago Urban League, Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, and Hazel Johnson and People for Community Recovery. By exploring how the purpose for their activism and the strategies they employed were informed by their own internalised perceptions of gender, race, and class which affected how they viewed themselves as well as those they were helping, allows links to be made between these women that span over one hundred years. How these characteristics were used by external parties to support or contest their battles will also be discussed to demonstrate that these women were operating in complex and difficult circumstances. This thesis will further demonstrate how African American women and white women, who were active in Chicago, subverted gendered expectations of domesticity, passivity, and submissiveness through their identities as municipal housekeepers. This ideology has been characterised as women cleaning the city as they would their homes, but it is a much more intricate set of ideals that warrants greater analysis.

Acknowledgements

Completing a PhD part time while being employed to teach GCSE English at a Further Education college as well as teaching on an Access to Higher Education Diploma has been a labour of love, especially in the last two years. I am indebted to so many people for their aid, both practical and emotional. I could not have completed this project without the support and patience of my supervisor, Andrew Priest. You have challenged me to consider my audience, which has made me a better writer, as well as providing invaluable support and advice. Colin Samson and David Pellow inspired me with their seminars and lectures on environmental inequalities as an undergraduate way back in 2000 to 2004 and provided me with the beginnings of an idea for this thesis. Thank you to Alison Rowlands and Carlos Gigoux Gramegna for your comments and suggestions during my supervisory boards, you helped me to broaden my perspective.

Being a self-funded, mature student can present certain obstacles but the generosity of the family of Dr Philip Hills in choosing me for the annual Dr Philip Hills award enabled me to carry out research in the archives in the United States of America. I certainly would not have had access to as much rich source material without this award. The archivists and librarians I encountered during this research trip were superb in finding random items and making suggestions for newspaper articles. They were also very patient with a first-time microfilm user.

To Dex, Emma, and Hannah, thank you for championing me and providing so much emotional support. HS- you have kept me going and I owe you a debt of gratitude which will be nearly impossible to repay. Dex, thank you for taking a chance on a stranger and providing me with a safe haven in the early days of my study. To my friends and CI family, I did it! Your humour and support during some very trying times helped me get through the day job, which allowed me to complete this project.

And finally, to my family, I would not be where I am today without your enduring encouragement and support. Dad, you were the reason I started this journey in the first place by asking me why not, when I was considering whether I could do this part-time. Mum, you are the best unpaid editor there ever was and I don't think I could have done this without you. You have helped me to clarify my thoughts and as always, always been there, even if it is last minute! To all the amazing women in my life, I continue to draw inspiration from your outstanding achievements

List of Abbreviations

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CCRR	Chicago Commission on Race Relations
CEJN	Chicago Environmental Justice Network
CHA	Chicago Housing Authority
CHA	City Homes Association
CUL	Chicago Urban League
CWC	Chicago Woman's Club
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
F.A.T.E	Fighting Against a Toxic Environment newsletter
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
GFWC	General Federation of Women's Clubs
HOLC	Home Owners' Loan Corportation
LAC	Local Advisory Council
LCHA	Love Canal Homeowners Association
LHPA	Ladie's Health Protective Association
NACW	National Association of Colored Women
NPR	National Public Radio
PCR	People for Community Recovery
PWA	Public Works Administration
WCC	Women's City Club of Chicago

List of Figures

Contents

Introduction

'We have a whole room full of hysterical housewives today, so men, we need to get prepared'.[1] This statement was made in the mid-1980s, by a male member of the Virgina State Legislature, in reference to Cora Tucker, an African American woman who was instrumental in the grassroots movement for environmental justice in the 1970s and 1980s. This description classified Tucker according to prescribed notions of gender; namely that woman's primary role was domestic and that women possessed an overly emotional temperament that prevented them from taking a logical perspective on important social and political issues, that were perpetuated by the Victorian-Era doctrine of separate spheres. Although Tucker, and women such as Hazel Johnson and Lois Gibbs were operating in the latter decades of the twentieth century, their experiences were shaped by antiquated concepts of womanhood and a belief that the inevitability of separate male and female spheres, had endured well into the twentieth century.[2] Ideas concerning gender were instrumental in influencing women's environmental activism from 1890 to 1990.

This thesis sets out to examine how the experiences of women involved in challenging environmental inequalities in urban settings, specifically Chicago, from the 1890s to 1990s were shaped by gender, race, and class, and, crucially, how they used these themes of race, gender and class to promote their causes. This will be done in two ways: Firstly, by exploring how the purpose for their activism and the strategies they employed were informed by their own internalised perceptions of gender, race, and class which affected how they viewed themselves as well as those they were helping. And secondly, how these characteristics were used by external parties to support or contest their battles. It will further

[1] Robin Lee Zeff, Marsha Love, and Karen Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves: Women and Toxics Organizing* (Arlington, VA.: Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, 1989), p.6.
[2] Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p.245.

demonstrate how African American women and white women, who were active in Chicago, subverted gendered expectations through their identities as municipal housekeepers and how this ideology was much broader than just cleaning the city as they would their homes. The case studies that will be discussed concern African American and white women in particular, to enable a greater depth of comparison. This is not meant to exclude women of other ethnicities, but to facilitate a deeper understanding of how these two groups of women shared similar experiences because of their gender and how their ideologies and strategies were informed by the barriers they faced. This thesis contributes to existing scholarship because it provides a detailed analysis of municipal housekeeping as a specific strategy that enabled some of these women's goals to be realised so it should not be dismissed or simplified. This study additionally contends that this concept incorporated a critique of men concerning their attitudes toward public health issues and how they viewed urban environmental problems. This analysis further shows a sophisticated approach of participation of women from the middle classes, especially through membership of women's clubs, and working-class women who tended to be more directly affected by environmental issues. This analysis will challenge historian Martin Melosi's contention that municipal housekeeping was merely 'a layman's perception of a complex environmental problem'.[3] Instead, this thesis will argue that women environmentalists used their respective positions in society to advance a sophisticated agenda to bring about change. Melosi's critique embodies a common contention that was levied against the women who will be discussed throughout this thesis at the time they campaigned, in that they were not seen as having an appropriate or formal level of expertise in the issues they were tackling. The primary reason for this was because the principles of a separate

[3] Martin V. Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), p. 99.

spheres ideology, namely domesticity, were a recurrent theme in activism spanning more than a century.

Considering Gender

This thesis focusses on women, not because men were not active in environmental reform, but because women are under-represented in this area of study. Their stories deserve greater attention in the researching and teaching of different subjects, both at secondary and tertiary levels of education. The organisations and women studied in this this thesis all shared similar experiences despite differences in terms of their class and race. While external preconceptions about women's roles meant that gender acted as a barrier to activism, it was also used as a means of validating the expansion of women's roles because they could be seen as protecting the health of their communities and the wider environment of the city. Beginning with the Chicago Woman's Club in 1876 and continuing with subsequent organisations including the Settlement Houses and their respective leaders, and the women-led departments of the Chicago Urban League, each organisation would be vital in promoting how women could attend to the needs of a growing population in an urban city. This was often despite the men they dealt with at the municipal level generally viewing their gender traits as an indicator of inferiority.

Rosalind Rosenberg's excellent work on how women in Progressive-Era America launched the modern study of sex differences through their training in social sciences in universities such as the University of Chicago, articulates a compelling reason that the ideology of separate spheres persisted for so long. She argues that because of changes in American society brought about by rapid industrialisation – such as factories luring women out of the home to work, middle-class women being introduced to 'urban squalor' through civic club work, and the demand for women teachers precipitating the requirement to open up higher education institutions to women –there was a widespread belief that the need to draw a

clear line between appropriately male and female activities had become acute.[4] This clear line between what was proper for women to do would contribute to how women's environmental activism would be perceived by multiple groups including women who were encouraged to join the women's clubs and later environmental justice groups, immigrant women that reformers were helping, journalists and newspaper editors, and male public officials. Adding to this perception was what Rosenberg describes as the 'Victorian faith in sexual polarity – from the doctrine that women are by nature emotional and passive, to the dogma that men by nature are rational and assertive'.[5] This succinct expression of supposed mental differences between men and women encapsulates the criticism that all of the women engaged in environmental activism detailed in this study encountered. This criticism of women's emotions was commonly used throughout the Progressive Era, and it persisted well into the twentieth century as seen in the assertion that Cora Tucker was a hysterical housewife. This thesis will explore these perceptions of gender by drawing-on Rosenberg's ideas about what were seen as appropriate activities for women, perceptions of women as overly emotional, and definitions of womanhood as synonymous with motherhood and housekeeping within the domestic sphere. It will show how women environmental campaigners re-shaped, and more crucially subverted these roles to create an identity that was based on objectives of service to others and thus expand their previously limited spheres.

Nancy Unger advances the field of American environmental history with her study of gender and environmental history in *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers* by exploring how different groups of women interacted with and were affected by their environments. This crucial study served as inspiration for this thesis, and this is reflected in the choice of title. Unger proposes that gender is a complex construct that is based on behavioural, cultural or psychological traits associated with one sex and that 'men and women frequently understood

[4] Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, p.xv.
[5] Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, p.xiv.

and responded to their environments and to environmental issues in decidedly different ways'.[6] This was especially evident in the work of Progressive-Era women who viewed the wider city as an extension of the home where they could use their expertise as housekeepers to clean it up, utilising the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping and to legitimise their public activism. In the Progressive Era and the post-World War II modern environmental justice movement, both African American and white activists expanded the roles of mothers to incorporate the care of all urban children as their responsibility and used this identity to draw attention to environmental issues. Both of these gendered identities were employed as a method of countering entrenched views of gender norms and to re-define a woman's sphere.

The organisations and individuals that will be examined in this thesis, made significant contributions in fighting environmental inequalities in an urban environment and employed deliberate strategies to advance their aims. This will add to existing, broader discussions which do not examine specific methods that these women utilised, and which must be included in the broader discourse on women in environmental history. These women-led organisations were operating in distinct, separate spaces. Those that were socially constructed into the male space of politics, industry and expertise in public health and sanitation, and those that were physically constructed by segregation based on race and ethnicity. These organisations and individuals explicitly challenged male-dominated structures from a perceived position that lacked both political power and professional expertise in environmental hazards, and they had to negotiate their place in a socially constructed space where they were meant to have virtually no agency because of established social conventions. However, they conveyed a resilience in their rhetoric and strategies which deserves an in-depth analysis in order to expand the discourse of women's roles in American environmental history to include precisely how they navigated difficult external

[6] Nancy C. Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.6-7.

circumstances and why their work both disrupted gendered norms of domesticity and re-shaped these notions into an empowering ideology.

Race and Class

Although women environmental campaigners shared similar aims in their reform activities, to improve living conditions in the city, different social realities mediated their experiences. For African American women, including the National Association of Colored Women, formed in 1896, and the Chicago Urban League, founded in 1917, their endeavours in civic improvement were rooted in a race and class-based consciousness shaped by the realities of segregation and disenfranchisement.[7] The leaders of both of these organisations subscribed to a doctrine of racial uplift that attempted to endorse their respectability as middle class African American women whilst highlighting their duty to reform the morals and behaviours of the masses. In his influential study *Uplifting the Race,* Kevin Gaines describes this as a self-help ideology that was a direct response to *de jure* segregation and utilised as a means of countering white racism.[8] This ideology was problematic because it sometimes served to enforce the racialised perceptions of African Americans who had migrated to Chicago and other Northern cities from the South and created clear class delineations. But it also served as a catalyst for African American community organising at a grassroots level in the form of block clubs. These groups were formally organised in the 1920s by women of the CUL and would achieve city-wide prominence in the 1940s under the leadership of Alva Maxey. They were so significant because they marked the foundations for environmental justice groups that formed in the 1970s and 1980s.

[7] Nancy S. Dye, 'Introduction', in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*, Noralee Frankel & Nancy S. Dye eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), pp. 1-10 (p.7).
[8] Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p.xiv.

African American women had to form their own organisations in the early Progressive Era because they were excluded from membership of the middle class, white women's clubs. There were some exceptions to this such as the CWC, but the colour line was enforced by white women in the majority of cases. They viewed themselves as the ambassadors of the race because of their class status and higher education levels, however they were operating in a space dominated by racial prejudice and segregation. Although these groups shared similar aims in improving environmental conditions in the city, African American women in the Progressive Era were operating from a less powerful position than their white counterparts because of their race.

For Hazel Johnson, her fight against environmental injustice in the 1980s and 1990s was also defined by her class status as the resident of a low-income public housing project without the educational background that leaders of the NACW and CUL had achieved. This class difference would add an additional complication to her activism because as she put it 'not all people in the projects are lazy and dumb'.[9] She had to contend with the dual barriers of race and class, as well as her gender, which were used by outside agencies to invalidate her campaigns and research. Johnson's view of her social class reveals economic and education factors but defining what class means is a complicated task as it is an evolving construct. As this thesis examines divergent groups of women whose experiences were shaped by their contextual circumstances, a definition of class has to consider both internal and external elements.

The theory of class stratification that is appropriate in exploring how different women viewed their position in society is that of German Sociologist Max Weber. He proposed that there were three interconnected components of class, status, and party, which directly

[9] Chicago, Chicago Public Library Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, MS People for Community Recovery Archives, Hazel Johnson, 'Living in Chicago's Toxic Doughnut' 1990 in box 1, folder 2

influenced how much power an individual had. He defined class as an economic position which included possession of property and the services that an individual could offer. Status relates to the respect or esteem an individual is shown by society and party and relates to groups who aim to secure power either indirectly or directly, such as the ability to enact laws or influence those who make the laws.[10] This model proposes that class can be viewed as the interplay between economic situation, for example income and occupation, as well as an individual's position in the social hierarchy. In relation the women's clubs this would be reflected in their values and for immigrant and Southern African American migrants it would be based on their customs and perceived morals and behaviours. These migrants occupied a lower position in the social hierarchy because of visible representations of their Southern culture such as accent, food, and clothing and the women of the CUL would employ their middle-class status to educate these newcomers on appropriate behaviour in a Northern city.

Women's status was also demarcated by specific definitions of what constituted expert knowledge. A commonality that all the women in this thesis share is that they were not formally educated in the areas of health, sanitation, or scientific methods of dealing with various forms of pollution. These women constructed their own form of education and expertise which was valid and informed. However, they still faced, mostly male, reticence to accept their findings as legitimate. This resistance still holds true today, particularly in relation to grassroots organisations fighting for environmental justice. The final classification of party relates to the political power that women's organisation sought to influence. Because the early organisations could not vote, at least until 1913 in Illinois when they gained the municipal vote, they had to find alternative methods to achieve power.

[10] Charles E. Hurst, *Social Inequality: Forms, Causes, and Consequences*, 6th edn. (Boston: Allyn and Beacon, 2007), p.206. Max Weber, 'Class, Status, Party', in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp.180-95.

The individuals and organisations studied in this thesis viewed their class status as either an obstruction or a benefit to their purposes and aims, and it is clear that the intersection of race and gender added complexities to their work which will be explored in each chapter. The concept of power that Weber proposes is particularly relevant because often these women found themselves in direct opposition to those who held economic and political power. They were also limited by a power imbalance between the sexes because of the separation of activities of women and men and supposed passive and emotional feminine characteristics.

Context and Links

The organisations that will be analysed in this thesis span over one hundred years of Chicago's history, but they are all linked because they were led by women, both African American and white. They were also all concerned with improving the environmental conditions in their own communities as well as the wider city, and they all used their gender identities in subversive ways to achieve their goals. Each organisation and its women leaders had a direct impact on those that followed because they created a framework within the public domain wherein women could empower themselves and redefine their roles.

Chicago was chosen as the primary focus for analysing the work of women in tackling environmental inequalities as it enables a more detailed exploration of the links between women-led organisations as well as highlighting the important contributions of the women of the African American Chicago Urban League (CUL) founded in 1917, and Hazel Johnson, leader of People for Community Recovery (PCR), founded in 1979 in an African American public housing project. These case studies are an important part of environmental history and the environmental justice discourse and will be analysed alongside the work of notable reformers Jane Addams and Mary McDowell, who operated in the Progressive Era from 1890 onwards. To date only Sylvia Hood Washington's in-depth study of environmental racism in

Chicago, *Packing Them In*, has examined these women and groups and her notion that immigrant communities in the Progressive Era were victims of environmental racism develops environmental justice scholarship to incorporate periods before the 1980s, when this became a nationally recognised movement.[11] Maureen Flanagan also frames Progressive Era municipal reform within the context of environmental justice in *America Reformed* when she contends that women who embraced municipal housekeeping were pioneers because they believed public health decisions had to be made on basis of environmental justice.[12] This work will build on these examples of a growing field of scholarship because it provides a more in-depth examination of the specific and deliberate strategies that were employed by women across class and race lines to fight for environmental justice.

Examining an urban centre like Chicago with its changing demographic make-up allows us to see how rapid change affected the direction of women's environmental activism. A further contributory factor was how rapidly Chicago became industrialised and the resulting impact on public health. The dual aspects of industrialisation and urbanisation provide an explanation for why women-led organisations were required in the first place, as the primary reason why organisations such as the CWC, CUL, and PCR formed was to respond to conditions caused as a direct result of these two factors.

Chicago's rapid development as an industrial centre in the nineteenth century illustrates its environmental significance and why residents soon felt they had to take action to combat environmental decay. Jean Baptiste Pointe De Sable was the first recorded permanent resident of Chicago in 1790 and built a house at the mouth of the Chicago River that began the settlement of the area. By 1831 the shape of the future city was being designed by surveyor James Thompson in a grid layout and by 1833 the village had a population of

[11] Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954*, (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2017).
[12] Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivism 1890s-1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 176.

five hundred residents.[13] The location of Chicago on a key waterway as well as becoming the center of a forty-seven-hundred-mile network of railroad tracks that reached across America in the 1850s, positioned it as a substantial hub for the import and export of goods, mainly meat, grain, and timber. United States Census records show that in 1840 the population of Chicago was 4,470 increasing to 29,963 in 1850, and by 1870 it was 298,977.[14] This massive growth in population in such a short time frame can be attributed to the expansion of the railroad network as well as the Union Stock Yards opening adjacent to the railroad tracks in 1865. Chicago developed into a manufacturing center with iron and steel industries housing their operations in sites on the Calumet River in the 1880s. This detail is particularly important as the Calumet Industrial area was chosen as the location for the Altgeld Gardens public housing project in the 1940s and would become the home of Hazel Johnson, so decisions made about land use would directly impact the health of the residents sixty years later. The environmental hazards of pollution from the factories and railroads as well as solid waste by-products of the meat packing industry including animal carcasses, manure, hair, and fat that were dumped into the south branch of the Chicago River would be the focus of Mary McDowell's campaign in the Back of the Yards district from 1900, which was located next to the Union Stock Yards industrial area.

The sudden growth in Chicago's population, which more than doubled between 1870 and 1890 to 1,099,850, was linked to immigration from Europe and people seeking employment opportunities in the city's industries.[15] This rapid increase in people living closely together, often in poor quality overcrowded housing with little or no sanitation,

---

[13] Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 13-18.
[14] Louise Carroll Wade, *Chicago's Pride: The Stockyards, Packingtown, and Environs in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p.3. Census Records available at: Department of Commerce, U.S Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of The United States 1920: State Compendium Illinois from 1840-1920*, < https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/06229686v8-13ch5.pdf> [accessed 10 January 2022] p.8.
[15] U.S Bureau of the Census, *State Compendium Illinois from 1840-1920,* p.8.

caused terrible conditions and environmental degradation. It further led to the problem of garbage in the streets and alleys which was often neglected by public officials because collection and removal was the responsibility of private contractors. For the civics department of the CWC and Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House Settlement, these issues would dominate their public reform activities.

Chicago's growth into America's Second City, both in terms of population and economic output, and the resulting environmental degradation would necessitate a response that was based on combatting environmental inequality between inhabitants of the city. This was because the people most affected by detrimental environmental conditions tended to be those from minority ethnic and racial groups employed in low-paying occupations, a focus that underpinned the activism of women in Chicago from the late nineteenth century through to the 1990s.

Sources

In order to understand how women viewed their roles and activities according to gender, race, and class it is vital to focus on their own accounts. The most valuable sources of information for this thesis are the organisational records of the women's clubs and departments, Mary McDowell's records and papers, and the records for PCR, compiled by Hazel Johnson. This included meeting minutes, annual reports, reports of specific committees, newsletters and press releases. These records contain evidence of specific strategies that were employed as well as how they built alliances with external agencies and networks with other women-led organisations. This allows for an in-depth understanding of what motivated these women as well as the obstacles they faced. Examining these records reveals how women negotiated their place in the public sphere in the face of often considerable opposition, and subverted notions of gender in the process. They recorded their encounters with public officials and the

press, which were both positive and negative, thus disclosing how they adapted their rhetoric to respond to negative criticisms.

Another important source highlighting differing viewpoints is newspapers. The reports and articles published in African American and white, local and national newspapers highlight the work of these women as well as public perceptions of it. They further demonstrate how the wider population viewed the communities that these women engaged with, including those of African American migrants from the Southern states, in a harmful manner which perpetuated racist stereotypes. These newspaper reports confirm how class and race-based assumptions prevailed in the Progressive Era and influenced the work of the CUL in the 1920s, 1940s and beyond. The news reports from Hazel Johnson's papers show how she used race and class distinctions in her favour to further her argument that the residents of Altgeld Gardens were the victims of environmental racism and how she employed a public relations campaign to publicise educational outreach programmes.

A variety of studies informed the direction of this thesis including the work of Washington, Unger, Flanagan and David Pellow with *Garbage Wars*, his discussion of garbage and environmental justice in Chicago.[16] In fact it was during a seminar in 2003, on environmental racism taught by Pellow at the University of California, San Diego, that an interest in how ordinary people contested powerful political and economic forces emerged. This interest was also rooted in the idea of persevering in the face of adversity and seemingly insurmountable obstacles and how groups and individuals empowered themselves. The above-named authors successfully expand the field of environmental history to incorporate the roles of women as well as situating their work within an environmental justice framework. Rosalind Rosenberg's work on separate spheres provided a particular insight into the societal expectations of Progressive Era female reformers and how they contested these

[16] David Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004)

views. This served as an essential starting point to examine the concept of municipal housekeeping and how this was about more than just women cleaning the streets as they would their homes. It also explored ideas of sexual polarity and the exclusively female qualities of passivity and hyper-sensitivity that men seem to assume all women should be judged on. This assessment proved to be evident, even in perceptions of women in the later years of the twentieth century. Robert Gottlieb's ground-breaking 1993 study *Forcing the Spring* expanded the meanings of environmentalism from preserving nature, that is outside of cities, to one that included urban and industrial environmental concerns.[17] His work was crucial in introducing the Progressive-Era reform agenda into the narrative of environmental history and this encouraged further research into the intersection of gender, race, and class in environmental movements which has proved invaluable in the research of this thesis.

A further field of study that provides a framework for examining municipal housekeeping is that of a feminine rhetoric concerning motherhood, family and the community. This has been articulated by environmental historians and communication studies scholars as a method of legitimising women's activities in the public sphere of environmental justice. Nancy Unger argues that this was 'an arena in which their prescribed gender role as altruistic caregivers was a credential rather than a handicap'.[18] Although she was referring to Progressive-Era female reformers, this can also be related to the activities of the civics departments of the CUL in the 1920s and 1940s, and organisations in the late 1970s and after. The evidence of a deliberate, strategic use of a feminine rhetoric is further supported by communication studies scholars Jennifer Peeples and Kevin De Luca in their analysis in *Empowering Ourselves*, a publication from the Center for Health, Environment & Justice. This report includes transcripts from the 1987 Women in Toxic Organizing

[17] Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement,* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1993),
[18] Nancy Unger, 'The Role of Gender in Environmental Justice', *Environmental Justice*, 1:3 (2008), 115-120 (p.6). < https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2008.0523> [accessed 15 December 2020]

conference held in Arlington, Virginia. They assert that 'today community activists use what appears to be a liability, their gender-especially their roles as mothers and housewives-as potent rhetorical resources'.[19] This perception that the role of mother, community member, or housewife authenticated participation in public activism is a common theme shared by all of the organisations and individuals in this thesis.

Terminology

It is necessary to detail the definitions of specific terminology employed in this thesis as these have informed the analysis of sources and shaped the contentions put forward. This terminology has evolved in relation to the context it has been utilised in but several of the terms employed in this study apply to historical contexts just as much as they do to a more modern one. Specifically, the thesis utilises concepts of the environment, environmental inequality, environmental racism and environmental justice, which will now be defined.

The environment is defined as where we live, work, and learn. Within this space, environmental activism or environmentalism occurs as well as in non-human natural environments such as forests, parks, and oceans. Robert Gottlieb moves what constitutes environmentalism beyond management and preservation of natural resources to incorporate a space where racial, social, and economic justice are intertwined with the protection of public health from environmental threats.[20] Chicago is a prime example of how the environment of an urban city is shaped by human actions as all of the environmental hazards discussed in this thesis were a result of industrialisation and urbanisation. This was through waste practices of industry as well as the effects of huge increases in the population without the required sanitary infrastructure or adequate housing to support it.

[19] Jennifer A. Peeples & Kevin M. DeLuca, 'The Truth of the Matter: Motherhood, Community and Environmental Justice', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 29:1 (2006), 59-87 (p.61).
[20] Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*.

Environmental inequality is a central theme of this thesis and has been succinctly expressed by sociologist Liam Downey as the disparate exposures, and health and social impacts of environmental issues based on ethnicity and class.[21] The women's organisations and individuals examined here were all engaged in addressing this inequality that primarily affected immigrant and segregated African American communities in Chicago from the 1890s onwards. Expanding this definition to one of environmental racism incorporates deliberate practices by external parties which sociologist Bunyan Bryant defines as 'the unequal protection against toxic and hazardous waste exposure and the systematic exclusion of people of color from decisions affecting their communities'.[22] This is significant because neighbourhoods such as the Back of the Yards had no part in deciding if another municipal waste dump should be located where they lived. This is further elaborated upon by David Pellow who states 'environmental racism is a form of *environmental inequality* which occurs when a particular social group – not necessarily a racial or ethnic group – is burdened with environmental hazards'.[23] So the broader definition of environmental inequality will be employed to incorporate both class and race as factors in the disproportionate exposure to degraded environmental conditions and to denote how these groups were excluded from decisions that would ultimately affect their health.

There is no doubt that the women of the CWC, Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, The Community Organisation Department of the CUL, and Hazel Johnson and PCR were seeking environmental justice as a remedy to counter environmental inequalities. The United States Environmental Protection Agency currently defines environmental justice as:

---

[21] Liam Downey, 'Assessing Environmental Inequality: How the Conclusions We Draw Vary According to the Definitions We Employ', National Institute of Health, *Social Spectr,* 25.3 (2011) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3162366/pdf/nihms317109.pdf> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

[22] Bunyan Bryant, ed., *Environmental Justice: Issues, Policies, and Solutions* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1995) p. 6.

[23] Pellow, *Garbage Wars*, p. 8.

> The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys: the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.[24]

Environmental justice is a broad term that also incorporates the study of the cumulative impacts of existing environmental hazards and the effects of segregated housing patterns.[25] This aspect is essential to understanding how Chicago neighbourhoods developed in the way they did, and also to demonstrate the formidable external factors of prescribed land use and patterns of population settlement that women were contending with in their campaigns for environmental justice.

Chapter Outline

Each chapter in this thesis focusses on an organisation or individual and examines their specific activities in challenging environmental inequalities. The chapters are arranged in chronological in order to highlight the links that these women shared as well as to demonstrate how previous decisions, such as land use and restrictive housing policies, would affect subsequent communities. This structure also facilitates an understanding of how, despite the wide-ranging time period covered, each organisation or individual shared similar experiences on account of their gender. All chapters will explore the aims of these women, and the strategies they employed to increase support for their public activism, to explain how they contested traditional notions of womanhood and created a distinctive identity for themselves and their organisations. They will further discuss external perceptions, both in support of and in opposition to, women's public work as evidence that these women all tended to be characterised according to the norms of a separate spheres ideology.

---

[24] Environmental Protection Agency, *Environmental Justice* (2019) <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice> [Accessed 13 March 2022]

[25] Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental justice movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p.16.

Chapter one details how and why early women's clubs formed prior to 1890 and how the Chicago Woman's Club, founded in 1876, and the Ladies' Health Protective Association of New York, founded in 1884, were pioneering organisations. Both of these clubs evolved into groups that directed their activities toward fighting environmental inequalities and the CWC in particular was ground-breaking in their organisational structure of separate committees that carried out investigations into particular areas of urban life. This structure was replicated by other women's clubs across the United States, but more significantly, the work of the CWC directly influenced Jane Addams and Mary McDowell and they were the first public association in Chicago that promoted inter-racial collaboration. The CWC and LHPA records contain explicit references to municipal housekeeping, and these are used to analyse how this concept evolved into a form of resistance against dominant power structures, in a time when women were politically disenfranchised and constrained by ideals of domesticity. This chapter explains the development of women's clubs and how this was significant in influencing the formation of successive clubs, including African American organisations.

Chapter two details the formation of African American women's clubs and how they shared a similar purpose to white women's clubs but also purposefully focussed their activities on African American communities because no other organisation was doing so. These groups organised in response to rising levels of migration from the South to Northern cities predicated on the rapid industrialisation of cities and increased employment opportunities there. Leading these city clubs was the National Association of Colored Women, established in 1896 with Mary Church Terrell serving as the first president. One of their goals was to improve social and economic opportunities for African Americans as well as defend the character of African American women. Their motto was 'lifting as we climb' and they promoted an ideology of respectability. This chapter explores how these clubwomen

created their own unique gender identity that incorporated municipal housekeeping and their roles of civic mother but was rooted in the realities of segregation and pervasive racial prejudice. It further discusses the collaboration between Fannie Barrier-Williams, a noted clubwoman, and the CWC in the founding of the first African American settlement house in Chicago. The work of the NACW was essential in laying the foundations for the Chicago Urban League, formed in 1917, and it highlights the significant role of African American women in urban environmental reform efforts.

Chapter three develops the analysis of how women were instrumental in early movements for environmental justice in Chicago. It focusses on prominent reformers Jane Addams and Mary McDowell and their work in immigrant communities, where they established settlement houses. Both of these women achieved prominent public appointments in municipal sanitation provision because of their public activism, and they both explicitly challenged male power structures in industry and municipal government. The environmental conditions in the Twentieth Ward and the Back of the Yards communities will be detailed to demonstrate how class and ethnicity determined who was worst affected by environmental hazards and the methods Addams and McDowell employed to improve conditions for their neighbourhoods. Although women's public roles had evolved thanks to organisations such as the CWC, Addams and McDowell still faced a largely negative reception because they were women and characterised by imposed ideas of what was appropriate activity and behaviour for a female. This chapter explains that Addams and McDowell were so important because they experienced first-hand the degraded environmental conditions and created a new form of expertise in sanitation by carrying out detailed surveys and investigations, which is also a strategy used by modern environmental justice organisations. They collaborated with the University of Chicago and public health officials to advance their aims and succeeded in changing policies. This chapter marks a particular moment in the development of women's

work at the forefront of efforts to ameliorate harmful environmental conditions in specific neighbourhoods.

Chapter four documents the evolution of African American organising against environmental inequality in Chicago, from women's clubs working with communities, to those communities empowering themselves and forming their own block clubs to deal with issues that directly affected them. This is done through an analysis of the work of the Chicago Urban League and its female-led civics departments, particularly in the 1920s and the 1940s. Alva Maxey was instrumental in formally organising the block residents and block clubs are still operational today. These were some of the first grassroots groups in Chicago to deal with specific issues in their neighbourhoods and this is the same model that Hazel Johnson followed in Altgeld Gardens. The CUL was operating in segregated areas, and this was enforced by racially restrictive covenants that prohibited African Americans from moving to a healthier environment, mostly inhabited by whites. As a result of this restriction, they sought to conserve their existing environments through aesthetic improvements and advances in public health. This was facilitated by the CUL and women such as Maxey who contended with prevailing racist attitudes as well as prejudicial housing policies. This chapter also explains how these policies led to segregated public housing projects in Chicago, one of which was Altgeld Gardens where Hazel Johnson would move to in 1962.

Chapter five documents how Hazel Johnson founded People for Community Recovery in 1979, the first grassroots environmental justice organisation situated in a public housing project. It explores how her activism was framed by dominant perceptions of gender, race, and class and how she countered negative perceptions of these categorisations. The history of Altgeld Gardens is discussed to show how historic land use and discriminatory housing policies meant that from the beginning, this community was disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards because it was built on an old sewage farm, in an area

surrounded by toxic waste dumps, abandoned steel and iron factories, manufacturing plants, and contaminated waterways. This led Hazel Johnson terming this area as a 'toxic donut' and the residents as clear victims of environmental racism. Johnson needs to be included in any environmental justice narrative because she formed coalitions with international environmental organisations such as Greenpeace and was instrumental in strengthening the network of female-led grassroots organisation across the country. Her activities and strategies clearly refute Martin Melosi's contention that the environmental justice movement is 'limited by its stance on the issue of race versus class; its underestimation of its friends and its own exclusivity'. He also questions whether the issue is environmental racism or just poverty.[26] For Hazel Johnson, living in a historically segregated, low-income public housing project, it was definitely both of these factors. Her investigations demonstrate how experiential knowledge, in a similar manner to Addams and McDowell, was a valid form of expertise even if it was dismissed by those she was challenging. The final part of this chapter examines how women including Johnson, Cora Tucker and Lois Gibbs all used notions of domesticity to articulate their purpose and also how, even in the latter decades of the twentieth century, their activities were perceived in the context of Victorian concepts of femininity. However, these women subverted these concepts and claimed the prescription of hysterical housewives as their own.

All of the women discussed in this thesis, despite class and racial differences, shared experiences that were shaped by their female identities. Each chapter demonstrates how decisions and actions in preceding time periods would influence later women's work in the public sphere of environmental reform despite them operating within inequitable contexts. This thesis contends that women who fought environmental inequalities in Chicago from the

[26] Martin V. Melosi, 'Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History', *Environmental History Review*, 19:3 (1995) 1-16 (p.10).

1890s to the 1990s re-shaped concepts of the female gender and gendered space, creating a new identity for themselves and thus becoming much more than municipal housekeepers.

Chapter One - Early Organised Womanhood: The Chicago Woman's Club and the Ladies Health Protection Association of New York

The late nineteenth century witnessed an evolution of women's clubs in cities across America which subsequently developed into female-led environmental activism into the early years of the twentieth century. The first female-led organisation in Chicago was the Chicago Sorosis Club, formed in 1868 by Kate Doggett and Myra Bradwell to promote female suffrage. Both of these women were political activists and Doggett was a noted botanist. Bradwell was the first woman to pass the Illinois bar exam in 1869 but was prohibited from practicing law by the Illinois Supreme Court. She fought this decision in the Supreme Court of the United States in 1873 but lost with several of the Justices agreeing that 'the paramount destiny and mission of woman are to fulfil the noble and benign offices of wife and mother'.[1] Bradwell's experience highlights the limited opportunities that educated and professional women had, and it underscores how significant women's clubs were because they provided a space where women could share their experiences and also form coalitions to deal with issues that they felt needed their attention. These issues were ones that were usually neglected or ignored by male city officials. The Chicago Sorosis club was divided into those who argued for universal suffrage for African American and white women, rejecting educational and property rights requirements for voting, and those who wanted to focus on women's rights in broader terms.[2]

This club was initially modelled on the Sorosis Club in New York, formed by Jane Cunningham Croly in 1868 after she was excluded from a dinner held by the New York Press Club because she was a woman. As well as suffrage, women organised for literary and

---

[1] Justice Joseph P. Bradley summarised the prevalent view of society about women's appropriate place in his opinion the *Bradwell v. Illinois* case in 1873. Available at: Supreme Court of the United States, *Lady Lawyers: The Rise of Women Attorneys and the Supreme Court* <https://www.supremecourt.gov/visiting/exhibitions/LadyLawyers/section1.aspx> [Accessed 13 March 2022

[2] Maureen Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City 1871-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 31.

cultural enrichment. An example of this type of organisation was the Fortnightly Club, founded by Kate Doggett in 1873 which explicitly distanced itself from involvement in municipal politics. In contrast to this was the Chicago Woman's Club (CWC), formed in 1876, which directly participated in municipal life with a range of reform activities including public education and protection of workers. The CWC was the first organisation of its kind that had a clear structure of committees dedicated to a specific set of issues with a lead investigator as well as support staff. Each committee actively petitioned city officials, produced reports on activities, and carried out research into issues ranging from working conditions in factories to the inadequate provision of garbage collection services. These early clubs were significant because they provided middle class women with a space beyond the limits of their homes where they could build networks and create a shared identity based on issues that directly affected their lives and not the lives of men. These women were operating in a society which still upheld the Victorian ideals of domesticity and had a restricted notion of femininity, whilst the same society was beginning to promote opportunities for middle class women, including access to higher education, afforded by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. What these women's clubs did was bridge the divide between these two worlds and created a new understanding for these women of their gender identities.[3]

This chapter will focus on the white, middle-class women's clubs in Chicago and offer a comparison with clubs in New York in order to establish the various reasons these organisations were formed, as well as how they were influential in reshaping notions of women's roles and what were appropriate activities for them to focus on. In the years after the end of the Civil War, America was experiencing a seismic change in all aspects of society and as historian Rosalind Rosenberg contends, because women were joining men in the outside world, changes in the traditional division of sex roles was viewed as a serious threat

[3] Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p.xiv.

which had to be countered with a clear line between suitable activities for men and women.[4] This underlying divide would determine how women's clubs had to adapt their strategies in order to advance their reform goals.

The growth and popularity of women's city clubs that responded to the issues faced by a rapidly urbanising and industrialising society has been documented with a particular focus on the maternalistic rhetoric these organisations employed and the growth of the ideology of municipal housekeeping. Work by scholars including Nancy Unger, Maureen Flanagan and Robert Gottlieb illuminates how groups of white, middle-class women, some of whom had been educated at the new women's colleges, such as Vassar College that was founded in 1861, navigated the public sphere of reform as an extension of their domestic roles and how this characteristic of domestic experience was often used as a justification for their activities.

It is this explanation that has led to historian Martin Melosi labelling clubwomen involved in Progressive Era reform as moralistic and paternalistic in their goals, imposing their middle-class values on working class people. This distinction that these clubwomen were making decisions for others, rather than involving them undermines the work that these women undertook to improve sanitary and public health conditions for those who were worst affected. He further contends that municipal housekeeping was 'a layman's perception of a complex environmental problem'.[5] This claim that they did not know what they were talking about when it came to complex issues fails to understand that these women were conducting their work in male-dominated space that valued professional training over experience. They had to find alternative means of education precisely because they had been denied these opportunities and they were proposing a different solution to environmental problems based

[4] Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, p.xv.
[5] Martin V. Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), p. 99.

on their own experiences, because the current systems were inadequate. Melosi's statement also devalues the contribution of these women to the protection of public health, which was at the heart of their activities. Without their intervention, it is highly likely that conditions would have continued to deteriorate because these women were instrumental in raising public awareness and campaigning for change. Although there were aspects of a moralistic outlook in clubwomen's rhetoric, which will be explored throughout this thesis, this was intertwined with their perceptions of class and race. They were shaped by the context in which they were working, and of much greater importance than whether they acted in a paternalistic manner is how these women redefined the concept of the domestic sphere. This opened up opportunities for women in municipal reform after 1900, as will be examined in later chapters.

This ideology of municipal housekeeping was not solely used as a justification for women's activism but was also employed in a strategic manner. Among other things, it served as a critique of male municipal governance, as a method of increasing membership of women's clubs by appealing to women who were hesitant to join, and as a way of appeasing and manoeuvring male city officials who were unsupportive. Clubwomen began to identify as municipal housekeepers as early as 1876 and this identity was not solely based on domestic characteristics being used in defence of women's public activism but as a vehicle for social and environmental reform. This chapter seeks to build on, and contend with, the work of Melosi, Flanagan, Unger and Gottlieb to explore how this gendered identity deserves a more in-depth examination than it has previously received, to show how women were disrupting established political practices as well as traditional notions of gender differences.

An examination of the records of several early clubs including the Ladies Health Protective Association (LHPA) in New York, organised in 1884, and the CWC established in 1876 conveys a sense of how these clubwomen recognised and negotiated the barriers that

impeded them.[6] It also shows how their primary aims were based on motivations including aesthetic environmental concerns and a concern for wider civic betterment. A further source of analysis is presented in newspaper reports which provide an insight into the public discourse surrounding the activities of women's clubs. These reports contain both positive and negative representations of women's activism and reveal the entrenched views of what male writers considered to be appropriate work for women, as well as the Victorian doctrine that women are more emotional than men and thus not suited to work in the public sphere. Understanding how the clubwomen themselves, as well as later historians, viewed the concept of municipal housekeeping enables further discussion on how women's clubs' activities evolved from concerns in their immediate environment to the wider sphere of urban environmental reform, and how this influenced subsequent organisations in Chicago. The significance of their activities in the public domain of politics and reform, whether successful or not, needs to be explored further to understand how organised womanhood links with the formation of activist women's clubs and the settlement houses that were founded in the 1900s, and the work of the Chicago Urban League (CUL) in the 1920s and 1940s as these groups which included specific departments for civic improvement, had a specific focus on the environment and would face similar issues and barriers to those of the modern environmental justice movement. Many of the members of the CWC formed relationships that crossed race and class lines, and these members worked with other organisations in the city or set up their own groups and settlement houses to address environmental inequalities.

[6] The name of the Chicago Women's Club was changed in 1895 to the Chicago Woman's Club

Early Club Formation: The Chicago Woman's Club and the Ladies Health Protective Association of New York

Major cities like New York and Chicago underwent transformations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and would come to embody what urban historian Lewis Mumford termed 'industrial cities' characterised by manufacturing industries, massive populations and slum housing districts.[7] United States Census records show that in 1870 the population of Chicago was 298,977 and had increased dramatically to 1,099,850 by 1890.[8] With rapid industrialisation came economic growth but also environmental issues including poor water quality, pollution, solid and hazardous waste disposal and sanitation problems; issues that urban environmental historian Robert Gottlieb classifies as endemic in the period from the 1860s through to the World War I.[9] These hazards were the consequences of the multitude of factories in the industrial city and the rise in population due to mass immigration with limited municipal planning and oversight. There was little-to-no regulation on waste disposal and garbage collection was minimal, resulting in localised environmental and health problems. Gottlieb asserts that environmental degradation was viewed as a necessary by-product of urban and industrial growth and the responsibility for these hazards was often placed on the communities directly affected rather than with civic leaders or the polluting industries.[10] A further aspect of environmental degradation concerned the rise of tenements which will be discussed later in this chapter but that was a direct result of the rise of the industrial city. It was these environmental concerns that clubwomen turned their attention to at this time.

The purposes of forming women's organisations were varied. In the 1860s and 1870s, women's clubs were started for a variety of reasons including as hubs of literature and

---

[7] Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), pp. 147-49.
[8] Department of Commerce, U.S Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of The United States 1920: State Compendium Illinois from 1840-1920*, < https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/06229686v8-13ch5.pdf> [accessed 10 January 2022] p.8.
[9] Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, rev.edn. (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005), p. 89.
[10] Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*. p.91.

culture, such as the Chicago branch of the Fortnightly Club organised in 1873 by Kate Doggett, and suffrage, which was the focus of the Chicago Sorosis Club founded in 1868. A number of clubs were formed to deal directly with the effects of industrialisation rather than suffrage and some clubs had multiple committees which dealt with a broad range of issues. One view on why women's clubs formed at this time is that due to industrialisation, the middle-class household was changed from one of production to consumption. Women in these social strata had more free time because of the shift of production from the home to the factories.[11] This may have been partially true; however the records of the women's clubs indicate that their early concerns and justifications for entering the sphere of reform were due more to a desire to improve communities that were being affected by pollutants rather than having nothing better to do. The issues of concern thus drove the formation of the clubs which contradicts the argument that they were paternalistic in their outlook. These middle-class women recognised that they were in a privileged position and that this should be used to assist others. Female voluntary organisations such as the LHPA and CWC occupied a space between the public and the private spheres, as Sara Evans contends, and the location between the state and domestic life provided an essential link between the two.[12] This construction of a new space between the public and the private sphere for women is indicative of how vital these organisations were in challenging notions of female passivity and also how they redefined what constituted the female sphere.

This was particularly significant for women's clubs that were involved in municipal reform because these women had entered a space that was focused on politics and expertise, which was often used to prevent them from advancing their environmental reform agendas

[11] Nancy S. Dye, 'Introduction', in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era,* Noralee Frankel & Nancy S. Dye eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), pp. 1-10 (p.4)
[12] Sara M. Evans 'Women's History and Political Theory: Toward a Feminist Approach to Public Life', in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism,* ed. by Nancy M. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) pp. 119-39 (p.129)

and was governed by men who tended to prioritise financial interests over all others. As urban historian Maureen Flanagan succinctly argues, 'Chicago women wanted an activist municipal government that would secure a common welfare for all Chicago residents and most Chicago men preferred a government whose first priority was to protect the economic desires of men'.[13] These conflicting ideals of how the city should be governed would characterise the reform work of clubwomen and provide the impetus for the formation of women's clubs dedicated to city-wide environmental reform in the early years of the twentieth century.

The range of women's clubs that organised between 1868 and 1884 across America covered a broad remit but local organisations such as the CWC and the LHPA were primarily formed because of the absence of a club that met their needs. Comparing the LHPA in New York and the CWC in Chicago expands the dialogue surrounding women's involvement in environmental reform activities in the initial years of the Progressive Era to demonstrate how these two organisations were influential in reshaping notions of a woman's place in public life. Although the LHPA was initially concerned with the effects of odours on their privileged neighbourhood, they very rapidly broadened their focus to the environmental impact of industrial practices on the wider health of the city, as evidenced in their designation as a protective association. Martin Melosi has linked this with progressive ideals and claimed that 'citizens' organisations and their allies borrowed the era's civic-mindedness, its emphasis on aesthetics and its moralistic tone'.[14] However, this critique fails to explain how these groups took an active role in addressing these hazards for the improvement of public health. The criticism that women's clubs such as the LHPA were primarily concerned with the aesthetic effects of industrial practices probably originates from the way that some of the clubwomen framed their struggle. This is seen in a speech given at the first convention of the LHPA in

[13] Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts,* p. 10.
[14] Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities*, p. 91.

1896, in which President Mary Trautmann described the catalyst for the eventual formation for the organisation:

> 'Eleven women residing on Beekman Hill, whose houses are beautifully located on a high bluff overlooking the East River, with everything desirable to make them healthful, were so outraged at the continuance of the foul odors which polluted the atmosphere of the entire neighborhood…that they resolved to investigate the cause of this nuisance'.[15]

Beekman Hill was an upper-class neighbourhood that was affected by odours from an accumulation of manure at a nearby slaughterhouse but not directly affected by other environmental hazards such as garbage or contaminated water. This community was an otherwise healthy place that was removed from the tenements of New York, both in location and also in the standard of the residences. According to Max Weber's definition of class, these women were in a higher economic position because of the exclusive nature of their residences, and they had status because of where they lived.[16] The members of the LHPA occupied a privileged social space and in 1884 were concerned with keeping their own neighbourhoods beautiful, so in this instance they were certainly concerned with the appearance of their neighbourhoods. However, to reduce their values to primarily aesthetic ones ignores how this organisation evolved into an activist group that sought direct action in response to environmental concerns. The initial reason they formed was because they noticed an issue that directly affected them which was how many grassroots organisations, including block clubs, were also started. Also, although a problem of foul odours can be reduced to an aesthetic concern, the source is usually detrimental to public health and the LHPA recognised this.

According to the certificate of incorporation, the primary aim of the LHPA was that 'the particular business and object is to protect the health of the people of the city of New

[15] Proceedings of the First Convention of the Ladies' Health Protective Association of New York – May 14-15 (1896) pp. 41-42.
[16] Max Weber, 'Class, Status, Party', in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp.180-95.

York by taking such action as may secure the enforcement of existing sanitary laws and regulations'.[17] Seeking to enforce existing sanitary laws also indicates how the LHPA, despite having no political power, would have to learn about the regulations already in place in order to ascertain if they were being disregarded. This marked a clear departure from clubs that pursued cultural enrichment, such as literary societies, to organisations that confronted and critiqued the dominant political systems of the city. This demonstrates how they were proposing alternative methods of expertise through research and experience as well as having to undertake their own education. This strategy continued into the twentieth century and used by women in the environmental justice movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Although an initial aim was to protect their own homes from foul odours, the LHPA quickly evolved into an organisation that was concerned with the wider damaging impact on public health caused by environmental hazards, much like later women's clubs that formed from 1910 onwards. They realised that they were not the only ones affected by unsanitary practices and that there were underlying issues of social inequality which needed addressing. They further realised that there was little regulation of industrial waste and this became a primary focus for them.

In contrast to the evolution of the LHPA from a club with a very specific remit, the Chicago Woman's Club was the first women's club with a specific focus on broader municipal reform. It was formed in 1876 as an organisation with a broader sphere of activity than an immediate neighbourhood concern that would be a model for successive women's clubs in the Progressive Era. In parallel with the LHPA, it was also a women's organisation that went beyond traditional women's work.[18] Caroline M. Brown founded it as 'a club of women in Chicago, not so much for mental culture, but to take up the live issues of this world

[17] W.H Tolman, *Municipal Reform Movements in the United States* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895) p. 171.
[18] Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts,* p. 32.

we live in'.[19] Statements such as these indicate that literary societies such as the Fortnightly Club were seen as a more traditional space for women and that aim of the CWC was to operate in an unconventional space. By moving away from the model of these cultural clubs, the CWC was instrumental in challenging what were considered to be appropriate activities for women. The CWC was not formed in response to a specific environmental concern like the LHPA, but the organisational structure that originated with the CWC was then replicated in later clubs. This was significant because no other organisation had existed in this form as the Fortnightly Club and Sorosis operated on the basis of a less defined agenda, holding meetings and inviting guest speakers to lecture on a specific topic at monthly meetings. The structure of the CWC consisted of named committees with nominated women who led these departments, carried out systematic investigations, and proposed and enacted solutions to an array of issues including the safety of factory workers and a lack of women on the Education Board of the city. The committees were titled Home, Education, Philanthropy and Reform and as Brown has noted, this was so that 'timid souls who feared that woman might get outside her sphere could surely not object to serving in the interests of home'.[20] Although Brown's language is ambiguous and could be interpreted as relating to women who were hesitant to join a women's club that was operating outside of the private, female sphere of the home (as indicated by the word 'timid'), her statement could also refer to men who may have felt that meeting in this way was not in keeping with women's traditional roles (as implied with the comment 'that woman might get outside her sphere'). This resonates with Sara Evans's contention that these clubs occupied a space between the private sphere of home and the public sphere of politics. Brown's reasoning also illustrates one of the tenets of municipal

[19] Henriette Greenebaum Frank and Amalie Hofer Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club for the First Forty Years of Its Organisation, 1876-1916* (Chicago Woman's Club, Chicago, 1916), p. 16.
[20] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p.16.

housekeeping that was practiced by women's clubs, not just as a justification for their activities but as a way of mollifying male city officials.

As Maureen Flanagan highlights, the CWC occupies a significant space in the history of women's clubs in that it had a structure of committees that was new to women's organisations.[21] Committees on the home, education and reform would be seen in later organisations including the African American Chicago Urban League formed in 1917. Members of the CWC, such as Jane Addams, would also be instrumental in advancing environmental reform into the twentieth century, indicating that the early work of the CWC would inspire and provide a template for not only local organisations but also national ones. An example of this national influence was seen in a letter presented at a meeting on 20 May 1885 from a Miss Swazey of New Orleans who wrote that a successful organisation had been formed in the city, 'suggested by, and formed after the plan of the Chicago Woman's Club'.[22] The influence of the CWC was seen in its organisational structure and also in its purpose which was to care for 'not only the fortunately placed in life, but the step-children of fortune, those who needed mothering and guidance'.[23] This maternalistic rhetoric was commonplace in the documents of various organisations and spoke to the extension of domestic duties into civic life. The guidance provided also became one of the key strategies employed to combat unsanitary environmental conditions in the form of neighbourhood-based campaigns and education in order for those communities to participate in their own civic betterment, a strategy that was employed by civic departments of the CUL from 1917 through to the activities it conducts today.

In the above statement about the need for 'mothering and guidance' there is evidence of a moralistic tone which can be attributed to the predominance of white, middle-class

[21] Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts*, p. 32.
[22] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p. 48.
[23] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*. p. 11.

women in the club movement. As they saw it, their place within the social hierarchy was an asset and to be used to benefit those in a less fortunate position. In keeping with sociologist Max Weber's definition of class that proposes how status relates to the respect or esteem an individual is shown by society,[24] they used their positions to garner respect as a way of affirming their position in this social hierarchy, and they further saw it as their moral duty to use their intelligence to advance environmental reform initiatives. The way in which class intersected with the aims of women's clubs was as a moral duty to be undertaken because they were in a position that allowed them to do so. In 1896, for example, Mary Trautmann implored the members of the LHPA to look beyond the obstructions they faced because 'we were earnest women, fully aroused to the necessity of action for the benefit of those who were less fortunate in life, and unable to help themselves'.[25] Trautmann was probably referring to the neighbourhoods made up of tenement housing that were prevalent during the Progressive Era. This implies that their actions would benefit the poorer members of society who may have been unable to help themselves through a lack of education, financial means, or because they were immigrants, thus lacking status and power.

As this shows, in the initial establishment of organised womanhood, class was often used as a rationale for reform activities. An article appearing in *The Outlook*, a weekly magazine published in New York, about the appointment of hygiene inspectors reiterated these class-based views of the women's clubs. 'Women of wealth and position and intelligence have given moral and social support', the article stated, indicating the perceptions of a higher-class position that these women had.[26] Their perceived moral duty arose out of their belief that their privileged position allowed them certain benefits that were not accessible to others, and their education and intelligence would enable them to circumvent

[24] Weber, 'Class, Status, Party', in *Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. Gerth and Mills, pp.180-95.
[25] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15 1896, p.43.
[26] The Larger Opportunity' *The Outlook* 12 August 1893, p.305.

the impediments they faced. In this respect, the purpose of the LHPA and the CWC were the same based on their perceptions of their social class, although both organisations evolved from a paternalistic position of helping those less fortunate to ones that encouraged education and self-improvement.

During this period, membership of women's clubs was also generally restricted to the middle-classes and organised according to race, with separate clubs for white women and African American women. White women's clubs that admitted African American members were the exception rather than the rule. The CWC differed from the LHPA and many other woman's clubs because it was the first multi-racial women's club. This was in direct opposition to the national umbrella organisation, the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) that formed in 1890, and denied membership based on race. In a departure from the previously exclusively white membership, the CWC voted in 1894 that they would 'condition its membership on character and intelligence, without restriction of race or color'.[27] This resolution was put forward by Celia Parker Woolley, who would later be a member of the founding committee of the Chicago Urban League, and marked a significant point in race relations between middle-class white and African American women that crossed the colour line. In 1895, President Ada Sweet wrote in her annual report that this vote was remarkable. She concluded that 'it was right and proper for the Club to clearly enunciate its opinion upon the subject of race and color prejudice, and to refuse to aid its continuance or growth'.[28] This public declaration of racial collaboration was extraordinary at the time because African American clubwomen were prohibited from joining other white women's clubs as seen by the exclusion of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of the Women's Era Club in Boston from the national convention of the GFWC in 1900.

[27] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p. 145.
[28] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p. 145.

In another first for Chicago, Celia Parker Woolley and her husband founded the Frederick Douglas Center settlement house. Elizabeth Lindsey Davis, who was a prominent African American clubwoman in Chicago and president of the National Association of Colored Women from 1901 to 1906, recounted:

> 'Credit for the first effort towards inter-racial co-operation belongs to Mrs. Celia Parker Woolley, who came to live among colored people… she founded the Frederick Douglas Center to promote a just and amiable relationship between white and colored people…and encourage equal opportunity'.[29]

Historian Maureen Flanagan defines this cooperation as an 'openness to the principle of opposing racial discrimination' by the CWC.[30] And although there were instances of clubwomen working together, African American women had to form their own organisations in other cities and on a national level because they experienced additional prejudice on account of their race as well as their gender. This was further necessitated because there were no organisations whose primary concern was improving conditions for migrating African Americans from the South until the CUL was established in 1917. In this respect, the Chicago Woman's Club was the antecedent of a movement that would fight environmental inequalities whilst restructuring women's roles in public life and empowering them to transcend pervasive ideas about appropriate activities for women.

Municipal Housekeeping: More than Cleaning the Streets

A further similarity in these early organisations that would be echoed in all women's clubs engaged in civic betterment through the middle of the twentieth century was that the women who formed these organisations recognised they would face barriers from the outset. This opposition came from men and women who adhered to the restrictive Victorian views of femininity, because they were moving beyond traditional women's work. So the rhetoric of

[29] Elizabeth Lindsey Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs:1900-1922,* (Chicago, 1922) p. 36.
[30] Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts,* p. 49.

municipal housekeeping became a method to overcome these barriers as well as provide opportunities that surpassed previously limited activities for women.

Maureen Flanagan argues that municipal housekeeping has been viewed by scholars as women cleaning the city as they would their homes, and, as we have seen, Martin Melosi contends that municipal housekeeping was 'a layman's perception of a complex environmental problem'.[31] Both of these ideas fail to comprehend that municipal housekeeping was an ideology that was deliberately deployed in several key ways to advance the women's environmental reform agendas. It was used as a justification to external stakeholders for women engaging in the public sphere because it was predicated on a set of male assumptions about women's domestic roles, and it was used as a method of growing club membership by providing a rationale for women to engage in public activities. Municipal housekeeping was also utilised to critique men as being economically motivated. As Flanagan contends, it was 'a metaphor through which to articulate and establish a rather more comprehensive set of priorities for city government than the men of the time were prepared to imagine'.[32] Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House settlement house, also viewed municipal housekeeping through the lens of criticising the inaction of male city officials in respect of environmental reform.

The ideology of municipal housekeeping was adopted nation-wide by women's clubs and was viewed not only as a natural extension of women's duties in the home but as a specific area of expertise that could be applied to the whole city. A common critique of women who engaged in environmental reform, in the Progressive Era as well as more recently, was that they lacked expertise. As President of the LHPA Mary Trautmann succinctly commented, 'we were interfering in matters that did not concern us'.[33] This

[31] Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts*, p. 86 and Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities*, p. 99.
[32] Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts*, p. 86.
[33] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15 1896, pp. 42-43.

contention that taking public action to improve the health of the city was not the concern of women is evidence that the notion of separate spheres for men and women continued to influence the male view of organisations such as the LHPA and CWC well beyond the Progressive era. To counteract this external perception, women used the idea of municipal housekeeping as a means of expanding their sphere of influence and using their private, domestic expertise in the wider city. Historian Terrianne K. Schulte has defined this approach as taking the role of 'citizen experts who promoted civic activism and acted as a communication and information bridge between government officials and concerned citizens'.[34] This definition echoes clubwomen's perceptions of their municipal activism. As the LHPA declared in their first annual report published in 1897, 'it is the right of women to undertake these matters as they are brought into constant contact with the results of this housekeeping and will therefore be able to judge how it should properly be carried out'.[35] This view that it was not only their duty but their right re-enforces the belief that they had an expert knowledge in how to carry out these duties. Although it did not fit with the male definition of expertise, it was still valid because direct experience of these issues gave these women a unique insight into methods that could be used to solve them. The CWC also followed this argument, with President Caroline M. Brown articulating how clubwomen had assumed responsibilities outside the home to study the conditions of the city because it constituted the larger home.[36] It seemed natural to these clubwomen that they should expand their sphere because the city was the larger home to all inhabitants, and they could use their expertise to benefit all sectors of society.

Clubwomen also used assumptions about their domestic expertise to their advantage, promoting the idea that they could clean the city as they cleaned their homes. As Suellen Hoy

---

[34] Terrianne K. Schulte, 'Citizen Experts: The League of Women Voters and Environmental Conservation' *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 30 (2009), 1-29 (p. 3.)
[35] Report of the Ladies' Health Protective Association, 1894-1896
[36] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p. 15.

suggests ‘most people believed that women had certain intuitive convictions when it came to matters of order and cleanliness’.[37] This view was reinforced by city officials such as Colonel George Waring, head of New York’s sanitation department and noted sewer engineer. He declared that matters of sanitation ‘required the sort of systematized attention to detail that developed more naturally out of the habit of good housekeeping’.[38] Certainly this male view, from a recognised expert in a position of public power, enabled women’s clubs to have their voices heard. Expressing the idea of municipal housekeeping as an extension of their private, domestic duties was a non-threatening method of achieving their wider aims as these women recognised they would be perceived as inexpert and they adjusted their methods accordingly, including taking advantage of their connections with prominent men in the city. It was a significant strategy as it was acceptable to a wider audience, both men and women, and ‘demands for women’s wider opportunities were made palatable to those who sought to uphold traditional gender relationships’.[39] This resonates with Caroline M. Brown’s assertation there were those who ‘feared woman might get outside her sphere’ and demonstrates how women’s city clubs understood that their gender would serve as a barrier in environmental reform. So, they purposefully used the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping to legitimise their activities as well as provide a mechanism to move beyond previously limited opportunities.

Municipal housekeeping was further used as a means to criticise men’s indifferent attitudes toward environmental reform. In the years preceding reform programmes, industrialists such as Gustavus Swift and Cyrus McCormick, who owned meatpacking plants and developed agricultural machinery respectively, were exemplars of how individuals held

[37] Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 72.
[38] Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*. p. 73.
[39] Sara Hayden, ‘Negotiating femininity and power in the early twentieth century west: Domestic ideology and feminine style in Jeanette Rankin’s suffrage rhetoric’, *Communication Studies*, 50:2 (1999), 83-102 (p.86)

monopolies on specific businesses in Chicago. They were financed by men, often called 'Robber Barons', whose only interest was in making money through the labour of others, monopolising essential industries, and conducting unethical business practices. Men such as Cornelius Vanderbilt, who built his fortune in railroads and shipping, and George Pullman, who built railway sleeper cars in Chicago, were given free rein to amass fortunes at others' expense because there was virtually no government oversight of their activities or those of their industrial partners.[40] This allowed economic interests and pursuits to dominate urban and industrial life and these priorities were placed above the health and welfare of residents and workers, who often endured appalling living and working conditions. The rapid expansion of industrial facilities also directly led to harmful waste practices which will be explored further in chapter three.

The business development of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company in Chicago typifies the industrialisation of the post-Civil War period. Cyrus McCormick had invented a series of mechanical reapers in the decades before the war and then moved to Chicago. By the 1860s, the McCormick Reaper Works occupied five buildings that were each between two and five stories, providing 110,000 square feet of space with a huge yard and dock on the Chicago River's main branch.[41] This is significant detail as it was a proposed 15% wage cut and deplorable working conditions including hours of work, that precipitated the Haymarket Riot on the 4th of May 1886. The day before the riot, or massacre as some referred to it, police and strikers at McCormick's company had clashed resulting in one fatality and multiple, severe injuries. This event led to a mass meeting of striking labourers and labour leaders in Haymarket Square where a bomb was set off by an unknown agitator. Police officers were killed, and others injured leading to retaliation by the police.[42] This

[40] Matthew Josephson, *The Robber Barons*, (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1934), p. 28.
[41] Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), p.38.
[42] Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the USA*, (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p.419.

violent action was seen by many civic leaders as a culmination of the excesses of industrialisation at the expense of others and a lack of government regulation. There was a growing sense that the Robber Barons were only interested in the economic outputs of industry and not the widening social inequalities that it caused.

According to this logic, it fell to women to enact change because men were primarily concerned with the financial implications that human activity had on the urban landscape rather than on people that inhabited this landscape. Anna E. Nicholes, former director of the civics department of the Woman's City Club of Chicago, wrote in a 1913 essay that 'the sense of the city as a business corporation became the prevailing community idea'. The implications of city industries as the most important function of the municipality provided justification for the pollution they caused and the waste they generated, and with economic growth as the primary objective of city government and leaders of industry, 'city homes and city children were lost sight of.'[43] Jane Addams agreed with this sentiment, particularly the idea that the city had become a corporation. She further argued that women were engaged in enlarged housekeeping because of the direct effects of the pursuit of wealth and indifference of male city officials.[44] This tension between business and public welfare was at the root of many of the environmental issues that clubwomen believed they faced. For example, in her essay, Nicholes noted how in an encounter with a prominent banker about the odours from the nearby Stock-Yards district, he stated, 'I used to dislike that smell; but do you know what it means to me now? Dollars.'[45] This view that environmental issues were seen in terms of their monetary value was a catalyst for women such as Jane Addams and Anna Nicholes of the WCC and Mary Trautmann of the LHPA. They were not just cleaning up the streets but were actively engaging in reform by promoting municipal housekeeping as a way for all

[43] Anna E. Nicholes, 'How Women Can Help in the Administration of a City', *The Women Citizen's Library*, 9 (New York, 1913), 2143-2208 (p. 2150.)
[44] Jane Addams, 'Municipal Housekeeping', *Indianapolis Home Magazine*, July 22 1906.
[45] Nicholes, How Women Can Help', p. 2150.

citizens to campaign against harmful environments which would benefit all residents of the city and lead to a better city for everyone. The rhetoric of municipal housekeeping further served to critique those who were purely interested in the pursuit of wealth for a privileged few.

Male civic and business leaders were not only criticised for their exclusive focus on financial matters, but also for their indifference and lack of expertise in domestic matters. Mary Trautmann of the LHPA, in her address to the first convention in 1896, stated that 'men had tried to do the work before us, but they had failed; because they are the bread winners, nor do they so well understand housekeeping with its numerous duties'.[46] This observation enforces the notion of municipal housekeepers as citizen experts by claiming that men were not the experts. It further implies that men had proven to be failures at taking care of the municipal needs of the city so women were the only ones who could take on this task. Mary Trautmann was appealing to her members' sense of duty as well as disparaging men's sense of civic pride, a notion shared by Jane Addams when she publicly wrote that 'men of the city have been carelessly indifferent to much of this civic housekeeping, as they have always been indifferent to the details of the household'.[47] As women had been constrained by their gender, men were now being disparaged precisely because of their lack of domestic expertise.

Another significant, but less often discussed aspect of organisations such as the CWC utilising the ideology of municipal housekeeping was how they did it as the method of persuading women to join them. In other words, the leaders recognised that if they were to be successful, they had to appeal not only to the men of the city, but also to the women. Marietta A. Dow recalled the early years of the CWC and how some women hesitated to join because the club was perceived as being 'too radical'.[48] This alludes to Rosenberg's contention that

[46] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15 1896.
[47] Addams, 'Municipal Housekeeping'.
[48] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p. 148

there was a clear line between appropriately female and male activities and how the doctrine of a private, domestic sphere for women was still pervasive in American society.[49] Framing their activities as a natural extension of their household duties went some way to mitigate this perception and encourage new members. Similarly, Caroline M. Brown noted how the leaders of the CWC who were 'home-women, quite content to remain within the sphere of women, then defined as limited to fireside, were timid at the thought of venturing out of the lines of family ties'.[50] Thus, embracing municipal housekeeping as their purpose was a way to justify their public activities to themselves and encourage others that is was an acceptable activity including to external parties.

It is therefore imperative to broaden the definition of municipal housekeeping as it underpinned the environmental reform work of Progressive Era clubwomen and was used in a strategic manner to advance their agenda. The power of municipal housekeeping was realised in 1913 when Illinois women were granted partial suffrage and had the power to elect officials who would not mix politics and garbage together.[51] Women who had been engaged in work to clean up the city now had the power to vote for men who would enact the changes that they sought. It also gave them political power that they could use to influence the male politicians to enforce existing sanitary laws. Following Weber, this strengthened their class position because, as a group who had previously been denied this party power, they could now directly influence those who made the laws.[52]

[49] Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres,* p.xv.
[50] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*. p. 1.
[51] MS Woman's City Club of Chicago Records, *Bulletin,* 1 July 1913.
[52] Weber, 'Class, Status, Party', in *Essays in Sociology,* ed. and trans. by Gerth and Mills, p.183.

External Perceptions of Clubwomen's Work

In order for the women's clubs to succeed in their aims, negative perceptions of their work had to be overcome, including external discrimination from city officials and the newspapers. An examination of club reports, convention proceedings and newspaper articles reveals that this discrimination was primarily based upon their gender and the rhetoric that women were overly-emotional and thus could not operate in the world of politics. However, a lack of expert knowledge on sanitation systems, public governance and medical knowledge also contributed to the perception that these women were interfering in matters they had no business in.

The traditionally held values that were ascribed to women in the earlier part of the nineteenth century certainly informed these public views and were a framework within which all women's activities were classified. Barbara Welter's work that explores a Victorian belief in gender polarity and what she calls the 'Cult of True Womanhood' states that 'the attributes by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbours and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues - piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.'[53] Although these perceptions were being overturned by women attending the new women's colleges and forming clubs that were not just concerned with literature and culture, they were still evident in 1876 when the CWC began its activities and would continue well into the twentieth century. These virtues were publicised in women's magazines and would be upheld by the middle and upper-class women who organised in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This notion of the 'true woman' as well as the idea that men were threatened by the evolving public activism of women and the fact that they were explicitly challenging men's control of the public world,[54] explains the reticence of city officials and newspapers to

[53] Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860', *American Quarterly,* Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (1966) 151-174 (p. 152).
[54] Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres,* p.42.

support the early work of organisations such as the LHPA in New York and the CWC in Chicago.

To understand why the women's clubs organised in the way they did, an evaluation of the initial perception of these clubs should be considered. When the LHPA held their first convention in 1896, President Mary E. Trautmann reflected on the first 12 years of their organisation and the fight against the prevailing attitudes towards organised womanhood. She describes their experiences as follows:

> 'In those days our officials were very indifferent, and as this was the first time women had attempted to interfere with any of their duties, they looked upon our action with great disfavor, and met us with antagonism at every step'.[55]

This example gives an indication of how these clubs were disrupting the traditionally male public sphere of politics and in the early years, rather than accept these women's contributions, public officials hindered their efforts by publicising the view that they were interfering.

An additional problem was in how they were portrayed in newspaper reports. An article appearing in *New York Tribune* in 1894 referred to the LHPA as a 'little band of women'.[56] The Association themselves referred to their early organisation as a band of women but this was in 1884 when the original eleven members met. By 1894, the membership numbers were significantly higher so to refer in this way to the organisation that had a charter, by-laws and had influenced the organisation of other clubs was a deliberate attempt to trivialise their work. The newspapers also feminised the activities of the women's clubs rather than seeing them as an organised reform organisation. For example, on 16 February1900 the *New York Tribune* reported on the appointment of Percival E. Nagle as Street Cleaning Commissioner in New York City. It described how the LHPA would be

---

[55] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15 1896, pp. 42-43.
[56] *New-York Tribune*, 05 March 1894. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1894-03-05/ed-1/seq-6/>

watching him and would insist upon pushing for reform. This article appeared on a page entitled 'Only Woman's Page' and contained advertisements for Colgate & Co's Cashmere Bouquet and Van Houten's Chocolate, and articles with headings of 'The Day's Gossip' and 'Kentucky Women Aroused'.[57] By classifying this as women's work and situating the article on a page aimed at female readers, rather on pages all members of the public might access, the *Tribune* was effectively limiting the value of the club's environmental work and reenforcing the image of pleasant smelling women meeting other women in their homes to eat chocolate and trade in gossip which were legitimate activities for women to pursue. An interesting observation is also the advert for Cashmere Bouquet soap and perfume, which was in stark contrast to the dirty world of pollution, manure, and garbage that women were operating in. This suggests that to be feminine was to be clean and smell attractive rather than associating with filth and foul odours.

The newspapers further appeared to denigrate these women with their use of hyperbolic language and by playing on the tropes of women as overly emotional. In 1898, the *New York Sun* referred to them as 'having got over the sensitiveness which used to send them into tears on all occasions'[58] indicating that rather than knowledgeable, organised women, they were sensitive to criticism and hysterical, in line with symptoms commonly diagnosed by Victorian physicians. This was a common defence used against women's public activism for many decades to come, and Cora Tucker would be called a 'hysterical housewife' by a male member of the Viginia State Legislature almost one hundred years later.[59] These portrayals in the newspapers were common when the clubs first organised and reflected a view that was obviously unfavourable and reflected prejudices of the time. These early

---

[57] *New-York Tribune* 16 February 1900, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1900-02-16/ed-1/seq-7/>
[58] *The Sun*, 03 November 1898, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030272/1898-11-03/ed-1/seq-7/>
[59] Robin Lee Zeff, Marsha Love, and Karen Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves: Women and Toxics Organizing* (Arlington, VA.: Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, 1989), p.6.

preconceptions of organised womanhood displayed to the public created an additional obstruction to achieving their aims and aimed to diminish the legitimacy of their environmental concerns.

Like the LHPA, the CWC also had an antagonistic relationship with the press but there is evidence that they adapted their approach as they were conscious that positive publicity could only serve to benefit their activities. This was extensively documented in a report presented at a CWC meeting in 1902 in which Mary Sherman, officer of the Press Committee, noted how the organisation was 'exceedingly unpopular with reporters' and considered 'the meanest club in the city'.[60] This was due to the CWC policy of shutting the press out of club meetings. They still passed on club notices and bulletins, which the clubwomen alleged were thrown in the waste basket, but the policy of closed-door meetings that was initiated in the early years of the club meant, they believed, that the press viewed them negatively. The CWC view was that the editors of the city newspapers may have admired the work of certain departments but 'he has no space to devote to a report of their proceedings, because from his standpoint they are not news'.[61] This perception of their activities not being worthy of printing, whether accurate or not, reflects several key themes: Firstly, that these women were struggling to have the validity of their work recognised by male newspaper editors, and secondly, that women were reliant on men having a favourable view of women in the public sphere, in order for them to consider publicising women's work.

The CWC realised they had to alter their approach, demonstrating a resilience and adaptability, as well as an acknowledgement that would benefit from male support. The report recommended that as a semi-public body, the CWC should revoke the policy of closed-door meetings in order to improve relations and publicise the broad scope of the club's

[60] Chicago, Chicago History Museum, MS Chicago Woman's Club Records, 'The Woman's Club and the Press', 1902.
[61] MS CWC Records, 'The Woman's Club and the Press'.

work. It is interesting in this instance that by trying to control what was reported on, the CWC were perceived to be 'mean' and 'unpopular' and if anything was printed, in Sherman's words, it was exaggerated. By repealing their policy, the CWC recognised that 'the work we are doing is of real value, it will not only stand the publicity the press may give it, but it will be assisted by this publicity'.[62] This marked a departure from the experiences of the LHPA as the CWC actively sought a more positive relationship with city publications and recognised the value of this relationship in publicising the agenda of the club. It is particularly significant that the CWC appointed a press officer and had a press committee which shows they were aware of the importance of a public relations campaign. With this deliberate and considered strategy, the CWC were instrumental in laying the foundations for how women's organisations could interact with city publications in ensuing years. It is a further demonstration of how these women negotiated their public positions because this strategy succeeded in raising awareness of their work as well as the wider issue of poor public health caused by environmental pollutants. They were effective in creating a unique form of power that made it difficult for city officials to dismiss or ignore their contributions. This positive relationship between women's clubs and the press would be seen in the work of the Woman's City Club of Chicago from 1910 onwards. It became an active policy to court the press to gain publicity for their activism in recognition that they needed the support of the wider public and to bring a greater attention to environmental inequalities faced by immigrant communities, particularly in the Back of the Yards neighbourhood. This was located adjacent to the industrialised Union Stock Yards and would be a key site in contesting environmental inequalities in Chicago after 1900.

[62] MS CWC Records, 'The Woman's Club and the Press'.

Clubwomen Address Environmental Concerns

The definition of environmental justice from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency states that 'no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies'.[63] Although this is a modern term, the environmental problems in Chicago and New York, which were primarily located in areas surrounding slaughterhouses as well in the neighbourhoods of tenement houses, generally affected the working classes and largely immigrant populations. Environmental concerns that clubwomen responded to during the early years of the Progressive era included management of stable refuse, garbage disposal, run-off from slaughterhouses, street cleaning and expectoration in cars. From around 1880 to the early 1900s, women's organisations would come to focus on specific environmental concerns caused by population increases and new industrial practices. And in order to counteract the indifferent and sometimes actively oppositional attitudes of the city officials and proprietors of the businesses causing these problems, these women's clubs had to develop a systematic approach and an understanding of city governance.

The primary way that slaughterhouses transported their stock was by horse-drawn wagons which led to an increase in stable facilities in the vicinity of these businesses. Manure was a waste by-product which was often ignored by the owners leading to foul odours and swarms of flies, the latter being a public health hazard. A prominent example of how women's clubs expanded their sphere of activity to encompass a larger area of the city can be seen in the way the LHPA dealt with the hazard of stable refuse. In reaction to the accumulation of 20,000 tons of manure by one Michael Kane, owner of a stable, the LHPA appeared before a Grand Jury in 1884 and obtained an indictment for maintaining a public nuisance. The judge ruled that Mr. Kane had thirty days to remove the rotting pile of

[63] Environmental Protection Agency, *Environmental Justice* (2019) <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice> [Accessed 13 March 2022]

manure.[64] He did so, but continued his practices for several years, indicating that he was not concerned with having legal action taken against him. This approach of seeking legal action against the owner of a slaughterhouse and the associated stable facility, a key business in the city, demonstrated how the women of the LHPA had adapted their methods within two years of formation, and actively sought a legal solution to their problem. The people who were bearing the disproportionate burden of foul odours and swarming flies were residents of the tenement houses that surrounded the slaughterhouses which also demonstrates how the LHPA were acting on the behalf of others, rather than just addressing the issues in their own backyard as they did in 1884 when they first organised.

The LHPA also had a longer-term impact as the businesses that they targeted did not want to pay the legal costs of fighting them in court, so they reformed their practices. In this way the LHPA were responsible for encouraging others to change how they dealt with waste and brought greater public attention to the health hazards associated with stable refuse methods. Their first course of action was presenting a bill to the Legislature. It is interesting that the Association recognised that this was unlikely to affect change as stated by Mary Trautmann: 'As we expected, we were defeated'.[65] This had an unintended consequence which furthered the attempts to reform the slaughterhouse practices; the owners of the slaughterhouses realised that these women's efforts would not be thwarted, and they were aware of the costs associated with defeating the attempts to pass legislation. This served as an incentive for them to meet with the LHPA and agree that they would reform their practices if no further legal action was taken. This approach shows how the women's clubs were strategic in their actions and sought deals that benefitted the public health of the city. They were also using their knowledge of existing sanitary regulations to force industries and the city to act. They took a course of action that, by whatever means, would put an end to the environmental

[64] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15, 1896, p.42.
[65] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15, 1896, p.43.

issues faced by the public. The result of their intervention into the unsanitary practices of Messrs. Rafferty and Williams, who were the owners of one of the largest slaughterhouses in New York, was that these men 'found it much cheaper to tear down the offending pens and erect new buildings…with all the modern machinery known to science.'[66] The use of legal action was as a last resort and usually as a result of being met with antagonism and resistance in initial efforts to seek a solution but it served the purpose of implementing change.

The LHPA operated in a similar way to the CWC and used methods that would be crucial in the work of Jane Addams and Mary McDowell in the early 1900s and Hazel Johnson in the 1980s and 1990s. They all carried out systematic investigations into environmental problems to ascertain the root of the problem and then sought solutions to solve these issues as well as informing themselves of municipal codes. These methods were successful in the majority of cases and led to better enforcement and reduced hazards. The identification of nuisances was usually as a result of it being reported to the Ladies Health Protective Association. They stated, 'we have never worked on theories, but on facts, pure and simple'.[67] It seems they did not acquire expert knowledge of the effects on health as did later reformers such as Addams, Alice Hamilton and Florence Kelley; they simply identified the issue and resolved to stop it. The women of the LHPA and CWC became citizen experts in municipal government by learning about various city ordinances and how to enforce them, as they recognised this was a crucial step in abolishing environmental nuisances. In the 1900 report of the Woman's Health Protective Association, it was recognised that a lack of required knowledge on the laws governing municipal issues would hinder their reform activities,

'We appeal to the civic pride of every woman and recommend that one of the first steps for women to take is to make a study of the laws governing the various nuisances in the

[66] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15, 1896, p.43.
[67] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15, 1896, p.45.

community where she resides, and then secure the co-operation of those in authority to enforce the laws'.[68]

This evolution in their approach is evidence that they understood the requirements of navigating the public, male sphere of politics, and began to see success there. They acquired knowledge on the existing sanitary laws and the methods used to enforce them, and then set-to to ensure that these laws were being implemented. Once a complaint was received it was investigated to ensure it was reasonable before it was sent to the public official for his assistance in removing the nuisance. No single member could take action and a system of checks and balances 'secured the confidence of the officials of our municipality, and a letter or committee from our Association receives the most prompt and courteous consideration.'[69] This contrast in attitude from 1884 when the Association first organised, to 1900 is indicative of a change of strategy by these women and a broader change regarding women's status.

Certainly, the women who were members of later clubs in Chicago in 1910, enjoyed a better relationship with city officials and the press, as will be seen in chapter three. In their initial work, the LHPA and the CWC worked within traditional boundaries of gender to justify their involvement in public reform activities. However, with experience and success, they developed their tactics and renegotiated their place in the public sphere with the acquisition of expert knowledge on municipal issues thus subverting expectations of women and what was deemed appropriate for them. They had refuted the claim of male politicians that it was a 'matter that did not concern them' by demonstrating that they had to be concerned because of a lack of action from any other party.[70]

[68] Report of the Woman's Health Protective Association of New York, 1900-1904, p.18. The name of the Association was changed by replacing the word 'Ladies' with 'Woman's' by unanimous decision because of perceived prejudices against the word 'Ladies'. This occurred between 1898 and 1900.
[69] Report of the Woman's Health Protective Association of New York, 1900-1904, p.19.
[70] First Convention of the LHPA – May 14-15, 1896, pp. 42-43.

The Chicago Woman's Club and Environmental Reform

The CWC was one of the first women's organisations to promote community-based organising for the improvement of environmental conditions as early as 1901. This ethos would be evident in the female-led departments of the African American CUL in the 1920s and 1940s, and in the grassroots environmental justice campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s. The way that the CWC advocated for neighbourhood involvement, and indeed control, over their own environments directly contests Melosi's claim that Progressive Era civic clubs were paternalistic in their agendas.

The structure of committees in the LHPA was modelled on the CWC, which had their own dedication to environmental reform. Although in the initial years of the club there was no particular focus on environmental concerns, these issues became prevalent as the population of Chicago grew and the overcrowded neighbourhoods and tenements provided fertile ground for disease to spread.[71] The Neighborhood Center Committee of the CWC was formed in 1901 specifically to improve the physical conditions of Chicago and its residents with a particular focus on neighbourhoods and the degraded housing conditions within certain communities. A report published in 1909 by the Committee highlighted how women's clubs across the country had helped neighbourhoods to organise and campaign for local improvements. It noted how the CWC was the 'inaugurator of those improvements that came under the descriptive title of municipal housekeeping'.[72] The CWC was the first women's club to organise neighbourhoods into self-improvement organisations which is the epitome of grassroots environmental justice organisations. They also focussed on reform activities within these neighbourhoods concerning such matters as sanitation, smoke nuisance, street and alley cleaning, care of vacant lots, garbage disposal and more general civic education.[73] These

[71] Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring,* p. 92.
[72] The Neighborhood Center Committee of the Chicago Woman's Club, '*Neighborhood Improvement in and about Chicago',* (Chicago, Chicago Women's Club, 1909) p. 3.
[73] The Neighborhood Center Committee, *Neighborhood Improvement,* p. 4.

reform efforts were necessary because of what historian Thomas Philpott described as the 'slum conditions' of Chicago.

By the late nineteenth century, Chicago's rapid growth over the previous few decades forced city authorities to confront the problems caused by tenement housing, which already plagued New York. These city officials were no doubt responding to public pressure, and the sustained campaigning of organisations such as the CWC likely influenced their decision to take action. This was due to the investigations that the CWC conducted in conjunction with city departments, as well as their public outreach programmes that included exhibits in highly visible, and public locations.

In 1878, the Department of Health in Chicago conducted a report which defined a tenement as 'a dwelling occupied by more than three families, keeping house in separate compartments'. The report also recorded that there were 4,896 tenement homes in Chicago occupied by the 'poorer and dependent classes'.[74] In this respect, environmental concerns became a class issue and the African American and immigrant communities in Chicago were often blamed for the poor conditions in their neighbourhoods. In 1881, for example, G.H. Genung was appointed tenement and factory inspector and he noted how 'the tenement problem was an immigrant problem'.[75] This added a prejudiced dimension to how unsanitary settings were viewed and dealt with that would continue to be articulated well into the middle of the twentieth century. That a public official was linking degraded conditions with class status and ethnicity became a recurrent theme that was a means of shifting the blame from city officials to those who were adversely impacted by environmental inequality. Added to this was a continued lack of intervention from political leaders in regulating housing standards or private contractors who were responsible for sanitation, compounding public

[74] Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Wadsworth: California, 1991), p. 14.
[75] Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*. p. 15.

health problems. Historian Thomas Lee Philpott contends that 'if the population could have been frozen at its 1881 level and if Chicago had been willing to take action' then there might have been a chance that improvements could be made.[76] However the population continued to increase from 503,185 in 1880, to 1,099,850 in 1890, rising to 2,185,283 by 1910.[77] These huge increases led to further overcrowding and a further deterioration in neighbourhood conditions. These areas became known as the slums and the ghettoes and were home to immigrants from Europe who worked in low paying jobs. Philpott describes the slum as being defined by poverty whereas the ghetto was characterised by poverty and race.[78] The immigrant tenement districts were seen as both slum and ghetto by the women of the CWC and wider Chicago society because of the ethnic composition, including Poles, Lithuanians, Bohemians and Italians, as well as the lower-class status of its residents.

Several investigations were carried out into tenement conditions, including by residents of Hull House which will be detailed further in chapter three. The work of the CWC and the Neighborhood Center Committee will be examined here, as they were both operating in a space that was still unreceptive towards their endeavours but, more significantly, their strategies would be incorporated by later grassroots organisations. A major strategy that was used by the CWC was education, including setting up an exhibit on improvement work, giving talks and 'encouraging school children to study the needs of their home districts'.[79] In contrast to the claims that clubwomen were paternalistic in their reform goals, this programme of education sought to give agency to those communities directly affected by detrimental environmental conditions. Educating residents on the negative health effects of poor sanitation and associated diseases was also employed by People for Community Recovery in the 1970s and 1980s, demonstrating the legacy that women's clubs left for later

[76] Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*. p. 16.
[77] U.S Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of The United States 1920*, p.8.
[78] Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, p. xiv.
[79] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p. 300.

grassroots environmental justice groups. In a similar manner to the LHPA, the Neighborhood Center Committee, which was renamed the Civics Committee in 1909 as they felt their name did not reflect their work adequately, followed a pattern of assembling facts about a particular issue, such as the problem of garbage on the streets, and then using them for publicity and education in an effort to pressure city officials to take action.[80] A very public display of these facts was housed in the City Library in the Municipal Museum which was established in 1904 by the City Homes Association (CHA). The CHA was founded by settlement workers including Jane Addams and Robert Hunter in 1900 and it would be instrumental in housing reform in Chicago in the early twentieth century. The exhibit in the Municipal Museum provided information and models of street cleaning, care of vacant lots and garbage removal that was being carried out across the city by improvement associations.[81] By publicising this work, the CWC were creating networks of residents who could share solutions, as well as demonstrating their significant influence to city officials. This outreach programme was a successful strategy as evidenced by the partnership with the Commissioner for Public Works, Joseph Patterson. It was reported that 'he always co-operated heartily with the improvement associations'[82] which again demonstrates a shift in the male attitude toward the work of female voluntary organisations such as the CWC. This was no doubt due to how women had successfully reframed their private, domestic roles, into the public rhetoric of municipal housekeeping and they had effectively legitimised the vital, experiential contributions that women made, even though they had no formal expertise in the area.

A further example of how the work of the CWC had evolved was that three separate committees were set up in 1906 to tackle different environmental problems including garbage reduction, poor sanitation, and substandard housing. The Garbage Committee carried out

[80] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p. 300.
[81] Neighbourhood Committee, *Neighborhood Improvement*, p. 6.
[82] Neighbourhood Committee, *Neighborhood Improvement*, p. 9.

investigations making links between garbage disposal and public health and concluding that 'in no part of the city's housekeeping is the service more inadequate or the methods more antiquated'.[83] This statement conveys how the women of the CWC used the ideology of municipal housekeeping to critique municipal governance, a critique that would continue with settlement house workers Jane Addams and Mary McDowell. This is also an example of how women subverted gender expectations by using their uniquely female insight to highlight deficiencies in how men managed sanitation services, and refuted the notion that women, by nature, were passive. In this way, the women of the CWC were instrumental in laying the foundations for how subsequent women contested the division of male and female characteristics and, furthermore, promoted the idea that women did have a form of valid expertise. McDowell was also chair of the City Waste Committee of the WCC showing how successive women's clubs used the same organisational structures as initiated by the CWC. The forming of these specialist committees demonstrates how the CWC had adapted in response to the changing needs of the city and, in comparison with the earlier views of some members of being 'too radical', they were firmly placing themselves in the public sphere of moderate environmental reform.

Several voluntary organisations in Chicago collaborating with settlement house workers and city investigators undertook extensive surveys of the tenements in Chicago but the CWC conducted its own survey in 1911 under the direction of Celia Parker Woolley. This was a significant activity for the Civics Committee because they were not only securing first-hand facts, but an additional aim was to 'come into practical acquaintance with certain administrative departments of the city'.[84] This re-enforces the strategy of acquiring knowledge on municipal government that 'citizen expert' women employed in order to

[83] Neighbourhood Committee, *Neighborhood Improvement*, p. 12.
[84] Report of Civics Committee of the Chicago Woman's Club, *Tenement Housing Conditions in Twentieth Ward, Chicago*, (1912), p. 1.

promote civic activism and to respond male criticism. This was a form of politically empowering women as they were still denied the municipal franchise in Illinois and by understanding the workings of city politics, they could exert pressure on the men who had the power to take action.

This method of investigation also acted as a mechanism to hold city departments accountable as the survey included whether complaints made had been acted upon. The survey was carried out in the Twentieth Ward which was home to the 'heart of the ghetto' defined by the Civics Committee as containing houses originally built for one family but housing from three to six families from the immigrant communities.[85] This survey was carried out without the cooperation of the City Health Department. It was noted in the report that Rose Zwihilsky, the principal investigator, was only refused entry to one home, indicating that the residents of these dilapidated and unsanitary tenements were keen to work with the CWC. This further speaks to the success of the Improvement Associations that were in the remit of the CWC and rather than viewing their work as paternalistic, these communities were involved in the process of improving their environments. The report also placed the blame for these terrible housing conditions on landlords and their 'unhindered readiness to capitalize on misery and disease'.[86] The view of these female investigators was that a key reason for poor environmental conditions was economic motivation, which was usually not considered by male investigators, as evidenced by the tenement and factory inspector Genung who saw the primary issues as the immigrant residents themselves. These diverging opinions support the contentions of clubwomen Addams and Nicholes that too many saw the city as a business, and the requirements of the business were prioritised over public health and sanitation.

[85] Civics Committee, *Tenement Housing Conditions,* p. 3.
[86] Civics Committee, *Tenement Housing Conditions,* p. 3.

This hierarchy of priorities was evidenced by Mrs. Edward T. Lee who compiled Zwihilsky's findings. She wrote in her report that garbage was one of the primary 'evils' of the slums that was ignored by male city officials. This was apparent because residents had formally complained about garbage to the Bureau of Streets and Alleys, but no action was taken until the CWC intervened. These complaints ranged from 'alley littered with manure and garbage to manure boxes broken with flies swarming'. As well as manure and garbage, rats were a problem because of 'dumping of offal from butchers shops' and even the 'decayed body of a dog lying for weeks in an alley'.[87] These issues show that in certain areas of the city, existing sanitary laws were not enforced as the 1881 Municipal Code of Chicago explicitly referenced the regulation and prevention of depositing ashes, offal, garbage and any other 'offensive matter' in streets and alleys.[88] But as evidenced in the nature of the grievances filed with the city, the Twentieth Ward was neglected. This meant that a key function of women's organisations was to not only educate themselves on these codes, but to also identify instances of negligence and ascertain the responsible parties.

The Twentieth Ward was clearly the victim of environmental inequality because the public health consequences alone of decaying animals and piles of rotting manure left out in the open needed to be addressed but were being ignored. The city offered varying excuses over time such as garbage collectors being unable to carry out their rounds due to severe weather or that having clean streets was impossible because as soon as garbage was collected more was thrown on the street, but, as Lee observed, 'it is coincidence that a few weeks after the committee work began, waste collections almost doubled'.[89] This suggests that city departments wanted to avoid the scrutiny of the Civics Committee and it is further proof that

[87] Civics Committee, *Tenement Housing Conditions,* p. 6.
[88] Egbert Jamieson and Francis Adams, *The municipal code of Chicago: comprising the laws of Illinois relating to the city of Chicago, and the ordinances of the City council,* (Chicago: Beach, Barnard & co. printers, 1881), p.19.
[89] Civics Committee, *Tenement Housing Conditions,* p. 7.

they were not carrying out their duties as they should have been. It also speaks to Jane Addams' critique of men's careless indifference to city housekeeping which Lee scathingly called the 'stupidity or neglect of the city itself'.[90] It was evidently not stupidity as once the issue of inadequate collections was identified, the city managed to increase its service.

The Health Department and Bureau of Streets and Alleys were not completely ignorant that reform was needed, and they were aware that there were weaknesses in their departments, but the continued work of the CWC and later the WCC was essential in forcing them to take action. For example, the report noted that of the 1644 complaints sent to the Health Department by residents of the Twentieth Ward that were surveyed, only 376 improvements were found to have been actioned.[91] Lee and the Civics Committee stated that reform had to come from the residents, landlords and the city but this seemed to be an uphill struggle because of the financial ramifications for landlords as well as the city and resident's lack of knowledge of sanitary practices. This was why programmes of education were necessary even though they appeared moralistic in tone. It is also why the continued observation of whether city ordinances were being upheld was required by women's organisations as it placed pressure on city officials to act. As Amalie Jerome wrote in June 1909, every effort counted.[92]

Recognising that they would face barriers to advancing urban environmental reform, the women's clubs of the early Progressive Era used a range of approaches to legitimise their activism. They had a clear strategy which complemented the procedures in municipal governance. They acquainted themselves with the laws and the enforcement of these laws concerning sanitation and other municipal affairs so that they could engage in dialogue with city officials in an informed manner. They had procedures in place for receiving and dealing

[90] Civics Committee, *Tenement Housing Conditions*, p. 11.
[91] Civics Committee, *Tenement Housing Conditions*, p. 15.
[92] Frank and Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, p. 48.

with complaints through a structure of committees. And, when necessary, they consulted with and obtained the support of experts to gain knowledge of a particular issue and its effects before presenting their case to public officials. This strategy was an advancement from the early moralistic and aesthetic aims of women's clubs and highlights the complex and intricate structures of organised womanhood. It also marks the point at which these organisations and their successors became activist organisations.

Conclusion

'Every Practical Effort, However Small, To That End Counts.'[93] This statement made in 1909 from the Civics Committee of the Chicago Woman's Club, epitomises how clubwomen in Chicago, and nationwide viewed their work. What they saw as small efforts would lay the foundations for other women's organisations and provide a comprehensive organisational structure as well as tried and tested strategies to advance their environmental reform agenda. The networks that were formed in Chicago would also lead to better relationships with the press and city officials for reformers including Jane Addams and Mary McDowell. It is necessary to explore the aims of the early organisations concerned with improving public health and civic life as it facilitates an understanding of how they evolved from their initial purpose of protecting their immediate environs to the wider sphere of urban environmental reform. It further demonstrates the impact of early organisations on other women's clubs across the country in that the organisational structures were replicated. The strategies these women employed are significant because they highlight how municipal housekeeping was employed in a deliberate manner to increase membership, critique male municipal leadership as well as justify women's place in public reform activities. There were numerous barriers when the CWC formed in 1876 and the LHPA was founded in 1884, including the

[93] Neighbourhood Committee, *Neighborhood Improvement*, p. 17.

indifference of public officials and the belittling attitudes of the press. A significant obstacle was a rigid adherence to the separate spheres ideology by men and women of the city which inhibited growing the membership of the CWC and provided male public officials with a way to critique women activists. As Mrs. John H. Scribner reported to the American Public Health Association at their twenty-fifth annual meeting in Philadelphia in 1897, 'at first we met with some criticism and opposition'.[94] In order to legitimise their efforts they had to renegotiate prescribed characteristics particular to their gender and apply this renegotiation to their reform activities. From a study of records of the clubs, what emerges is a complex interplay of domestic values, perceptions of class, a moral obligation to improve the city, the application of expert knowledge, and a growing understanding of how to navigate the public sphere of city politics. This shows how organised womanhood was increasingly based on a set of organising principles of gender and class and that the aims of these organisations were realised through considered strategies and an understanding of the affairs of municipal government.

This chapter has provided an introduction to the early women's club movement with a particular focus on the LHPA and the CWC in an effort to demonstrate how two early organisations had a significant impact in contesting the view of women as passive and effective only in the home. Their public activism fundamentally challenged ideas of what were appropriate activities for women. Without their work, successive women would have no doubt faced greater resistance than they already did. Because the CWC and LHPA had broken down gender barriers, space opened up for women such as Jane Addams and Mary McDowell who would go on to work with sociologists from the University of Chicago and hold prominent public positions in the environmental management of their city.

---

[94] Mrs John H. Scribner, (1898) 'The Relationship Between Woman's Health Protective Associations and the Public Health', *25th Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association*. Philadelphia, October 26-29 1897. Concord, New Hampshire: The Rumford Press, pp. 413-421.

These two organisations were also selected to illustrate how local clubs could impact the organisation of other clubs around the United States. Their archival records show the evolution of the organisations and help to identify the aspects of their work that influenced later associations that formed in the 1890s into the early decades of the 1900s. This includes the Settlement House Movement and the Women's City Club of Chicago, formed in 1910 which will be detailed in chapter three. An awareness of the purpose and varied approaches of white, middle class women's clubs enables an analysis to be undertaken in the next section of the parallel activities of African American women's clubs and to consider how the narratives of these women differs from those of their white counterparts because of race and racial attitudes. In this way, a similar examination can provide an interpretation of how gender, class and race intersected in the work of women's clubs for urban environmental reform.

Chapter Two - The Spirit of Organising and Civic Motherhood

In the 1897 presidential address to the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) Mary Church Terrell declared 'that this is an association of colored women, because our peculiar status in this country at the present time seems to demand that we stand by ourselves in the special work for which we have organized.'[1] She was reflecting on the first year of the national organisation and, in making this assertion that African American women stood by themselves, recognising the exclusionary nature of white women's clubs in reform activities. Terrell would go on to elaborate on what she termed their 'peculiar status' in a speech to the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1898 when she stated, 'not only are colored women with ambition and aspiration handicapped on account of their sex, but they are everywhere baffled and mocked on account of their race'.[2] The determiner 'their' suggests that Terrell was referring to African American female reformers rather than African American women collectively, as denoted by the aspiration and ambition comments, because African American women's clubs members drew clear class lines between themselves and African American women from the South whom they perceived to be ill-equipped for life in northern cities.

In the early years, members of African American women's clubs recognised that they faced barriers to their activism because they were women and because they were Black. The assertation by Terrell that gender and race were impediments for women who wanted to engage in public activities, would later be experienced by women, including Alva Maxey,

[1] Washington, Library of Congress, MS Mary Church Terrell papers, Speeches and Writing file - Box 28 Reel 20, Presidential Address Delivered at the National Association of Colored Women conference, September. 15,1897.
[2] LOC, MS MCT papers, Box 28 Reel 21, Address Delivered at the National American Women's Suffrage Association, February 18,1898.

who led the Civic Department of the Chicago Urban League during their activities in the 1920s and 1940s, and Hazel Johnson, leader of the grassroots organisation People for Community Recovery in Chicago in the 1980s. These women shared similar experiences because they were fighting against racist attitudes from white society from the outset of their work and lacked power within existing male political structures. This derived from gendered traits of domesticity and motherhood, that is that their roles were largely in the home and not in political life while civic institutions were dominated by white men. A key difference between African American and white clubwomen was that they were operating in a society that was racially divided by segregation and enforced on a local and national level. All of these factors meant that African American clubwomen's experiences were unique because their circumstances were fundamentally distinct from those of middle class, white, female reformers. This chapter will examine the responses to these conditions to draw attention to how the strategies employed by African American clubwomen diverged from those of white women on account of race but also how their approaches were comparable because of how they perceived their roles in wider society to be based on domestic gendered characteristics. They purposefully used the role of mother and housekeeper in tandem as a method to claim their place in the arena of public reform work.

This chapter will offer an analysis of the aims and objectives of African American women's clubs in order to highlight the multi-layered organising principles these clubs subscribed to when they formed in the early 1890s. It is important to examine these organising principles as they shaped the reform activities that African American clubwomen engaged in and they highlight how they shared common values based on gender and class identities with white clubwomen, but also how they differed. In some respects, these principles intersected with those of white women's clubs, particularly in regard to health in their communities and the condition of the home, whereas in others there was a noticeable

divergence on account of the race of the women involved and external perceptions of African American women as a collective. An evaluation of club activities and strategies will demonstrate how African American clubwomen deliberately employed gendered characteristics of domesticity and motherhood in a way that reflected a shared identity amongst clubwomen. They purposefully employed the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping and civic motherhood as justification for their reform efforts, for their members as well as male collaborators and critics. These dual doctrines combined the ideas of the city as an extension of the home and how African American women were responsible for the care of all children, of all races, within it. As the African American populations in Northern cities increased, so too did segregated areas and the services available to migrants from the South were increasingly inadequate. In this respect the children of the city that needed the most care were African American children while the focus of white clubwomen was on their own children and the white, immigrant communities that had grown in response to rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in the North.

As well as attempting to improve the social circumstances of those they perceived as less fortunate and less educated than themselves, middle-class African American women had to challenge and refute prevailing racist stereotypes of sexual promiscuity and immorality among Black women, which had primarily originated from white men as a rationale for their sexual exploitation during slavery. Deborah Gray White, a professor of women's, and gender studies at Rutgers University, concludes that these perceptions were used as a means of domination by imposing an inferior status onto African Americans, and to separate Blacks from Whites. She further argues that a primary focus of African American clubwomen was that they had to defend themselves against these external attitudes and what she calls

'defamation of character'.[3] This marked their experiences of organised action in a different manner to those of white clubwomen.

Although the activities of white clubwomen paralleled those of African Americans, and there was some cooperation promoted by Fannie Barrier Williams within the context of her club work in Chicago (which will be examined in this chapter), Black and white organisations remained largely distinct and separate. This separation was down to a lack of action from white clubwomen and white city officials but also because African American women's clubs did not have the same access to sources of support as their white counterparts including reform-minded politicians, white philanthropic businessmen, and professional associations such as male city clubs.[4] This was one of the reasons why a national network was so important to advance their reform aims. It was also a key factor in the ideology of racial uplift as these clubwomen faced external prejudices which limited their ability to build multi-racial coalitions on a national level.

'Lifting As We Climb' and Racial Uplift

The desire of Black Progressive Era clubwomen to uplift the race was rooted in the realities of segregation and disenfranchisement.[5] It was a complex ideology which sought to care for the African American population whilst delineating class lines and a direct response to attacks on African American civil and political rights. It conveyed notions of respectability as a way to challenge pervasive stereotypes of African American women were promiscuous and immoral. These women had to reconcile intricate issues of gender, class, and race in order to

[3] Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*: *Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994,* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p.14.
[4] Nancy S. Dye, 'Introduction', in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*, Noralee Frankel & Nancy S. Dye eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), pp. 1-10 (p.7).
[5] Dye, 'Introduction', in *Gender, Class, Race*, p.7.

address the needs of African American women and men in an equitable way.[6] Despite this, their perceptions of rural, Southern migrants were discriminatory and problematic, but these views were shaped by prevailing notions of femininity in Northern society as well as how status, according to Max Weber, was defined by the respect which an individual or group was shown by wider society.[7] African American clubwomen laboured under a dual burden and were constrained by external factors which offers a rationale for their promotion of an ideology based on the notion of racial uplift.

There was a clear racial divide in all areas of American society with African Americans viewed unequally to whites. There were numerous issues that African Americans had to contend with as this was the era of Jim Crow laws and new state constitutions that aimed to marginalise African Americans by denying them the vote and enforcing segregation. These were not only confined to Southern states but occurred in Northern states too. Segregation was enforced on a federal level as evidenced by the decision, in 1883, of the U.S. Supreme Court to nullify the Civil Rights Act of 1875. This legislation was a part of measures introduced during Reconstruction and affirmed that all citizens regardless of race had equal access to accommodation, transport, and entertainment venues. By declaring this law unconstitutional, the Supreme Court was endorsing segregation which was confirmed with the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* which declared segregation as constitutional.[8] In order to counter the perception that they occupied an unequal place in American society, and as a means of challenging the alienation of African Americans, clubwomen turned to the moralistic ideology of uplift. Professor of Civil Rights and Social Justice Kevin Gaines

---

[6] Deborah Gray White, 'The Cost of Club Work, the Price of Black Feminism', in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. by Nancy M. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) pp.247-270 (p.248).
[7] Max Weber, 'Class, Status, Party', in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp.180-95 (p.183)
[8] United States Senate, 'Landmark Legislation: Civil Rights Act of 1875' <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/CivilRightsAct1875.htm#:~:text=Radical%20Republican%20senator%20Charles%20Sumner,schools%2C%20churches%2C%20and%20cemeteries.> [accessed 20 January 2022]

articulates this as their duty, as elites, to reform the character and manage behaviour of the black masses.[9] This dual approach of changing the perceptions of the white population and improving working class African American behaviour and standards was at the core of racial uplift.

This notion of racial uplift that African American clubwomen subscribed to was clearly problematic as it assumed that these people needed to be uplifted. It appeared that African American clubwomen believed all should aspire to the values and characteristics of middle-class, Black and white society and that they were the group that should take on the education of the masses. But as Gaines argues, these women were responding to their circumstances which were imposed by white political systems so by publicising their adherence to these values, they were demonstrating that they should be viewed as equal to white women. The motto of the NACW was 'lifting as we climb' which Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has described as promoting the politics of respectability and demonstrated a clear class and status differentiation.[10] This suggests that those who occupied the middle class used visible indicators such as appearance, behaviour, and language to project a positive image to white society and that anyone who did not conform to this image was of a lower class. The view was that lower classes needed to be lifted out of a position where their morals and behaviour – including drinking and gambling – were less than respectable in the eyes of wider white society, but also from the perspective of the African American middle classes.

The writings of influential clubwomen Barrier Williams, Ruffin and Church Terrell frequently referenced this class differentiation as shall be evidenced throughout this chapter, demonstrating a tension between the necessity of defending African American womanhood,

---

[9] Kevin K. Gaines, 'Racial Uplift Ideology in the Era of the 'Negro Problem', *Freedom's Story Essays National Humanities Center*, < http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/racialuplift.htm> [accessed 20 January 2022]

[10] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Harvard University Press, 1994), p.187

and the desire to educate and correct what they perceived to be poor behaviour that would reflect badly on all African Americans. This concept was not only about uplifting the race but also about opportunities for the middle classes through social service. The 'climb' aspect of their motto was a way to address the gender hierarchy that existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although African American men had been granted the right to vote with the ratification of the 15th Amendment in 1870, even though the reality was that many of them continued to be prevented from exercising it, women were still denied the franchise. In a similar manner to white female reformers, African American female reformers thus had to empower themselves through their service to others.

Wanda Hendricks has stated that clubwomen such as Fannie Barrier Williams 'adopted a supremacist ideology that demonized and stigmatized the poor Black woman.'[11] This tension between internal perceptions of African American class status, particularly migrants from the Southern States, and a desire to defend the values and morality of African American womanhood were integral to the activities that clubwomen undertook. Anne Meis Knupfer has written that these tensions were not contradictory but evidence that clubwomen adapted their rhetoric to multiple audiences, demonstrating a level of resilience.[12] And Deborah Gray White contends that this motto demonstrated a desire to help others while helping themselves and signified that the NACW was the defender of all African American women.[13] These differing perspectives on racial uplift ideology demonstrate the complexity of clubwomen's identities: their class status was perceived by African American men and women, as a positive attribute that could be used to help others but they also demanded to be viewed as respectable by white society. Gaines argues that this internal class divide suggested

[11] Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race* (Illinois, The University of Illinois Press, 2013), p.60.
[12] Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York, New York University Press, 1996), p.21.
[13] White, *Too Heavy a Load*, p.54.

that clubwomen had internalised dominant notions of backwardness and depravity even as they sought to oppose racism.[14] It is understandable that this occurred because it was inescapable for clubwomen. The reality was that African American women were still being subjected to treatment and mindsets that stemmed from attitudes toward all women perpetuated during slavery. They were regarded as a collective with no awareness of individual qualities, achievements and aspirations so they were forced to publicise this in order to defend themselves.

It is clear that the external discrimination faced by these clubwomen was a motivating factor and they believed that to help in defending their race, gender, and class positions they should seek to elevate the morals and status of their communities. Although this form of uplift stigmatised southern migrants, it was a necessary tactic to counter the attitudes of white northerners who held the belief that undesirable attributes were infectious. Journalist Walter Weyl wrote in 1914 that 'just as a diphtheritic Negro will infect a white man… so weakness, immorality, ignorance and recklessness will spread from one race to the other'.[15] His view that these attributes were comparable to a disease was indicative of a sense of moral panic that white society expressed with increased migration from the South. This attitude typified the response of the native population to any 'outsiders' and was also applied to white immigrants from Eastern Europe who came to work in the Stock Yards District of Chicago and were accused of bringing filth and squalor with them.[16] Both groups of people were classed as others because of their customs but also because they were viewed as unaccustomed to life in an industrial and urban setting. For the African American migrants, they had the added classification of their race to signify their difference to whites.

[14] Gaines, 'Racial Uplift Ideology'.
[15] Walter E. Weyl, *The New Democracy*, rev. edn. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), p.345.
[16] Bertram B. Fowler, *Men, Meat and Miracles,* (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1952), p.78.

The concept of racial uplift was innately exclusionary in the early years of club formation, but it is reasonable to view it as an ideology that also acted to defend African American's character against outside attacks from white individuals. The future work of organisations such as the Chicago Urban League in civic betterment would be, in part, shaped by these concerns.

Early Organisations and the Making of a National Movement

African American women's clubs and their leaders such as Mary Church Terrell, Fannie Barrier Williams and Josephine St Pierre Ruffin were influential in securing the founding of the first national organisation, the NACW, which had a far greater impact in shaping city clubs' activities than had previously been seen and provided a national platform to publicise the work of local clubs. In Chicago, Barrier Williams formed partnerships with notable white female reformers such as Celia Parker Woolley of the Chicago Woman's Club and Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House settlement. The activities and strategies of local organisations such as the Phyllis Wheatley Club, formed in 1896 in Chicago, and of the NACW would be continued into the mid-twentieth century by the Chicago branch of the National Urban League. This underscores the significance of early reform activities of African American clubwomen as well as the powerful legacy that these distinguished women built for the grassroots organisations that would follow.

The position of African American women in the early 1890s was one of a continuous fight against prejudice in all areas of their life, including equal access to job opportunities. Mary Church Terrell highlighted the plight of those women seeking employment as being limited to a 'pitiful few vocations with poor pay' in comparison to their 'more favored sisters of the dominant race.'[17] A further facet of daily life was overcrowded housing and poor

[17] LOC, MS MCT papers, Box 28 Reel 21, Address Delivered at the National American Women's Suffrage Association, February 18,1898.

sanitary conditions. This would deteriorate further with the 'Great Migration' after the turn of the century in which millions of African Americans migrated from the rural south to the urban north, but the 'Ghetto,' as Historian and Chicago native Thomas Lee Philpott termed the segregated, African American community on the South Side of Chicago, was starting to form by 1900. The case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 would compound extant residential segregation in Northern cities.

Fannie Barrier Williams experienced this de facto segregation herself when, in 1908, the Hyde Park Improvement Club focused its efforts on forcing middle-class African Americans out of streets dominated by white families. Barrier Williams had lived in the Hyde Park area for fifteen years and viewed herself of a 'better class' than poorer African Americans.[18] This was because her husband was a lawyer and her social circle consisted of medical professionals and other lawyers. She defined herself in this way as she was born to free parents and grew up in Western New York State. She was well-educated, having studied academic and classical courses to become a certified teacher in Brockport, New York. Her marriage to lawyer S. Laing Williams in 1887 and subsequent relocation to Chicago further placed her in the elite sector of African American society in Chicago.[19] Therefore, to be hounded out of a neighbourhood where she had lived for fifteen years was incomprehensible to Barrier Williams. It also provides some rationale for the rhetoric of racial uplift as established Black residents of the city were subjected to the same racial prejudice that the inhabitants of the ghettoes were facing. Because of the tensions in American race relations, compounded by legislation that deemed segregation constitutional, her white neighbours in Hyde Park would no longer allow African American families to live there.[20] This is just one

[18] Thomas L. Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), p.156.
[19] Mary Jo Deegan, 'Fannie Barrier Williams and Her Life as a New Woman of Colour in Chicago, 1893-1918', in *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams 1893-1918*, ed. by Mary Jo Deegan (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), pp. xiii-lx (p.xvi).
[20] Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, p.157.

example of prejudice that African Americans, even those in an advantaged position, faced in their daily lives. For African American clubwomen, it was these exclusionary practices that served as the impetus for forming their own women's clubs.

Concerns arising from rapid industrialisation and mass migration were not confined to the domain of white, middle-class female reformers. For African American clubwomen, their organisational principles and priorities shifted in response to the mass migration of African Americans from the South which saw urban centres such as Chicago and New York experience a tremendous demographic transformation. Women's rights activist and scholar Angela Davis notes how prior to the formation of the NACW in 1896, African American women's organisations, in parallel with white, middle and upper-class women, were involved in literary societies and philanthropic endeavours.[21] One of the first prominent clubs like these was the Colored Woman's League of Washington, D.C, co-founded in 1892 and incorporated in 1894 by Mary Church Terrell and Helen Cook. They, along with seven other African American women founders who were well-educated and predominantly teachers, came from the older, more well-established families in the District of Columbia.

The aim of this organisation was to serve the local community. This involved setting up kindergartens for the children of working mothers and running an evening school, as well as disseminating information about the progress of African Americans in the United States and beyond.[22] These activities demonstrated how the early women's clubs were engaged in protecting children in their role as civic mothers as well as promoting their respectability. It was in speeches like the one she gave to the NAWSA in 1898 that Terrell highlighted specifically to white women the work of civic betterment as well as publicising the unimpeachable moral character of African American clubwomen. Terrell was a graduate of

[21] Angela Davis, *Women Race and Class* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1981), p.128.
[22] Sharon Harley, 'Mary Church Terrell: Genteel Militant', in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, Ed. By Leon Litwack and August Meier (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.311.

Oberlin College in Ohio and she had also studied at higher education institutions abroad. She was a high school teacher and had a later career as a university professor. She was also the first African American woman on the Board of Education in the District of Columbia.[23] These credentials afforded Terrell a position of privilege and strengthened her credentials when it came to her nomination to be president of the NACW.

The Woman's Era Club of Boston was also a significant women's club and is described by Angela Davis as a 'the fruit of Black Women's first organizing efforts within the club movement.'[24] Formed in 1893, it was led by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, who was the wife of Harvard Law School graduate George Lewis Ruffin who became the first African American judge in the Northern states. Josephine Ruffin would later be one of the key advocates of a national organisation and she wrote articles and speeches on this subject which were published in the *Women's Era,* the official news outlet of the club. Ruffin, along with her daughter Florida Ruffin Ridley were responsible for the writing and publication of this journal and they detailed club activities as well as elucidating the purpose of the club for other African American women and wider American Society. Similarly, to Mary Church Terrell, Ruffin occupied a privileged space in the African American community in Boston. Her marriage as well as her position as editor of the first newspaper published by, and for African American women gave her a position of elevated status in the community and bolstered her reputation amongst the white women's clubs in Boston as a cultured woman. [25] This further speaks to the notions of respectability that Higginbotham proposed in that Ruffin was publicising the social reform work as well as highlighting how they shared a similar purpose to white women's clubs. They were not merely replicating white club work but were serving the needs of their communities because they felt it was necessary to do so. Through

[23] Davis, *Women Race and Class,* p.135.
[24] Davis, *Women Race and Class,* p.127.
[25] Davis, *Women Race and Class* p.127.

the publication of their activities, they were highlighting these needs to wider society as well as demonstrating their credentials in order to counter the negative perceptions of African American women.

These two clubs are significant because their leaders were the driving force behind a national organisation. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Mary Church Terrell are just two examples of women who led clubs and pushed for reform, but they are noteworthy because their vision would influence that of the NACW and, in turn, city clubs on a local level. The records of these two prominent clubs highlight how one of the primary aims was to organise on a national level. In a speech to the Colored Women's League, for example, Terrell stated:

> 'A national organization of colored women could accomplish so much good in such a variety of ways that thoughtful, provident women are strenuously urging their sisters all over the country to cooperate with them in this important matter.'[26]

This belief that a national organisation would have a greater impact than city and state clubs spoke to African American clubwomen's desires to improve the lives of their communities. It would also serve as a way for African American clubwomen to align their work with white clubwomen in order to mitigate negative perceptions of their moral character and justify why, as women, they were engaging in public reform activities.

Exclusion and Respectability

The purpose of organising on a national level was driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Much like the exclusion of white professional women from organisations such as the New York Press Association, which led to the formation of Sorosis in 1868, African American women were also kept out of many aspects of professional life. However, it was not men that were excluding them, but the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) because of their race. This national, white, women's organisation denied membership to

[26] LaVonne Leslie ed., *The History of the National Association of Women's Clubs, Inc.: A Legacy of Service* (Xlibris, 2012), p.29.

African American clubs and thus publicly endorsed segregation. A further external factor that impelled a national organisation was a letter written by J.W. Jacks, president of the Missouri Press Association, to Florence Belgarnie, Secretary of the Anti-Lynching Society of England. The contents of this letter, where Jacks accused all Black women of being prostitutes and thieves, served to motivate African American clubwomen to defend themselves.[27] Because of this, they believed it had become even more necessary to publicise the ideology of respectability through articles that publicised the work of clubwomen. A final way that their purpose can be categorised is based on their belief that it was their moral duty to improve the lives of those in their immediate environments. They employed a similar rhetoric to that of white, middle-class women, namely that they should enlarge their domestic sphere to encompass the whole city and that their expertise as mothers, their education and their moral values would benefit not only their own communities but other African Americans outside of those communities in achieving social uplift and respectability.

Exclusionary practices were common in the early period of organised womanhood. As well as organising around a set of principles that were based on their 'peculiar status', African American women were denied membership and affiliation of the National Council of Women and the GFWC because, as Sharon Harley puts it, these groups did not welcome 'clubs composed of women with a different racial origin from white.'[28] In 1894, it took fourteen months for Fannie Barrier Williams to be admitted as a member of the white Chicago Woman's Club (CWC). This was due in large part to members of the CWC believing that her admittance would be at the cost of their self-respect and how they were perceived by other whites. They took pride in their status and felt that by associating with African Americans in the racial climate that prevailed at the time, they would not have received support from the white community. Barrier Williams wrote that members of the club

[27] LOC, MCT papers, Correspondence, n.d.
[28] Harley, *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, p.312.

had come to her and told her they would leave the club if she joined and that 'their only reason was that they did not think the time had come for that sort of equality'.[29] She was eventually admitted and would work very closely with Celia Parker Woolley. However, these attitudes reinforce Mary Church Terrell's assertion that they 'stood by themselves'.

Another very public display of exclusion was seen in 1893 at The World's Fair and Columbian Exposition held in Chicago where the GFWC planned to have a women's exhibit, but African American clubwomen were not permitted to participate. This prompted Ida B. Wells, activist and anti-lynching campaigner, to organise a protest as well as inspiring the formation of a permanent African American women's club in Chicago. Although African American women had been subjected to exclusion from the public sphere, particularly after the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870, they used this as motivation to form their own organisations within which they could pursue activities that paralleled those of white, middle-class women but were of a particular concern because of the prejudice they faced and because of the view that white women's clubs were not concerned with African American issues.

A further incident that demonstrated how white clubwomen attempted to keep their activities separate was The Ruffin Incident, as it became known, although this became an example of how African American clubwomen turned exclusionary practices in their favour. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin attended the 1900 convention of the GFWC as a representative of the Women's Era Club. The issue was that she was 'representing a colored women's club' which they would not allow to be members. She was informed she could attend as a delegate from a white club (The Massachusetts State Federation) but she refused to attend under these conditions.[30] Interestingly, the perception of this incident from the popular press' perspective was that 'Mme. Ruffin was making very much a nuisance of herself, and the Massachusetts

[29] Fannie Barrier Williams, 'A Northern Negro's Autobiography' in *The New Woman of Color*, ed. by Mary Jo Deegan, pp.5-13 (p.10).
[30] Gerda Lerner ed., *Black Women in White America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 448.

delegation was tired of the whole question'.[31] This was reported by Jane Frances Winn, a special correspondent for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* who sought to support the President of the GFWC, Rebecca Lowe, and underscores the prevailing opposition of white women to the inclusion of African American clubwomen in national white organisations. This incident was also publicised in the newsletters of African American clubs and was used to illustrate the notion that the clubs of white and African American women had similar ideologies and activities, but were organised because of different concerns arising from prevailing racist attitudes and separation of different racialised groups.

Nowhere is this more evident than in a letter sent from the Missouri Press Association in 1895. In that year, Ida B. Wells was completing a tour of England where she campaigned against lynching. Florence Belgarnie, secretary of the English branch of the Anti-Lynching Society, received a letter dated 19th March 1895, from J. W. Jacks, who was president of the Missouri Press Association and staunchly pro-lynching. Jacks sent his letter in response to a request for support and publicity for the anti-lynching campaign. In it he wrote that 'I presume your favor was intended for some negro' and went on to describe his observations which included 'the negroes in this country are wholly devoid of morality' and 'the women are prostitutes, and all are natural liars and thieves'.[32] It was this attack on the respectability of all African American womanhood that incensed Wells and Ruffin. It also enforced the stereotypes of Black women during slavery and demonstrated how some attitudes had not evolved beyond this position. Florence Belgarnie forwarded the letter to the *Woman's Era* where it was published in the June 1895 edition, although they refused to print the full text of the letter because of the nature of the contents. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin stated:

[31] Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier Books, 1954), p.239.
[32] LOC, MCT papers, Correspondence, n.d.

'The letter of Mr. Jacks to Miss Belgarnie is a denouncement of the morality of the colored women of America, and also a criticism of the peculiar ideas of virtue and morality held by everybody but the people of the south and west.'[33]

This attack on the respectability of African American women was an especial affront to the leaders of the African American women's clubs who viewed themselves as having honour and integrity. Historian and member of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, Elizabeth Lindsey Davis described the statements as vile and 'utterly false', calling Jacks an 'obscure man in an obscure Missouri town'.[34] However this 'obscure man' had provided a unifying battle for African American clubwomen in that they met to discuss and refute the accusations and as a result of this meeting, the NACW was formed in 1896. In order to disprove this attack on the virtues and morality of African American Women, the NACW believed it had to concentrate on these aspects for all women and defend their characteristics in order to 'uplift the race' and this was one of the underlying principles of the motto 'lifting as we climb'.

The notion of moral uplift of a race was not just the domain of African American clubs as white middle-class women were also concerned with it, but usually on behalf of immigrant women and working-class white women. This could reflect the ideals of respectability, but it was also a response to an attack on a whole section of society based on racialised characteristics of sexual promiscuity and immorality attributed to African American women. So, the purpose of organising for the moral uplift of a race should be examined from the perspective of the clubwomen themselves in order to analyse how important the perception of African American womanhood was to the founders and members of the NACW.

---

[33] Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Florida R. Ridley Eds. *A Charge to be Refuted,* in The Woman's Era. Vol II. No. 3. Available online at the Emory Women Writers Resource Project http://womenwriters.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/advocacy/content.php?level=div&id=era2_03.14&document=era2 [accessed 10th November 2017]

[34] Elizabeth Lindsey Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs: 1900-1922* (Chicago, 1922), p.1.

In a speech given at the first convention of the NACW in 1895, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin addressed the issue of perceptions and stereotypes when she claimed:

'It is our right and our bounded duty to stand forth and declare ourselves and principles, to teach an ignorant and suspicious world that our aims and interests are identical with those of all good aspiring women.'[35]

It is evident that the strategy involved was two-fold in that African American women sought to use education both to change perceptions of their morality and virtue and to use their club activities, as was their 'bounded duty', to uplift those beneath them which would lead to what they saw as a natural elevation of the race. Josephine Silone-Yates, president of the NACW from 1901-1905, echoed this sentiment when she stated the NACW would be 'one of the great forces of the century in the solution of the race problem, a problem that can be solved only by race elevation.'[36] She was referring to not only the moral uplift but to uplifting life in the domestic and public sphere through club activities. As historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham articulates, the ideology of respectability and moral uplift was adopted by leaders of the African American club movement predicated on the belief that adhering to middle-class values would earn 'their people a measure of esteem from White America'.[37] This speaks to the idea that African American clubwomen were concerned not only with internal uplift, but also the external perception of their racial and gendered characteristics. In terms of internal moral uplift, the view was that social ills that befell lower classes of African American women and men (as defined by clubwomen) such as drinking and gambling were preventable with education. Fannie Barrier Williams expressed this concern in article entitled *The Club Movement among the Colored Women* when she wrote 'The fact is that the colored race is not yet sufficiently aroused to its own social perils. The evils that menace the

---

[35] Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Florida R. Ridley eds. *Address of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin,* in The Woman's Era. Vol II. No. 5. Available online at the Emory Women Writers Resource Project http://womenwriters.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/advocacy/content.php?level=div&id=era2_05.24&document=era2 [accessed 10th November 2017]
[36] Josephine Silone-Yates, 'The National Association of Colored Women' *The Voice of the Negro,* Vol 1 (1904)
[37] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent,* p.192.

integrity of the home, the small vices that are too often mistaken for legitimate pleasures give us little concern.'[38] She was alluding to the home being the centre of family, as well as to community life, and she advocated the work of the NACW in education that would lead to social reform and racial uplift, expressing the belief that it would be the clubwomen who would carry out this education for those that needed help.

External Perceptions of Clubwomen

African American clubwomen faced opposition to their endeavours from African American and white men, and white women, and the external perceptions they encountered were predicated on both their race and gender. They sought to publicise their respectability and social service activities as a means of demonstrating a shared interest to white clubwomen, and also as a way of showing men how they were the only ones suitable for the task.

Notions of what was appropriate female activity were used against African American clubwomen in a similar manner to their white contemporaries. John Hope was a noted educator and political activist, and son of a white man and African American woman. Deborah Gray White highlights how Hope adhered to Victorian ideals of gender differences in her exploration of African American feminism. She notes that in a speech to an Atlanta woman's club he articulated how it was not right that African American women should be the leaders of the race in place of men because what was needed was for men to be more manly and women to be more womanly.[39] This clearly references notions of female passivity in deference to a more assertive man and is also indicative of an attitude that women were subordinate to men, particularly when it came to public activities. Echoing this view was W.E.B. Du Bois, who was a staunch defender of African American womanhood, so long as

[38]Fannie Barrier Williams, 'The Club Movement Among Colored Women' *The Voice of the Negro,* Vol 1 (1904), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100334974> [Accessed September 20th, 2021]
[39] White, 'The Cost of Club Work', in *Visible Women*, p.256.

they remained in the private sphere of the home as mothers. In Beverly Guy-Sheftall's comprehensive examination of perceptions of African American women, *Daughters of Sorrow*, she contends that Du Bois supported equal rights for women as well as holding onto the traditional tenets of a separate spheres ideology, with women's primary roles as mothers, and secondary to this was their duty as homemakers.[40] Both Hope and Du Bois were conforming to the predominantly male view that the appropriate place for a woman was in the domestic sphere of the home. These views demonstrate that African American women also faced opposition to their public activism on account of their gender. In this respect, being female was a common barrier for both African American and white women which explains why both groups subscribed to the principles of municipal housekeeping; it was a successful strategy to counter the opinions of men such as Hope and Du Bois.

An additional issue that African American clubwomen faced was based on the interconnection of race and gender. The perception of African American women's morality was of great concern to clubwomen. Anne Meis Knupfer has stated 'club women perceived themselves as ambassadors of the race and took great care to ensure that their deportment was beyond reproach.'[41] Their perception of their elevated status was also evident when Fannie Barrier Williams stated that the NACW was a movement that 'reaches down into the sub-social condition of an entire race and has become the responsibility and effort of a few competent in behalf of the many incompetent.'[42] This categorisation of the 'many incompetent' demonstrates the justification for racial uplift that clubwomen employed as they were educated and had the knowledge to educate those people living in 'sub-social' conditions. This also supports Wanda Hendricks' contention of a 'supremacist ideology' and indicates African American clubwomen held themselves as a higher intellectual and moral

[40] Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880-1920*, ed. By Darlene Clark Hine, (New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), p.72.
[41] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity*, p.21.
[42] Williams, 'The Club Movement Among Colored Women' (1904)

authority. Claiming that there were only a few who were capable of improving the lives of the masses was a condescending view that exposed the class differentiation that clubwomen sought to demonstrate. This was a way for them to court recognition of their respectability among the white community at the expense of other African Americans. But it also demonstrated the conflicting notion of service to others through social improvements indicating the complexity of this ideology. Despite the patronising nature of the language, it is apparent that their reform activities were based upon a very real concern for the conditions in their communities.

Regardless of the public demonstrations of respectability and service to others, the representations of the actions of African American clubwomen in the press were mixed. This can be seen in the depiction of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin as a nuisance in a June 1900 article in the *Chicago Tribune* quoting Rebecca Lowe, president of the GFWC, declared that 'Mrs. Ruffin belongs among her own people. Among them she would be a good leader and could do much good, but among us she can create nothing but trouble.'[43] This perception of the African American women leaders from the white leaders of the women's clubs shows the attitude that the clubs should remain separate in order to further their respective individual causes and achieve their aims as working together would lead to a lack of support from white politicians, businessmen and white women who were concerned with maintaining the colour line.

The reporting in white newspapers also displays language which highlights the prevailing racist attitudes of the time. An example is seen in a *New York Tribune* article of 1906 where the NACW is described as having a genuine interest in 'elevating their handicapped and struggling race.'[44] And in another article published in the *Los Angeles*

[43] *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois) 10 June 1900 quoted in Logan *Betrayal of the Negro*, p. 241
[44] *New York Tribune* (New York) 08 July 1906. Library of Congress http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1906-07-08/ed-1/seq-45/

Herald Illustrated Magazine, African Americans were described as a 'despised and downtrodden people' by a female writer who was invited to the 1902 Biennial Convention of the GFWC and had written a profile of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin who was also invited. These examples are important because they serve to highlight the language used to describe African Americans in general, but when it came to reporting on clubwomen and their conventions, there is a clear shift in perceptions of the public which shows that to some extent their purpose of educating wider society and a concerted public relations campaign had been successful.

This changing attitude is evident in the same *New York Tribune* article from 1906 which was disparaging of African Americans overall but somewhat complimentary towards the NACW. It reported that 'Republicans and Democrats alike expressed surprise at the knowledge of parliamentary law which many of the women displayed and the enthusiasm manifested by all.'[45] Perhaps the 'surprise' expressed is demeaning but it also highlighted the knowledge and education of these women, and the fact that it defied men's expectations of all women. This view of a woman's lack of expertise was also experienced by white clubwomen and was indicative of the male attitudes of women who entered the public sphere of reform. The promotion of respectability of clubwomen to counter negative images of African American women as immoral was a core principle of their organisation and this mission was achieving a measure of success as seen in an article appearing in the *Chicago Times Herald.* This was shared with delegates at the 1899 convention of the NACW. Mary Church Terrell reported that the article stated:

> 'These women of color were a continual revelation, not only as to personal appearance, but as to intelligence and culture. If by a bit of magic the color of their skin could be changed to white, one would have witnessed a convention of wide-awake women, which in almost every particular would favorably compare with a convention of white skinned women.'[46]

[45] *New York Tribune* (New York) 08 July 1906
[46] LOC, MCT papers, Speech at second National Convention, Sep 2, 1899, Box 28 Reel 21.

This report was described as fair and accurate by Terrell and whilst the notion that if they were white women they would be 'wide awake' insinuates that they were not alert or educated enough, it appears that the outward image of intelligence, personal appearance and culture was what mattered to Mary Church Terrell and the clubwomen. The fact that their personal appearance and culture was a revelation to the reporter invites questions of what they were expecting these women to look like. It suggests that they expected them to conform to the stereotypes of African American women and not be modestly dressed, or even shabby and dirty. To express that their intelligence was also a surprise was insulting to the fact that many of these women had attended higher education institutions and were engaged in professional occupations such as teaching and journalism which further supports the idea that this reporter had preconceived, negative ideas about the attributes of these women. Terrell also appears pleased with the comparison to the conventions of white clubwomen indicating the importance of respectability as well as the aim of the NACW to work alongside organisations such as the GFWC. Terrell also reported that 'in speaking about the impression we made, one of the representative citizens of Chicago said that we had done more to put our race in a favourable light than anything the colored people had done for a long time.'[47] As this indicates, as well as intrinsic motivations for racial uplift, the external view of African Americans was also of the utmost importance to these women and they were fulfilling their duty of uplifting the race.

This public recognition of the respectability of African American clubwomen as well as how they conducted their national conventions was important because they believed it lent credibility to their activism in the eyes of city officials and white women's clubs. Because the NACW and other local women's clubs had to contend with the dual barriers of race and gender, public perception of their virtues as African American women had to be positive in

[47] LOC, MCT papers, Speech at second National Convention, Sep 2, 1899.

order to counter the entrenched racialised views of African American women's morals, as expressed in the extreme views of J. W. Jacks' letter. It appears that they were somewhat successful in their aim, but they still faced discrimination and dismissive attitudes about their work for their local communities.

The principle of racial and moral uplift was seen as a responsibility by African American clubwomen in a similar manner to how white women's clubs sought to teach their idea of moral standards to immigrant communities. Articulating their moral duty on the grounds of their advantageous position Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin issued a call to all clubwomen and appealed to their sense of status when she said:

> 'All over America there is to be found a large and growing class of earnest, intelligent, progressive, colored women, women who, if not leading full useful lives, are only waiting for the opportunity to do so, many of them warped and cramped for lack of opportunity, not only to do more but to be more.'[48]

This appeal mirrored the perception that white, middle-class clubwomen had of their duty to those of a lower social class and indicates how class was perceived to be a unifying factor in early women's organisations on both sides of the colour line. Mary Church Terrell echoed this sentiment in her address at the second convention of the NACW in August of 1899 where she highlighted the class differences between clubwomen and those they sought to uplift:

> 'It is frequently charged against the more favoured among us, who have been blessed with advantages of education and moral training superior to those enjoyed by the majority…that the more intelligent and influential among us do not exert themselves as much as they should do to uplift those beneath them, as it is plainly their duty to do.'[49]

The use of the words 'education' 'intelligent' and 'moral training' are particularly significant in this speech because it indicates how African American clubwomen defined their elevated class status in comparison with other women in the community, a discourse also evident in the writings of white middle-class clubwomen. Both groups of women viewed education as

[48] Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin. *Address of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin* Women's Era
[49] LOC, MCT, *The Duty of the National Association of Colored Women to the Race,* August 1899, Box 28 Reel 20

an indicator of status, but also recognised that it afforded them a more privileged position and the possibility of taking action to improve people's lives. As some of these women had trained as teachers, it was also a natural extension of their professional training to use this experience in their own communities.

It appears that although race was an organising principle based upon exclusion, African American women saw their aims as being aligned with, and not just imitating, those of white clubwomen because of their shared gender. Ruffin was keen to stress this in her first presidential address when she claimed that the movement was a woman's movement because it was led by women, but that their work was for 'the good of women and men, for the benefit of all humanity.'[50] She was articulating the significant role of women in improving civic life for all sectors of society and how they were concerned with issues that affected everyone, not just women. In order to challenge the perceived immorality of African American womanhood, the NACW as a national organisation somewhat aligned its principle of moral duty to that of white clubwomen, reflecting the work all women's campaigning of this period did to challenge public perceptions of what being a woman entailed. Indeed, it reflected and re-shaped the notions of domesticity to show a shift to a more public life and how women were an essential part of civic life because of their experiences and observations. Although there was an alignment of some organising principles, the purpose of clubs and organisations such as the Women's Era club of Boston and the NACW was to address issues that particularly affected African American communities. They purposefully sought to 'elevate and dignify colored American womanhood'[51] through a programme of educating African American communities using the ideology of respectability and their professional training. This was enacted in conjunction with altering external perceptions of their race and gender by employing the wider rhetoric of municipal housekeeping and civic motherhood.

---

[50] Ruffin, *Address of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin,* Women's Era.
[51] Ruffin, *Address of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin,* Women's Era.

Civic Motherhood and Municipal Housekeeping

The members of the NACW encountered the same barriers in their work as those of the white women's clubs in Progressive Era municipal reform because city matters were controlled by men and women had little political power. In order to circumvent these obstacles, such as obstruction from public officials with the argument that women should be caring for their homes, African American clubwomen sought to expand the definition of the domestic sphere to encompass local neighbourhoods, thus embracing the municipal housekeeping discourse. They championed the idea that women were best-placed to support these communities because of their virtues, the same strategies employed by white clubwomen.

Where the NACW and other African American city clubs diverged from white clubs was in the adoption of a 'civic motherhood' role. This role meant that not only were women responsible for their own homes and children, but also the conditions in other homes in the community in order to protect all children. Legal historian Susan D. Carle claims that a separate spheres ideology was present in the work of the NACW but that it had a wider scope to 'discuss women's responsibility for fostering beneficial social conditions for the next generation.'[52] Expanding the discourse of the definition of the home was a way for African American women and white women to claim a place in wider city municipal life but for African American women it also meant creating a better environment for the future. There was a recognition that the options for sanitary living conditions were limited whilst segregation was enforced so these clubwomen had to work within the circumstances of the time. These conditions were also experienced later by African American women of the Chicago Urban League and Hazel Johnson in Altgeld Gardens.

[52] Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle: National Racial Justice Organizing, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.19.

The concern for the welfare of all children in the community was articulated by clubwomen and their belief was that through an understanding of issues in their own home, remedial action to address these issues could then be applied in the wider community. Fannie Barrier Williams identified the clubwomen as 'civic mothers' in her article 'The Club Movement Among the Colored Women' in 1904 when she stressed that

> 'members of individual clubs must study the needs of the community in which they live; they must lay hold of the problems that lie nearest to them…and to attempt only that which they know most about and which ought to be done in the interest of their own homes, their own families and the community in which they live. They will thus become the civic mothers of the race.'[53]

At a similar time, Barrier Williams was also expressing the idea that these women could use their own experiences and observations to identify issues because they were living in the communities affected. This principle was more closely aligned with the work of settlement house leaders Jane Addams and Mary McDowell as they too lived in the affected communities. It was a marked difference to the approach of white women's clubs such as the CWC and Ladies' Health Protective Association (LHPA) in New York that were active during this time period. The members of these clubs were operating from an external position and were not as impacted by urban environmental issues as they did not have to live in segregated neighbourhoods and did not have to directly experience degraded environments.

The concept of civic motherhood set African American clubwomen apart from white women's clubs and was an effective way to justify their activities in the public sphere of municipal reform. Placing the health and protection of children at the centre of their work legitimised their efforts not only in the eyes of white women's clubs, but also for city officials and the men in their communities. An example of this validation was in the work of a social improvement committee set up in 1913 in Atlanta, Georgia to inspect all African American schools. The findings indicated appalling hygiene conditions and severe

[53] Williams, 'The Club Movement Among Colored Women' *The Voice of the Negro.*

overcrowding. The result of lobbying city officials and white clubwomen was that a temporary additional school was set up to ease these conditions.[54]

It was not only schools that were seen as a place where children needed protection but also in the home. Combining the role of municipal housekeeper and civic mother, Mary Church Terrell believed that the Association's work started with where people lived. She claimed;

'If I were called upon to state in a word, where I thought the Association should do its most effective work, I should say unhesitatingly-in the home. The purification of the home must be our first consideration and care. It is in the home, where woman is really queen.'[55]

Beginning in their own immediate environments and then working outwards into the wider neighbourhood reflects the spirit of grassroots organising seen in later decades particularly in the work of the Chicago Urban League that formed in 1917. This is further supported in a speech given in 1897 entitled *In Union There is Strength* where Mary Church Terrell outlined the activism that NACW members and affiliates would participate in as municipal housekeepers and civic mothers. She brought to attention the racist practices of segregation that municipal governments enforced when she described the housing of African Americans to be 'relegated to the most noisome sections permitted by the municipal governments'. Continuing, she noted that in these environments the 'air is foul, the manners bad and the morals worse and this so-called home is a menace to health, a breeder of vice, and the abode of crime.'[56] This description underscores the purpose of the clubs in racial uplift as manners and morals were seen by clubwomen as an indicator of respectability and the vices of drinking and gambling were threatening to the children of the community. Terrell was further defining their activism within an environmental reform framework because of the poor sanitary conditions of tenement housing for immigrants and African American migrants from

[54] Gerda Lerner, 'Early Community Work of Black Club Women', *The Journal of Negro History* Vol.59, No.2 (1974) pp.163-164.
[55] LOC MCT papers, 'Duty of the National Association', Aug 1899, Box 28 Reel 20.
[56] LOC, MCT Speeches and Writings, 'In Union There is Strength', Sep 15, 1897, Box 28 Reel 20.

the South. In this example she was clearly identifying a link between the living conditions and low morals, and seemed to suggest that until these homes were improved, low moral standards would continue. Terrell offered a stirring call to participate in actions to deal with this problem when she described the conditions the children were living in. She believed these led to a rise in the number of African American juveniles 'who fill the penitentiaries and crowd the jails' and described the heritage of their youth that this environment created as 'wretched'. This certainly indicates that their dual roles as civic mothers and municipal housekeepers were what drove their reform work as well as being used as a strategy to enlarge the domestic sphere. The purpose of purifying the home in order to protect children can be seen in the following excerpt from Terrell's speech:

> 'I would have presented and pictured the miserable hovels from which these youthful criminals come. Crowded into alleys, many of them haunts of vice, few if any of them in proper sanitary condition, most of them fatal to mental and moral growth, and destructive of healthful physical development.'[57]

In her view, unsanitary living conditions were linked to crime as well as health issues, so it was prudent to clean up the streets and homes in order to protect the health and morals of the children.

This dual role as civic mothers and municipal housekeepers drove African American women's reform activities. Among other things, they worked to improve sanitary conditions inside and outside the home including sweeping, dusting and washing as well as garbage disposal which was a major cause of the spread of disease. In 1900, Dr Carrie Golden, one of Chicago's first African American female physicians, was invited to speak before the Phyllis Wheatley Club of Chicago which was reported in *The Broad Ax,* an African American newspaper published weekly in Salt Lake City and Chicago. Golden described her visit to the tenement housing on Chicago's South-Side where she found 'the homes of some of the

[57] LOC, MCT Speeches and Writings, 'In Union There is Strength', Sep 15, 1897.

colored people in a more wretched state as to their sanitary condition than the white homes. She deplored the fact that tenement houses for the greater part rented to Colored people are not fit to live in.'[58] This wider reporting of a club meeting depicted how the housing and environmental conditions in major cities were of a national concern and why the work of the NACW was so important in addressing these issues. It also marked a noticeable entry into environmental reform efforts by these groups that would be continued after the Great Migration from 1915. In contrast to the work of the Ladies Health Protective Association of New York, for example, which was concerned with unsanitary slaughterhouse practices affecting their own homes in an elite area of the city, African American women used the classed and gendered characteristics of civic mothers and municipal housekeeping to benefit the wider community by focusing on some of the specific concerns in African American areas. These concerns were the product of segregated housing areas where living conditions were clearly detrimental to public health. The ideals of municipal housekeeping and civic motherhood were thus used as strategies to engage in and justify reform activities as evidenced in the writings of Mary Church Terrell and Fannie Barrier Williams, both leaders of the NACW.

Civic Betterment in Chicago and the Settlement House

Whilst the national organisation followed the tenets of racial uplift, organisations on a local level were pursuing their own agendas. As early as 1896, clubs in Chicago were organising to improve civic life for African Americans. The Phyllis Wheatley Club was formed in 1896 and conceived as a 'neighborhood betterment organisation' that began by fighting 'saloons in close proximity to schools'.[59] This strand of their work was part of the broader aims of the

[58] *The Broad Ax.* (Salt Lake City, Utah), 14 April 1900. Library of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024055/1900-04-14/ed-1/seq-1/>
[59] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, p.16.

Anti-Saloon League that was formed in 1893 but this organisation evolved to also support women and girls in finding suitable employment. This early work was indicative of protecting the city's children, the core of the ideal of civic motherhood, which would also serve as a template for the work of the Department for Civic Betterment that was part of the Chicago Urban League in 1917. Elizabeth Lindsey Davis served as president of the club for twenty-four years as well as being the National Organiser for the NACW between 1901 and 1906. She was an experienced clubwoman who served her community, particularly focusing on the problem of inadequate housing and employment for African American women who migrated to the city. In 1906 The Phyllis Wheatley Club purchased a house for 'self-supporting girls' who were new to the city and 'finding it impossible to secure a congenial environment in which to live'.[60]

This home was located outside of the 'Black Belt' which the Club perceived as being a dangerous place for these young women due to the temptations of dance halls, saloons and movie theatres.[61] As well as providing sanitary lodging for these African American women, the Phyllis Wheatley Home was also a place where they were protected from these supposed vices and temptations, thus preserving their moral standards, and they could receive support for finding employment as it had been alleged that newly arrived women were being sent to saloons and dance halls to work. Establishing this home demonstrated African American clubwomen's dedication to improvement in their communities and reflected the spirit of reformers such as Mary McDowell and Jane Addams. Clubs such as the Phyllis Wheatley Club would also provide African American women organisers with experience in dealing with municipal governments that would be essential when tackling the degraded environmental conditions in Chicago's 'Black Belt' in the ensuing years.

---

[60] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, p.16.*
[61] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity*, p.81.

An example of one of the ways in which African American clubwomen were subverting the exclusion and prejudice they faced was the relationship between Fannie Barrier Williams and Celia Parker Woolley. Woolley had previously nominated Barrier Williams for membership of the CWC and in 1905, Woolley, with the assistance of Barrier Williams, established the Frederick Douglass Center. This was the first social settlement specifically for African Americans and was modelled on the Hull House social settlement, which shall be further discussed in chapter three. It was created in response to the lack of facilities for African Americans and because they were prohibited from white settlement houses. Its objectives were to 'promote a just and amicable relation between the white and colored people, remove the disabilities from which the latter suffer in their civil, political and industrial life and to encourage equal opportunity irrespective of race or color'.[62] These were ambitious goals and directly challenged the dominant forms of segregation in Chicago. The Douglass Center also established committees to carry out work in sanitation and housing which was a precursor to the work of the CUL. Fannie Barrier Williams wrote that this settlement house, the first of its kind, was a 'new experiment in the work of social justice'.[63] This shows a shift in the perception that clubwomen had of poorer African Americans from a condescending position that they were the better class to one that encouraged and actively sought equal opportunities, be it employment or sanitary housing, for all African American citizens.

This 'new experiment' in social justice was not without its critics, however. Philpott describes how once the programme got going 'there were no activities to attract recent Negro arrivals who might yearn for uplift'. According to Philpott, 'the center's clientele were already uplifted', a charge that was also levied in various articles in the *Broad Ax*

[62] Fannie Barrier Williams, 'The Frederick Douglass Centre: A Question of Social Betterment and Not of Social Equality' in *The New Woman of Color*, ed. by Mary Jo Deegan, pp.113-116 (p.115).
[63] Williams, 'The Frederick Douglass Centre'. p.114.

newspaper.[64] Julius Taylor wrote that it was not 'of the slightest benefit to the great mass of Afro-Americans' and was 'fast drifting into a mutual admiration society'.[65] These criticisms arose from the fact that whites outnumbered African Americans on the board overseeing operations and because they were prominent members of society such as lawyers and judges. There was no representation at the upper levels of the people who the Center was established to help, and this reflected the class differentiation that had been employed in the forming of African American women's clubs. It was also an attempt to impose middle-class values on the migrants. Historian Floris Barnett Cash argues that social settlements 'showed the ability of middle-class women to provide for their own but the elitist clubwomen used their organizations to promote middle-class concepts of morality and respectability'.[66] This dual purpose weakened the efficacy of the social settlement and in the aim of providing equal opportunities for all, it did not succeed.

A further criticism was that the location of the settlement house was not in the neighbourhood that needed it most. Unlike Hull House, which was located in the heart of the immigrant communities, the Douglass Center was located on a largely white street unlike the later settlements that were founded by African Americans such as the Emanuel Settlement. Philpott details how the settlement house was located east of State Street past the tracks of the South Side elevated railroad. This had been the 'grand dividing line' between the Black Belt and the white community of Grand Boulevard.[67] It seems counter-intuitive to locate a service for African Americans outside of their neighbourhoods and it is obvious why Woolley attracted criticism. However, it marked a major milestone in race relations in Chicago and although the Center closed when Woolley died in 1918 and became the headquarters for the

[64] Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, p.319.
[65] *The Broad Ax*, 23 June 1906.
[66] Floris Barnett Cash, *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), p.109.
[67] Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, p.320.

Chicago Urban League, it was a notable attempt at social improvement for Chicago's African American population which would be continued into the twentieth century.

Conclusion

African American women's clubs in the period from 1892 to 1896 were examples of early grassroots organising in the pursuit of social justice, which evolved into a national organisation that campaigned against lynching and in support of suffrage. The NACW was the first African American national organisation which was testament to the dedication of Mary Church Terrell and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin. The history of these clubs has been chronicled by historians in relation to their purpose, but this chapter offers an evaluation of how their work reflected aims which were specific to them because of their history as well as their status as spaces in which African American women could plan and campaign during a period that was marked by segregation and disenfranchisement. These organisations were formed according to internal and external factors which reflected the prevailing racist attitudes of white men towards Black women formed during slavery that had a long legacy. They were also motivated by the exclusionary practices of white, middle-class clubwomen, which were based on maintaining a clear racial divide between their public works. Finally, there was an evident desire to attend to local community needs. Racial uplift was a priority for African American clubwomen as seen in their motto 'lifting as we climb' because the more privileged members saw it as their moral duty to help those less fortunate than themselves. Although this approach has been critiqued as imposing a supremacist ideology, there is evidence that the aims of these clubwomen was to support other African American women, as was apparent in the founding of the Phyllis Wheatley Home for girls. Their strategy for challenging the separate spheres ideology was similar to white women's clubs with the adoption of the municipal housekeeping doctrine. But it significantly diverged with the added intersection of an identity as civic mothers who were tasked with improving the

homes of children in the wider community through education and better sanitation. Schools were also deemed to be within this ‘home’, and they were regularly inspected to ensure conditions were appropriate so as to avoid moral and physical degradation. Finally, the shifting perceptions of the white clubwomen and the popular press are evidenced in newspaper reports of the national conventions, and whilst the language used was often still derogatory, the clubwomen seem to have had some success in their aim of being viewed as intelligent, moral and cultured.

All of these factors combined to lay the foundations for community organising and activism in response to specific environmental concerns brought about by rapid industrialisation and mass migration. The work of the NACW and the influence of Fannie Barrier Williams and her allies would be continued and developed by the Chicago Urban League from 1917 into the middle of the twentieth century. The African American communities in the Black Belt would face worsening conditions, heightened by segregation, racial zoning laws and restrictive covenants, so the work of the CUL was imperative in fighting environmental inequality. In the next chapter, specific case studies will be examined and situated within an environmental reform framework to highlight how the work and organisational structures of women’s clubs in the early Progressive Era were replicated by subsequent women-led organisations to advance their own reform agendas.

Chapter Three - Confronting Environmental Inequalities in Chicago

In 1914 Mary McDowell remarked that the phrase 'put it on the edge of the city' was often heard in discussions concerning the location of 'certain unpleasant industries'.[1] She was referring to the proliferation of garbage dumps and the waste practices of industries that were a direct result of the rapid growth of the great stockyards of Chicago. This idea that facilities that were harmful to public health should be located away from the city and residential areas of the middle- and upper-class white residents was an overt reference to the environmental inequality experienced by the immigrant communities of Chicago. Mary McDowell would become the leading advocate for the residents of the Back of the Yards neighbourhood in an effort to tackle environmental inequalities in the most polluted area of Chicago in the early twentieth century.

This chapter seeks to examine the environmental activism of settlement house workers McDowell and Jane Addams in Chicago from 1894 to 1915 to demonstrate how they contested gender divisions in society, and explicitly challenged the male political structures in the city by demanding that existing sanitary laws be enforced. Their work was so significant because they were operating in a time of great urban, industrial and social change that benefitted men more than women and they couldn't vote or hold office, but they clearly carved out political power for themselves. Addams founded Hull House in 1889 and McDowell moved to the University Settlement House in the Back of the Yards district in 1894. Both of these areas were heavily polluted, and the residents were subjected to the most degraded environmental conditions in the city. The choice these women made to live in these communities transcended traditional notions of womanhood because they were deliberately

[1] Chicago, Chicago Historical Society, MS Mary McDowell Settlement Records, 'Standard of Living: Civic Frontiersman' 1914 in box 2, folder 13.

rejecting ideals of submissiveness and passivity at a time when these prescriptions were still pervasive in American society, especially in relation to women who entered the sphere of public reform.

The activities of Addams and McDowell were affected by the barrier of attitudes of multiple groups including male city officials, business leaders, and other women. This included resistance they faced from the very groups they were trying to help because these people were reliant on industry for employment. They were also endeavouring to reform the male sphere of sanitary practices that were directly linked to industrialisation which led to conflict because of the tension with men's economic interests. They had no formal training in this area and this fact was often used against them by those they directly challenged. What these women did was to create their own systems of power in the form of the settlement house in order to direct their own political agenda and as a route into social research that they could then use to effect change.[2] With these organisations, Addams and McDowell created networks of like-minded reformers and achieved tangible successes in the form of better implementation of existing laws, gaining positions in municipal government and improving environmental conditions in their communities. McDowell and Addams' activism demonstrated that women were at the forefront of struggles to improve urban environmental conditions in the major cities of the United States during the Progressive Era. Their work could have been inhibited by what Rosalind Rosenberg argues was 'the Victorian conception of sexual polarity that maintained its hold on the popular imagination', and both Addams and McDowell did encounter these kinds of challenges and attitudes about women's roles in social work, public health, and sanitation reform. [3] However, this chapter will demonstrate

[2] Ann Oakley, *Women, Peace, and Welfare: A Suppressed History of Social Reform, 1880-1920*, (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018) p.58. Barbara Sicherman, 'Working it Out: Gender, Profession, and Reform in the Career of Alice Hamilton', in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*, Noralee Frankel & Nancy S. Dye eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), pp. 127- 147 (p.127).
[3] Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p.207.

how they effectively countered these views and how their work built upon that of their predecessors in the Chicago Women's Club (CWC).

The strategies employed by Addams and McDowell contest Martin Melosi's view that these reformers were moralistic and paternalistic in their goals and that their concept of municipal housekeeping merely provided 'a layman's perception of a complex environmental problem'.[4] Both Addams and McDowell actively lived and worked in the communities worst affected, and they both employed the tenets of municipal housekeeping to draw attention to the deteriorated sanitary conditions in their districts. This chapter will examine how these women exposed and challenged environmental inequalities in their neighbourhoods that were perpetuated because of the class status and ethnicity of the residents.[5] The status of Addams and McDowell as women during this time of social change built upon the earlier work of the CWC and the Woman's City Club of Chicago (WCC), formed in 1910, which had provided both women with experiences of civic reform as well as access to a network of support. They were both active members of the WCC and regularly contributed articles to its monthly bulletin and contributed articles to city newspapers. Mary McDowell also published reports for the City Waste Committee, which she led. This gave them a particular perspective and ability to identify environmental issues and seek ways to solve them.

An examination of the work of Jane Addams and Mary McDowell will demonstrate how this activism was a precursor to the modern environmental justice organisations that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. As explored in chapter one, women who were engaged in urban environmental reform faced specific barriers on account of their gender and perceived

[4] Martin V. Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), p. 99.

[5] For the purposes of this chapter, the definition of environmental inequality that will be used includes disparate exposure, disparate health impacts and disparate social impacts based on ethnicity and class as proposed by Sociologist Liam Downey in, 'Assessing Environmental Inequality: How the Conclusions We Draw Vary According to the Definitions We Employ', National Institute of Health, *Social Spectr*, 25.3 (2011) < https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3162366/pdf/nihms317109.pdf> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

lack of expertise in both political structures such as municipal government, and sanitary systems and procedures including garbage disposal methods and sewage engineering. As Maureen Flanagan contends, municipal housekeeping was dismissed by male progressives because it did not fit within the constructed concept of 'expertise'.[6] However, Addams and McDowell would subvert this notion of expertise by educating themselves in sanitary systems as well as collaborating with professionals such as Dr Alice Hamilton in order to address public health concerns. They used similar methods to the women of the CWC as discussed in chapter one, carrying out investigations with experts including Hamilton who was a notable ally of Addams. She specialised in industrial toxicology and worked as a bacteriologist at the prestigious research laboratory of the Memorial Institute for Infectious Diseases. Hamilton spent most of her professional life working in the male sphere of scientific study but was active in workplace reform efforts, specialising in occupational diseases, and in the female reform network created at Hull House where she combined scientific research methods with social service.[7]

How gender, class and, in this chapter ethnicity, intersected in the activism of Addams and McDowell is a complex framework involving multiple participants. These included immigrant men and women who had their own concerns. For the men working in the factories of Chicago's booming industries it was that their livelihoods were linked to the very industries that were harming their health, and for the women it was the view that they had to support their husbands as well as adhere to the assumed characteristics of their gender. This included not involving themselves in public, political matters, thus preventing them from taking action against the environmental practices that impacted on their lives. Additionally, male politicians, journalists and publications who reported these activities to the wider public,

[6] Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivism 1890s-1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 176.
[7] Barbara Sicherman, 'Working it Out', in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform*, ed. by Frankel and Dye, p.129.

and men in industry who were responsible for unsanitary practices also shaped reform activities. This chapter will highlight how Addams and McDowell effectively responded to these numerous groups and challenges in their work to address environmental inequality in Chicago.

Early Environmental Justice Struggles in Chicago

Scholars including sociologist David Pellow, and historians Sylvia Hood Washington, Harold Platt, and Maureen Flanagan have framed the early environmental reform activities of women such as Addams and McDowell as environmental justice struggles. Although this is a modern concept, these characteristics can be seen in the work of Addams and McDowell, as they sought to engage their communities in ameliorating environmental hazards as well as challenging city officials they viewed as being motivated by economic gains rather than public health concerns. Both of these women also sought to articulate the ways that these communities were the worst affected in the city because of inequalities based on class and ethnicity.

In modern environmental justice fights this has been classified as environmental racism because the negative impacts tended to fall on certain groups. Sociologist Bunyan Bryant defines this as 'the unequal protection against toxic and hazardous waste exposure and the systematic exclusion of people of color from decisions affecting their communities'.[8] This is further elaborated upon by David Pellow who states 'environmental racism is a form of *environmental inequality* which occurs when a particular social group – not necessarily a racial or ethnic group – is burdened with environmental hazards'.[9] Pellow and Hood-Washington have applied the concept of environmental racism to the pollution in Back of the

[8] Bunyan Bryant, ed., *Environmental Justice: Issues, Policies, and Solutions* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1995),p. 6.
[9] David Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), p. 8.

Yards labelling it as one of the first manifestations of environmental racism in Chicago.[10] Following Pellow's definition, the immigrant communities of Chicago can be argued to have been victims of environmental racism.

The social justice perspective of Addams and McDowell was in direct opposition to a moralistic one as proposed by Melosi. These women were far less concerned with the behaviours of their immigrant communities and had less of a judgemental attitude than some of the early women's organisations. Both McDowell and Addams believed that external agents were the main perpetrators of environmental inequality, rather than the communities themselves and they actively campaigned from a position of collaboration from within those neighbourhoods. Flanagan further elucidates this idea when she states 'these women were progressive pioneers in the idea that public health decisions had to be made on the basis of environmental justice, not merely, or even primarily on economics'.[11] The work of Jane Addams in the Nineteenth ward can be explicitly linked to this notion, particularly in relation to garbage disposal which was contracted out to private companies and was one of the significant issues that Addams would address by challenging their economic motivations over the health of her residents.

Social Work and Segregation at the University of Chicago

Education and research practices in Chicago, and particularly at the city's main university, heavily influenced the ways these women went about their work. The direction of Addams and McDowell's early activism, and that of their female collaborators, was especially shaped by how the University of Chicago defined and separated the social sciences into the masculine, theoretical study of sociology, and the feminine practical application of social

[10] Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2017), p.85, and Pellow, p.22.
[11] Flanagan, *America Reformed*, p.176.

sciences in the school of social work.[12] President William Harper established the school of social work in 1902 to separate the more feminine reform work from the male professional school of sociology, and Edith Abbott, author of the comprehensive study of tenements in Chicago that spanned the years 1908 to 1935, graduated from this school. The study of the more practical elements of social work appealed to women such as Abbott because it was a mechanism whereby they could expand their work in the public domain. It further served as a way to broaden the concept of municipal housekeeping to encompass research into the cause and effect of poor public health, as well as data collection and analysis in the form of in-depth investigations. By dividing the social sciences into separate schools of sociology and social work, Harper had inadvertently enabled women reformers to legitimise their activism and renegotiate concepts of professional expertise.

Jane Addams and Mary McDowell collaborated closely with men who sought to work in the more practical side of social science including Graham Taylor, who founded the Chicago Commons settlement on the northwest side of Chicago in 1894. So the settlement idea was not a uniquely female concept, nor was social work. This was despite the leaders of the University of Chicago wishing to secure its reputation as a 'distinctly male institution training men for identifiably male work'.[13] Instead, it succeeded in training women (and men) in practical methods of investigation and this work influenced Addams and McDowell and also provided them with the evidence of harmful environmental conditions that they needed in order to challenge the inaction of municipal government and the economic priorities of various agencies.

[12] Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, p.50.
[13] Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, p.49.

Chicago: The Second City

Addams and McDowell both openly challenged environmental inequality from a grassroots perspective because they moved to the communities worst affected and established settlement houses there. This marked a departure from the work of women's clubs in the city as they were operating from external positions whereas Addams and McDowell made a conscious decision to live in the affected communities in the pursuit of a healthy environment for all citizens, regardless of class and ethnicity. The location of these settlements were the heavily populated Nineteenth and Twenty-Ninth wards of the city with large immigrant populations and deplorable housing and sanitary conditions due to the tenement houses that were prolific in these areas. The need for the settlements was a direct consequence of the dramatic increase in population as a result of the rapid industrialisation of Chicago.

To understand the nature of the environmental inequalities encountered by the residents of the Back of the Yards and the Nineteenth ward, it is essential to discuss the location and type of industry Chicago was home to. In a 1914 poem titled *Chicago* by Carl Sandburg, he immortalised the city as the 'hog butcher for the world'.[14] This is not an inaccurate description as highlighted by University of Chicago sociologist Charles Bushnell in his contemporary study of the Union Stockyards in 1901. As Bushnell noted, from December 1865 when the stockyards opened to 1900, the size of the live-stock industry operations grew at a rapid rate, aided in large part by the development of the railroads.[15] The figures Bushnell gives show the enormity of the operation by 1900, with over 400,000,000 head of livestock being processed in a thirty-five-year period with a value of $5,500,000,000.[16] This scale of industrialisation, typical of American cities in the latter part of the nineteenth century but particularly notable in Chicago, led to mass immigration and a

[14] Carl Sandburg, 'Chicago', in *Poetry Magazine of Verse*, ed. Harriet Monroe (Chicago, 1914) available online at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/issue/70335/march-1914> [Accessed 14 January 2019]
[15] Charles J. Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter I. Industry at the Chicago Stock Yards', *American Journal of Sociology*, 7:2 (1901) 145-170 (p. 149).
[16] Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter I', p.149.

dramatic increase in population size. Figure 1.1 demonstrates the size of the stock yard operations as well as the type of industry located there in 1894.

In the 1890 Census, Chicago was recorded as the second-largest city in the United States (New York was the largest) with a population of 1,099,850.[17] The Union Stockyards were located in the Twenty-Ninth and Thirtieth wards of Chicago, and the majority of the population within these districts lived in the precincts near the yards, which is where the name 'Back of the Yards' came from. Bushnell's comprehensive study of the community ranged from examining working conditions to health problems, but he also compiled statistics on the population based on his own observations as well as school records and employment figures. He found that in 1898 the population of the Stockyards district was 19% American-born, 24.6% German, 31.6% Irish, and 10.2% Slavic which included Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian and Russian immigrants.[18] As the stockyard industry grew, so too did immigration from Eastern Europe with the German and Irish immigrants moving away from the community. In a 1904 report on the packing industry, Harry Rosenberg, a Jewish lawyer who grew up in the stockyards neighbourhood, noted that these 'old immigrants' were being replaced by those of Slavic descent, particularly Poles, Lithuanians, Bohemians, Slovenians and Croatians.[19] The ethnic composition of these communities is important because it resulted in the Chicago-born population apportioning blame for unsanitary conditions on the customs and habits of these incomers. This pattern of immigration was evident in other major, industrialised US cities and these industries benefitted from a steady stream of labourers who were prepared to occupy any available position.

---

[17] United States Census Bureau, 'Decennial Census Records for 1890', <https://www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/decennial_census_records/availability_of_1890_census.html > [Accessed 6 May 2019] Approximately 99% of the census records for 1890 were damaged by fire in January 1921.

[18] Charles J. Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter II. The Stock Yard Community at Chicago', *American Journal of Sociology*, 7:3 (1901) 289-330 (p. 294).

[19] MS Mary McDowell Settlement Records, Harry Rosenberg 'Packing Industry and the Stockyards' 1914 in Box 3, Folder 15.

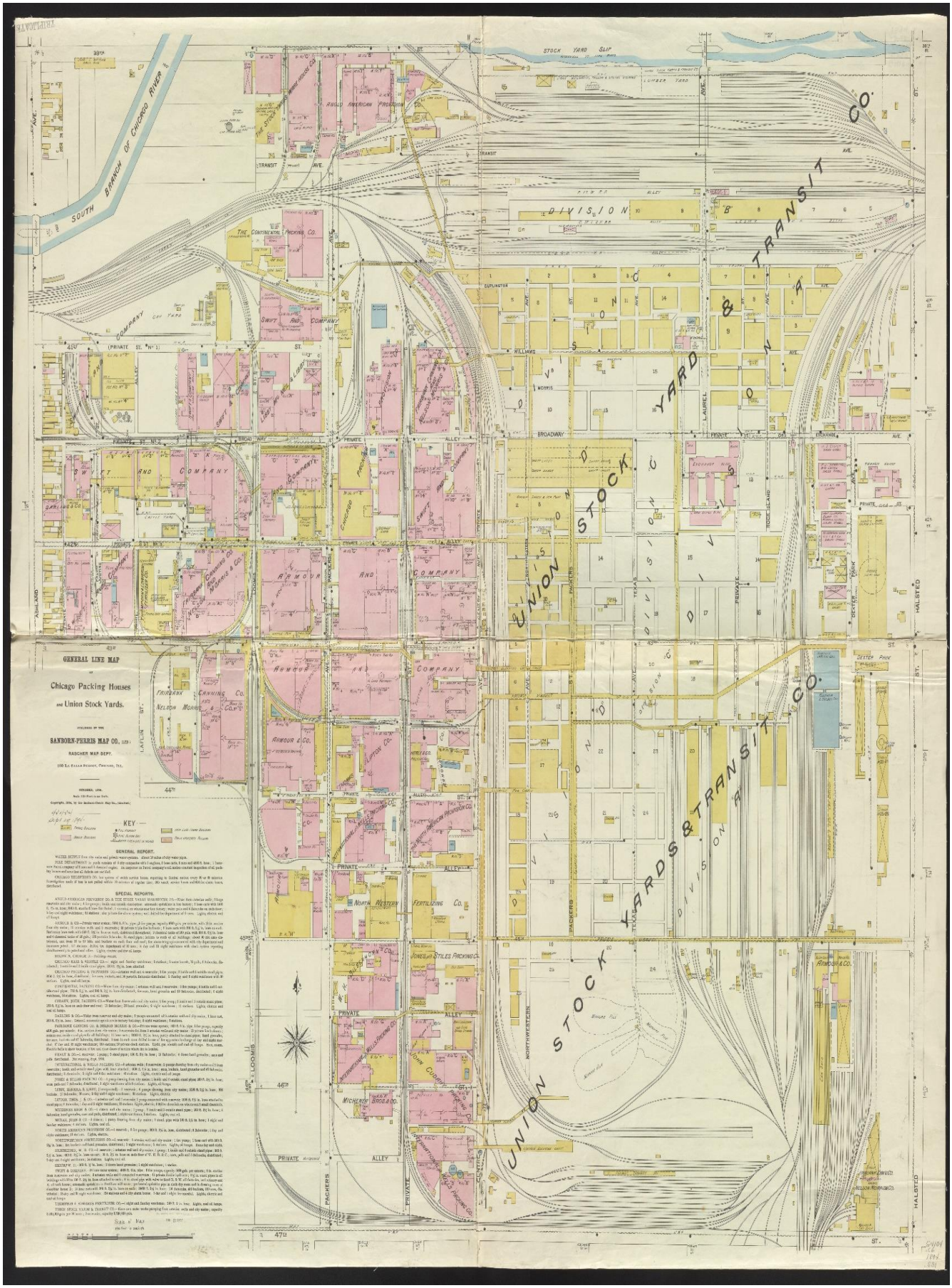

Figure 1.1. Sanborn fire insurance map of the Union Stock Yards, 1894. Provided courtesy of the Map Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In the stockyards, Polish immigrants were regularly brought in as strike breakers, and, as Bushnell observed, the complex structure of the organisational chain in the packing plants was a further avenue for increasing immigrant numbers. The lowest officer, often referred to as the 'straw boss' was 'usually a foreigner and a recognised social leader among his fellows'. He also served the function of 'bringing his friends and relatives from foreign countries to America by letters and descriptions of the opportunities of profitable employment, […] virtually importing foreign labor for contract'.[20] This change in the ethnic composition of the Back of the Yards is significant in relation to the waste disposal practices of the stock yards because the resulting environmental degradation that occurred can be directly linked to the prevailing attitudes towards the immigrant population that inhabited the 'edge of the city'. In short, business leaders either believed or assumed that this was a suitable place to dispose of hazardous materials, furthering the cycle of environmental inequalities.

It was not only the stockyards that was home to immigrant labourers. There was a massive increase in population, and tenement districts had expanded rapidly in the previous decades to accommodate this increase. In 1900 the foreign-born population of Chicago was larger than the entire population of Chicago had been in 1882. This stunning increase in such a short space of time emphasises just how significant Chicago was as an urban and industrial centre at the turn of the century. The Census records show that between 1860 and 1900, the immigrant population grew by 532,488, with the largest increase occurring in the 1880-1890 period with a total of 245,807 people arriving.[21] This rapid increase in population meant that the city's already inadequate tenement houses became more overcrowded because there was no suitable, alternative housing available, and those who had moved to the city, generally

[20] Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter I', p. 167.
[21] Department of Commerce, U.S Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of The United States 1920: State Compendium Illinois from 1840-1920*, < https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/06229686v8-13ch5.pdf> [accessed 10 January 2022]

lived near to the industrial districts where they sought employment, including the stock yards area. This meant they often shared buildings with multiple families, sometimes in the same room. The growth in industry spurred on by railroad development meant that more people were moving to these areas for employment opportunities which led to a proliferation in the building of cheap housing that were poorly ventilated and with little natural light.

Class and Ethnicity as Factors in Perpetuating Environmental Inequality

In a similar manner to the African American migrants from the South, European immigrants were viewed as outsiders to the city who were ill-equipped, both in education and habits, in dealing with urban living. The white, American-born population of Chicago blamed their habits and ignorance for poor health. In a study of the industry of the stockyards in the later years of the nineteenth century, Journalist Bertram Fowler wrote that the European immigrants created the slums of the Back of the Yards and that they had brought with them filth and squalor.[22] Interestingly, Addams also initially supported this view, claiming that the 'pathetic stupidity of agricultural people' was to blame for them not acclimatising to urban living.[23] This bears a striking resemblance to comments made by Fannie Barrier Williams about southern migrants in Chicago and demonstrates how the more established residents of the city held controversial views based on stereotypes before they became actively involved in these areas and witnessed the deplorable conditions first-hand. Communities were blamed for their own unsanitary conditions in what Robert Gottlieb calls a form of environmental victimisation.[24] Addams and McDowell would become instrumental in publicising this victimisation that was predicated on class and ethnicity.

[22] Bertram B. Fowler, *Men, Meat and Miracles*, (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1952), p.78.
[23] Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911), p.100.
[24] Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, rev.edn. (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2005), p.91.

In order to document the extent of unsanitary conditions, both Addams and McDowell conducted systematic investigations with the aid of members of their own communities as well as outside agencies, and by petitioning city departments for improvements. Addams articulated this inequality on the basis of class when she wrote:

> When the water of Chicago is foul, the prosperous buy water bottled at distant springs; the poor have no alternative but the typhoid fever which comes from using the city's supply. When the garbage contracts are not enforced, the well-to-do pay for private service; the poor suffer the discomfort and illness which are inevitable from a foul atmosphere.[25]

She was highlighting the class divisions that left her neighbours with fewer options in protecting their health because they did not have the resources to access better services. This inequality was perpetuated by low wages and insufficient housing as well as the external attitudes toward the immigrants that lived in these communities. The settlement houses became the primary organisations that sought to address this ethnic and class divide.

Although Addams and McDowell did not set out to become environmental activists in their leadership at the Hull House Settlement and University Settlement House, they could not ignore the environmental degradation they encountered. They were engaged in struggles for environmental justice decades before this concept gained prominence because they were working towards equal protection from environmental and health hazards. The everyday struggles faced by residents of Chicago's stockyard communities in Chicago and the tenement houses of the Nineteenth ward were ones of pollution and inadequate sanitation both inside their homes and in the wider areas.

Addams and McDowell used the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping as a method to garner support for their activism. This was a deliberate strategy to legitimise their activism to multiple audiences, including the immigrant women in the communities where they lived and to city officials. They also purposefully adapted this rhetoric to encourage other women to

---

[25] Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1902), p.261.

participate, including those in the affected communities who were reticent to speak up because their husbands worked in the industries of the stock yards. However, the work of Addams and McDowell expanded the narrative of municipal housekeepers to include a social justice aspect because in order to protect public health through cleaning up the city, they believed environmental inequalities had to be addressed at all levels.

The Settlement House: 'With' not 'for' the community

Jane Addams and Mary McDowell were instrumental in expanding the municipal work that women's city clubs had been undertaking in Chicago since 1876. This expansion would be facilitated by the establishment of Hull House in the Nineteenth ward by Addams, and the University of Chicago Settlement in the packing town area known as Back of the Yards, by McDowell. This expansion would evolve into overtly challenging environmental inequalities and making concerns over the environment and public health what historian William H. Chafe has called their 'central preoccupation'.[26] They did this through promoting municipal housekeeping as a means of traversing class and ethnic lines within their own communities and wider Chicago society, and arguing that public health and safety was the right of every citizen.[27] Whereas previous organisations had smaller departments devoted to municipal reform, Addams and McDowell made it their primary mission and played a crucial role in not only advancing environmental justice in Progressive-Era Chicago, but also the position of women in municipal government.

Their work was also significant because understanding it means we can directly challenge Martin Melosi's notion that citizen organisations were primarily concerned with

[26] William H. Chafe 'Women's History and Political History: Some Thoughts on Progressivism and the New Deal', in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. by Nancy M. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) pp. 101-118 (p.104).
[27] Maureen Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City 1871-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p.96.

the aesthetic problems of pollution.[28] A statement from Mary McDowell in a 1912 report for the City Waste Committee clearly placed public health concerns above aesthetic concerns when she stated: 'while the city beautiful is being sought through various proposed plans, the city sanitary is of more vital importance to the health welfare of the citizens.'[29] She was critiquing the prioritising of government-led plans to create a more attractive Chicago which included providing more parks and playgrounds and locating civic and cultural institutions in the downtown area. Both Addams and McDowell protested these plans because they did not address the acute housing crisis or the squalid environmental conditions that the immigrant communities endured.[30] In this instance, it was not the reformers who were concerned with aesthetics, but the male municipal government. This further emphasises how women in the Progressive Era were fighting for equal protection from environmental hazards to enable a healthy environment in which to live in. It is clear that public health had become a priority for women-led organisations by the turn of the century, largely in response to increasing immigration and its impacts on city housing as well as the environmentally harmful by-products of the industrial city. Addams and McDowell were key instigators of sanitation reform in Chicago, and they started in the neighbourhoods where their settlement houses were located.

Critics of the settlement house movement charged that it was 'too vague to be meaningful' and its leaders were attacked as either being too radical or not radical enough.[31] But Addams and McDowell would refute these claims and they both articulated their purpose in clear terms of providing solutions to problems cause by industrial and urban conditions.

---

[28] Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities*, p.91.
[29] CHS, MS Woman's City Club of Chicago Records, "Wanted-A Chicago City Plan for City Waste", *Woman's City Club Bulletin 2,* 1912.
[30] Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), p.175.
[31] Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) p.17.

Negative public perception of settlement houses was highlighted by Francis Hackett in a review written for *The New Republic* in 1916. He wrote:

> The name " social settlement" suggests to some Americans an utterly sentimental relation to the poor…It suggests young ladies with weak eyes and young gentlemen with weak chins fluttering confusedly among heterogeneous foreigners, offering cocoa and sponge cake as a sort of dessert to the factory system they deplore. It suggests a rootless flower stuck with romantic incongruity in the mud. It suggests, in short, a womanly effort to pave the hell of poverty with the very prettiest of intentions.[32]

Hackett did not claim to agree with these suggestions but by including them in his review he was giving them publicity. He also did not elaborate on who 'some Americans' were but they would have been anyone who opposed the work of settlement workers including city officials, ward bosses and private contractors responsible for city sanitation services. Feminising reform work in this hyperbolic manner with the inclusion of flowers, fluttering, cocoa and cake played into the tropes that women were suited to the domestic sphere rather than the public work of reform. Focusing on such superficial fare as solutions to industrial problems was also indicative of an attitude that failed to comprehend the public strategies of investigation, campaigning and publicity employed by women such as Jane Addams and Mary McDowell. This example supports Rosalind Rosenberg's contention that American society had drawn clear lines between appropriate activities for men and women, and that these conceptions were still pervasive in response to women's reform work. [33] Finally, the rootless flower imagery suggests these critics viewed settlement houses and their residents as having no purpose. All of these suggestions would be denounced by Addams and McDowell, and they would prove to their detractors that they would publicly fight against environmental inequality using their status as women to apply practical solutions to the problems of the industrial city.

---

[32] Francis Hackett, 'The Permanent War: Review of Lillian Wald, *House on Henry Street*', *The New Republic,* 8 January 1916, p.255.
[33] Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, p.xv.

The motivations of Jane Addams in creating her social settlement were two-fold: to help the residents who lived in the ward, and to give her a sense of purpose by actively engaging in reform activities that were desperately needed.[34] She founded Hull House, located on South Halsted Street, after a visit to the English settlement house Toynbee Hall in East London in 1888. She characterised its purpose as 'an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city.'[35] This was a clear articulation of reform goals linked to environmental conditions, as well as issues such as inadequate housing immigrant communities faced that were commonplace in Northern urban and industrial cities. This clear outline of the purpose of the settlement was in direct contradiction of the rootless flower metaphor that Hackett publicised.

Addams was also expressing her need to play an active role in creating solutions rather than continue in what she termed, 'passive receptivity' of the deteriorated social and environmental conditions in Chicago, thus explicitly rejecting the Victorian notion that women were naturally submissive.[36] She envisioned the settlement house as being a place that would provide a 'higher civic and social life' for its community through education programs and social events and would be at the centre of investigations 'to improve the conditions in the industrial districts of Chicago'.[37] Addams' assertions can be interpreted as moralistic and condescending in tone and contains echoes of African American clubwomen's rhetoric of racial uplift discussed in chapter two. However, this could also be interpreted as a desire to open up aspects of society to groups who did not have access to them due to working long hours, low wages and little to no formal education. The latter part of her

[34] Margaret Tims, *Jane Addams of Hull House, 1860-1935: A Centenary Study* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1961) p.49.
[35] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, p.125.
[36] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, p.127.
[37] Tims, *Jane Addams of Hull House*, p.49.

statement is the most significant in the context of this analysis as it was the detailed investigations and first-hand experience of the settlement workers that would have a longer lasting impact on environmental conditions in Chicago. As Richard Wade writes, settlement workers were concerned 'not only with salvaging people trapped in the slum, but also with transforming the entire environment to create a better city for subsequent generations'.[38] This focus on the environment marked a clear departure from the Chicago Woman's Club, which had a much broader sphere of activity regarding civic life, and would lead to the exposure of environmental inequalities that plagued the residents of the Nineteenth ward and Back of the Yards at this time.

In this sense, Jane Addams was using her privileged position to help others. She was twenty-nine and single, which afforded her a degree of freedom in pursuing public activism, when she settled at Hull House. She was the daughter of John Addams, a respected former state political leader, and she had been educated at Rockford College, one of the earliest women's higher education institutions in the Mississippi Valley.[39] Her background and education level afforded her a higher position in the social hierarchy much like the women of the CWC where she was admitted as a member in 1889 due to her connections to prominent members. She would use this position to get support for her settlement idea and those supporters with power and money 'did not have to actively participate but could watch from afar.'[40] This differentiated Addams from other white, middle-class reformers because she was experiencing life in the slums first-hand and not from a distance, affording her a greater depth of understanding into the conditions in these industrial districts and serving as the impetus to actively participate in reforming the unsanitary conditions she encountered.

---

[38] Richard Wade, 'Foreword' in Davis, *Spearheads for Reform,* p.ix.
[39] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House,* p.44.
[40] Richard Seidel, 'Introduction', in *The Selected Papers of Jane Addams: Vol. 3: Creating Hull-House and an International Presence, 1889-1900,* ed. by Mary Lynn McCree Bryan, Maree De Angury and Ellen Skerrett (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2019) pp.3-13 (p.9).

Mary McDowell also consciously made the decision to live and work in a polluted environment adjacent to the Union Stock Yards. Here, the residents were directly exposed to environmental hazards as a product of industrial practices. Like the inhabitants of the Nineteenth ward, there was little option for social mobility, as they were dependent on the stock yards for their livelihoods. McDowell moved to the Back of the Yards on 17th September 1894, from Evanston, a suburb of Chicago, and she described them as 'two places as aesthetically and culturally far distant from each other as any in the world'.[41] In her personal papers, McDowell began drafting an autobiography in which she details how she, an American-born, white Protestant woman, became the head of the University of Chicago Settlement House in the stock yards. She had intended to start working at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn to train other kindergarten teachers but was persuaded by Addams to head up the University Settlement. She felt that her faith, desire for social service and two years of residence at Hull House made her suitable for this position.[42]

She had also worked with Jane Addams on various social reform activities including the establishment of several kindergartens founded on the principles of German educator Friedrich Froebel that included the concept that parents are the first educators for children. McDowell employed this experience and training in the application of her environmental reform activism by spearheading public educational programmes in hygiene and garbage disposal methods. McDowell's background and upbringing was middle-class and she chose to 'follow her father into a modest Methodist chapel which emphasized good works' rather than pursue a formal education like her mother.[43] Her upbringing and her work with Addams meant that she was adept at organising for social causes and in her own words felt 'I must

[41] MS Mary McDowell Records, Mary E. McDowell 'Beginnings', 10 February 1914 Box 1, Folder 3.
[42] MS Mary McDowell Records, Beginnings' p. 11.
[43] Louise Carroll Wade, 'Mary McDowell', in *Women Building Chicago 1790-1990: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. by Rima Lunin Schultz and Adele Hast (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) pp. 563-65 (p.563).

know for myself by actual living experiences, more about the lives of working people'.[44] So her motives came from a place of altruism rather than a desire to impose a moral view on those she lived with in a similar manner to other women's organisations of the period, including the WCC.

Although she was not a native resident of Back of the Yards, Mary McDowell differed from women such as Mary Church Terrell, president of the NACW and Mary Trautmann, president of the New York branch of the Ladies Health Protective Association, whose activities were detailed in previous chapters. This was because she lived and shared the experiences of her neighbours, including the environmental degradation of the community, and her perspective was one of collaboration with her community rather than imposing ideals based on her class or race. This was demonstrated in her stated views of the settlement community:

> The settlement is not an opportunity for any one class of the community. It is for and with the whole community. It is not a woman's club house. […] We soon learn that social needs must be met individually while we wait for social changes for the better.[45]

McDowell echoed Addams' sentiments about working with residents rather than dictating standards of living in a paternalistic manner, and she too called out inequalities in opportunities for her immigrant neighbours. Her statement indicates that she also realised that these communities could not rely on external help to bring about change much like Hazel Johnson in Altgeld Gardens in the 1980s, without the active participation and campaigning of all those affected.

As Robert Gottlieb has stated, the settlement houses were a 'key symbol of the movements for change contesting the urban and industrial order of the period'.[46] This contention epitomises the transition to a more grassroots form of organising that would be

---

[44] MS Mary McDowell Records, Beginnings' p. 11.
[45] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'Babies, Politics, and Garbage Dumps' in *Beginnings*, pp. 36-7.
[46] Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, p.193.

continued by the block clubs and will be discussed in chapter four. Working from within these areas, rather than an external position, afforded Jane Addams and Mary McDowell a unique experience to address the immediate concerns of residents, working in partnership to seek solutions. One of the overarching aims of Addams and McDowell was to improve the environmental conditions in their communities and it became their primary focus because the problems had become critical. The purpose of settlement houses was criticised as sentimental and rootless by men like Francis Hackett, and they were not the only organisations in the Progressive Era that were concerned with urban environmental reform. But they were significant because they became a meeting place for those who shared the same values of redressing inequalities. In doing this work, both Addams and McDowell would contest the order of the period in their specific environmental activism in relation to the proliferation of garbage in the tenement districts as well as the polluting industries of the stock yards.

Jane Addams Tackles the Menace of Garbage

Settlement house workers and their allies soon realised that their initial aims of promoting a 'higher social and civic life' would have to start with directly addressing the environmental conditions of their communities. In their view, there were several reasons for these very poor conditions, including neglect by municipal authorities, corrupt politicians refusing to enforce sanitation laws, slum landlords who put profit above health (which was facilitated by the city through non-enforcement of tenement house laws), and public indifference to the state of municipal administration.[47] Addams would address the first and second charges with a sustained campaign which included inviting city officials to visit the slums, working with residents of Hull House and the University of Chicago to conduct surveys, and putting her

[47] Robert Hunter, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago, Report by the Investigating Committee of the Chicago Homes Association*, (Chicago, 1901), pp. 16-17. Harold L. Platt, 'Jane Addams and the Ward Boss Revisited: Class, Politics, and Public Health in Chicago 1890-1930', *Environmental History*, Vol.5 No.2 (2000) 194-222 (pp.201-202).

name on a bid to collect garbage in her ward. This last point was particularly extraordinary because as a woman, Addams was attempting to disrupt the male-dominated sphere of privately contracted business services and she undertook this action because of the negligence of the male-led municipal government. In respect of public indifference, she employed the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping to appeal to the residents of her community to support her efforts and as a means of empowering them to counteract the perceived negligence of city officials.

A reason for the terrible conditions, including the amount of solid waste that was prevalent in the Nineteenth ward, was the sheer size of the population in this area. In an extensive investigation carried out into tenement conditions in 1901 by the City Homes Association, formed by Addams and other residents of Hull House, the investigators estimated that about 45,000 people lived in the congested tenement districts they surveyed. Figure 1.2 is a map of nationalities that was compiled in 1895 by investigators at Hull House and shows not only the density of the area where Hull House was located, but also the range of ethnicities there. This was only a small sample and Robert Hunter, author of the report, stated that this sample was representative of conditions faced by approximately 400,000 people in Chicago.[48] The areas surveyed were home to Italians, Jews, Poles and Czechs (referred to as 'Bohemians') and, echoing the sentiments of Bertram Fowler, Addams initially viewed these residents as 'sordid and ignorant immigrants'.[49] She did not sustain this view as she became more actively involved in reform work but it is indicative of the victimisation that Robert Gottlieb outlined as well as the opinion that residents of affected communities were, at least in part, to blame for their own conditions. This was a common perception that was also evident in views of the African American communities of the Black Belt that will be explained in chapter four, and observations made about African Americans living in public

[48] Hunter, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago*, p.14.
[49] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, p.100.

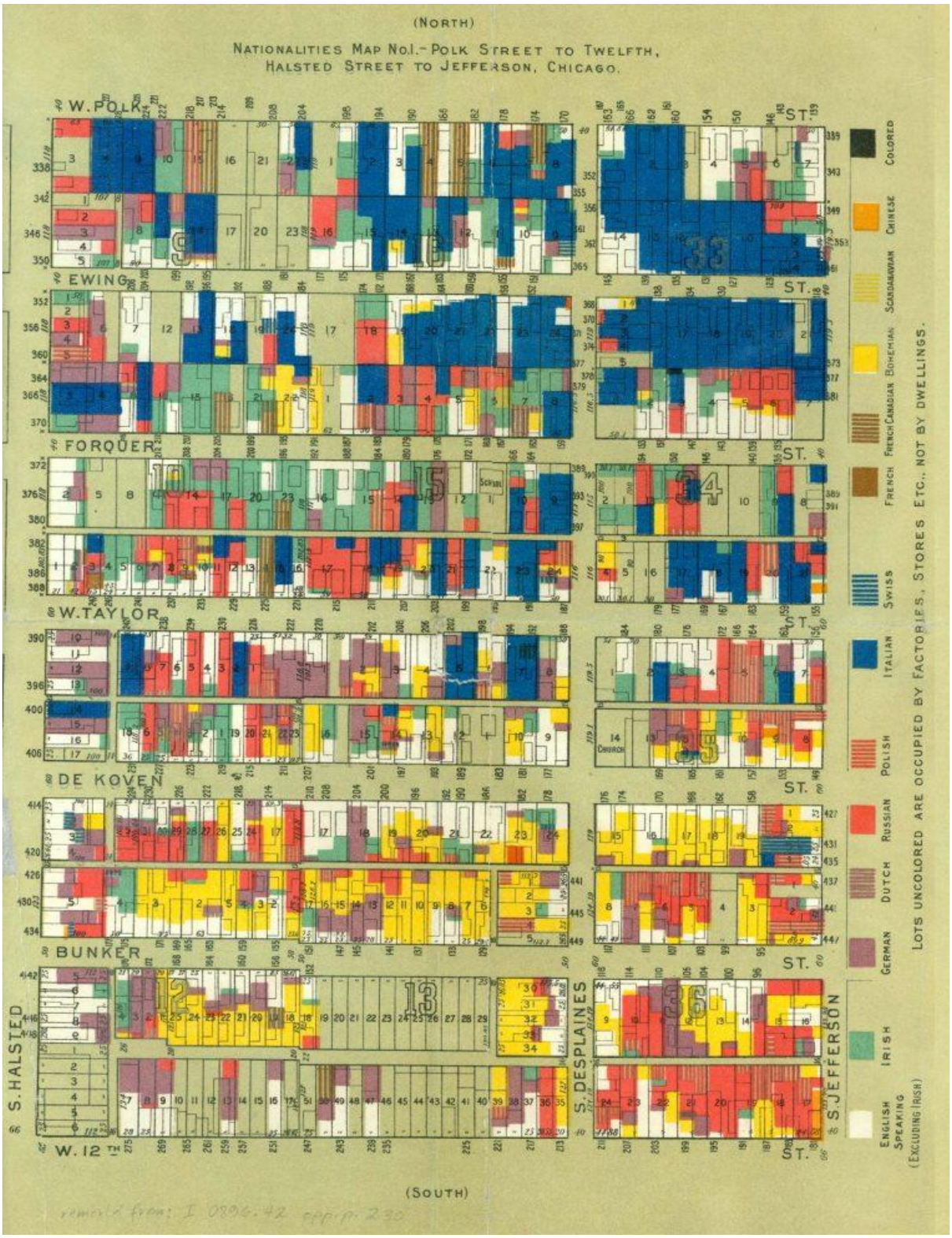

Figure 1.2. 'Nationalities map No. 1, Polk St to Twelfth', compiled by Agnes Sinclair Holbrook, Florence Kelley, and Samuel Greeley, 1895.

housing projects in the 1970s onwards that will be detailed in chapter five. With the increase in population of foreign-born residents, it was easy for city officials and residents of the wealthy, white neighbourhoods to shift the burden of blame for unsanitary conditions to these communities because these were the main areas affected. However, this was because the residents were working class, poor, and immigrants. They were starting from a disadvantaged position and excluded from decision-making processes as they lacked political power and were marginalised because they did not have the economic resources required to better their situations.

A further example of the disproportionate public health problems that this community experience was during the typhoid fever epidemic in 1902. During this period, Addams demonstrated this inequality by compiling health statistics and discovered that although the Nineteenth ward only contained one thirty-sixth of the population of Chicago, the registered deaths from typhoid were a sixth of the total number of deaths.[50] Addams made the link between disease and poor sanitary conditions in the same way that Mary McDowell would link high infant mortality rates to pollution in the Stock Yards in the same period, and Hazel Johnson would go on to link respiratory illness with polluting industries in Altgeld Gardens in the 1980s. All of these neighbourhoods shared the same characteristics in that they were home to poorly paid, working-class people who were non-native whites and African Americans, which indicates that these disadvantaged communities bore the brunt of environmental burdens. This was down to a lack of social mobility and there was little choice in which areas of the city they could live in. They were neglected by city agencies and had to rely on individuals and social workers to highlight their issues and fight for their rights because they lacked political and social power, and their class status impeded their chances of having their voices heard.

[50] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House,* p.296.

Jane Addams and Mary McDowell would be leaders of a movement that Robert Gottlieb characterises as at 'the forefront of the effort to reform the environment as the most effective way to accomplish public health goals.'[51] Addams' initial impressions of her new neighbourhood were likely a strong motivating factor in determining the direction of her efforts as she directly witnessed the degraded environmental conditions that were having a detrimental impact on the health of the residents. She remarked:

> The streets are inexpressibly dirty, the number of schools inadequate, sanitary legislation unenforced, the street lighting bad, the paving miserable and altogether lacking in the alleys and smaller streets, and the stables foul beyond description. Hundreds of houses are unconnected with the street sewer.[52]

The accumulation of manure and the state of stables can be directly attributed to industrialisation as horses were one of the main forms of individual and commercial transportation. They were also a source of energy for factories in the late nineteenth century and it was estimated that there were over 74,000 horses in Chicago by 1900.[53] Even when manure was cleared, usually to a location outside of the city, a large amount remained in the streets attracting flies as the wagons that transported it were not covered.

The removal of garbage from the streets, that included household waste, fruit and vegetable peelings, and manure from stables, became a focus for Addams and it was one of the most visible ways she sought to improve sanitary conditions. The reason why garbage was such a problem in relation to public health was not only the foul smell which caused residents to shut their windows and doors in often poorly ventilated rooms, but also the 'rats, insects and flies swarming these accumulations of filth'.[54] These conditions were a breeding ground for disease and the overcrowded and poorly ventilated housing exacerbated the problem. Addams laid the blame on inadequate garbage collections, which was the

---

[51] Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, p.94.
[52] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, p.98.
[53] Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities*, p.20.
[54] Hunter, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago*, p.132.

responsibility of private contractors who were granted these franchises by the municipal government. There were several departments who were supposed to regulate and oversee these businesses were carrying out their duties effectively, including the Bureau of Streets and Alleys, but more often than not garbage was left to rot in the streets. Addams called garbage 'the greatest menace' in her ward and saw it as a symptom of environmental breakdown.[55] Undertaking comprehensive investigations and compiling evidence as to the extent of the problems, Addams was demonstrating more than a 'layman's perspective' of the issue as she recognised that she needed proof of her claims as well as solutions to present to city officials as she was challenging municipal authority. Although the roles of women were changing, she still held no political power, so this evidence was necessary to effect change. She was also adhering to municipal housekeeping in its simplest form: cleaning up the city in order to improve the health of its inhabitants. It is credible to argue that inadequate collections were the result of environmental inequalities because of the class status and ethnic composition of these districts. As Addams had previously highlighted, the poor could not afford to pay private collectors while the rich could and the disparity in financial means meant that wealthier residents were not subject to the same hazards as those in a more precarious financial position.

In the above description Addams critiques city officials because sanitary legislation was not enforced. She would discover that one of the reasons that conditions were so bad was because of the financial implications of correcting poor sanitary systems including regular garbage collection. She was critical of male politicians placing economic prosperity over public health and safety and claimed that 'for years the city administrations have protected the money interests invested in the Stock Yards, so that none of the sanitary ordinances have

[55] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House,* p.281. Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, p.99.

ever been properly enforced'.[56] This view was shared by prominent members of the Women's City Club such as Anna Nicholes, who was a director of the civics department, and illustrates the diverging priorities of men and women when it came to the health of the city. An example of how sanitary laws were not enforced in tenement districts was explained by the investigators for the CHA who noted the sanitary code of Chicago explicitly stated that garbage collections should occur every day and mid-morning. In the districts surveyed they found that out of the 1,769 garbage collection boxes, 219 were emptied three to six times a week, 331 one or two times a week and 1,199 were not known or reported.[57] This was in clear violation of the law and Addams maintained that it was primarily for financial reasons because upon investigation she found that the private contractors responsible for garbage collection were only using seven wagons when they should have been using seventeen because as the contractor claimed, 'he lost money on every wagon used and the former inspector had let him off with seven'. This exposed the negligence of city officials as well as financial motivations that perpetuated environmental inequalities.

Addams gives a further example of how economic gains were prioritised over public health when she claimed that a contractor who was paid 'liberally' by the city to remove dead animal carcasses from the streets, was instead using police ambulances to do his work for him.[58] This tension between profit and a safe environment exemplifies not only Addams' experiences in the Progressive Era, but also prefigures environmental justice struggles later in the twentieth century. Mary McDowell would also encounter this tension in her fight against polluting industries in Back of the Yards, detailed in the next section. The underpinning causes for not clearing up the ward's garbage were financially oriented and a result of negligent city inspectors. But because this issue was clustered in the immigrant

[56] Jane Addams. 'Problems of Municipal Administration', *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 10, No. 4 (1905), 425-444 (p.435).
[57] Hunter, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago*, p.134.
[58] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, p.286.

neighbourhoods, there was also an element of discrimination at play. This was because these practices were allowed to exist until Jane Addams and the other settlement workers took direct action and started publishing the results of their surveys. Existing sanitary laws were not being enforced and Addams, driven by the tenets of municipal housekeeping, sought to tackle this issue in a direct fashion, rather than relying on male officials to solve the problem.

In a very public action, Jane Addams put in a bid to be awarded the contract for garbage collection in 1895. This entry into the male sphere of politics certainly goes against Hackett's contention that settlement workers were engaged in 'womanly efforts' with the 'prettiest of intentions'. It also marked a clear departure from the efforts of the CWC and WCC because Addams was overtly entering the world of politics rather than nominating a male candidate as the previous strategy of women's clubs had been. This action was due to several factors but the primary concern for Addams and the other female residents of Hull House was the high death rate in the ward, which was attributed, in part, to the highly unsanitary conditions. Several of the residents of Hull House and mothers from the Irish American community founded the Hull House Woman's Club in 1891 and in 1894 they undertook a thorough inspection of the streets and alleys of the Nineteenth ward. They reported 1,037 violations of the law and sent details of these to the health department.[59] This activity was a characteristic of municipal housekeeping, but it added a political aspect to the ideology and involved direct action by the women of the ward. Because of this survey and its reporting, three city inspectors were transferred out of the ward for failing in their duties and Addams became directly involved in ward politics. This was twenty-eight years before Illinois women gained the municipal vote in 1913. Addams used the principles of municipal housekeeping to renegotiate a form of female public power because although her bid was dismissed on what she called 'a technicality', she was appointed as garbage inspector of the

[59] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, p.284.

ward by the mayor.[60] Addams called this position a 'political plum' and in the eyes of the male politicians, the loss of it to a woman for the first time, caused a stir.[61] Although she did not name the politicians, she was likely referring to Alderman Johnny Powers, also known as the ward boss. Addams and Powers had an antagonistic relationship and for Addams to be given the position of garbage inspector was a significant defeat for Powers who has been characterised by historian Allen Davis as one of the 'most powerful men in Chicago'. This was because of his position as chairman of the Finance Committee of the Chicago City Council and also the support he had from the residents of the Nineteenth ward who he helped with employment, albeit in poorly paid jobs.[62] This made Addams' achievement all the more noteworthy because she was in a position that had been previously occupied by men and a direct result of this success was that there was a noticeable improvement in the cleanliness of the ward. As an indicator of this, three years after her appointment the death rate had dropped so that it was now seventh rather than third in the list of wards.[63] This tangible success was the culmination of efforts by Addams and other women who were affiliated with, or resident of, Hull House and was an attempt to build bonds of political solidarity.[64] It was due to the actions of women, using gendered maternal and domestic traits, that their goals were realised and this signified how using these characteristics in a strategic manner could bring about significant changes. Addams deliberately employed the ideals of municipal housekeeping to garner support as well as cooperation from the residents of the ward because she knew that in order to address the unsanitary conditions she had to contend with external forces in the form of city officials and private contractors, and internal forces in the form of the residents themselves.

---

[60] Davis, *Spearheads for Reform,* p.154.
[61] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House,* p.284.
[62] Davis, *Spearheads for Reform,* p.152.
[63] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House,* p.288.
[64] Platt, '*Jane Addams and the Ward Boss Revisited'* p.215.

Despite the advances Jane Addams made attempting to ameliorate the environmental conditions of her ward, she still faced resistance from the women residents in involving themselves in work to improve conditions outside of the home. In conjunction with challenging the city on the harmful environment, Addams also used a campaign of education for the immigrant women on garbage disposal outside of the home using the tenets of municipal housekeeping. The talks were centred on the harmful health effects of the accumulation of garbage and Addams linked this with wider city-cleaning:

> In a crowded city quarter, if the garbage is not properly collected and destroyed, a tenement-house mother may see her children sicken and die, and that the immigrants must therefore, not only keep their own houses clean, but must also help the authorities to keep the city clean.[65]

This was part of a deliberate strategy by Addams and McDowell, using the immigrant women's roles as mothers to encourage residents to keep their own houses clean but also a method of ensuring participation in campaigns to clean up the ward by explicitly linking garbage disposal with infant mortality. It also demonstrates how women used their domestic characterisation to their own advantage in a strategic manner, and not just as a justification to men. Addams was also implying that these women could protect other children by entering a larger domain than just their homes. In a particularly shrewd move, Addams linked the idea of improving the local environment with aiding the authorities, which could be seen by immigrants as a pathway to potential benefits such as a higher standard of living or possibly as a way to negate the negative stereotypes (which Addams herself had previously articulated). She still encountered resistance from immigrants because of the prevailing attitudes of the nineteenth century that taking such action was not part of a woman's role and, as she put it, that these 'foreign-born women were much shocked by this abrupt departure into the ways of men'. Yet Addams countered this with the argument that if 'it were a

[65] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House,* p.288.

womanly task to go in tenement houses to nurse the sick, it might be quite as womanly to go through the same district to prevent the breeding of so-called filth diseases'.[66] This is a clear display of the ideology that women's sphere was the wider city where they could perform the same duties as they did in their own homes using their unique form of expertise.

Addams was unmarried which gave her a certain freedom in pursuing social causes that married women did not have, while she was also a member of the CWC and later the WCC who publicised their roles as municipal housekeepers as explored in chapter one. However, a large proportion of her audience were married, and their husbands worked in the very industries that Addams and McDowell were battling, which meant they were sometimes reliant on their husbands' wages to support the family. This would explain their reticence in involving themselves in anything that was 'the ways of men', as Addams put it, and they potentially would not want to be involved in anything that antagonised the authorities, including their ward boss. Addams would continue to face resistance from some of the women in her ward because although they saw improvements in their local environmental conditions, and they saw that 'housewifely duties logically extended to the adjacent alleys and streets, they yet were quite certain that 'it was not a lady's job'.[67] These attitudes were not uncommon, especially in the 1890s and were likely influenced by male perceptions of women's early reform efforts as well as ideals of femininity – that is that they should not be exposed to dirt, garbage, and other foul things that might affect their sensitive natures. These immigrant women also did not have a network or the structure of women's clubs to help change these attitudes which underscores how vital these clubs were in advancing not only reform goals, but also in challenging views on where women belonged and what their roles should consist of.

[66] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, p.286.
[67] Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, p.288.

Jane Addams proved that she was not a ‘young lady with weak eyes’, as journalist Hackett had characterised the women of the settlement houses, when she publicly entered the sphere of ward politics. She had a very clear agenda in tackling environmental inequalities in her ward as evidenced by the founding of the City Homes Association and the subsequent report that was published refuting the idea that settlement workers were ‘fluttering confusedly’. She achieved tangible successes and became known as one of the most famous female reformers of her time.

Fighting Environmental Inequality in the Back of the Yards

Whilst Mary McDowell has not received the same degree of attention as Jane Addams, her impact and achievements were no less notable. McDowell had a similar background to Jane Addams and shared the same influential network of clubwomen in Chicago. Her position as head of the University Settlement in the Packing Town district of Chicago afforded her first-hand experience of the environmental inequalities suffered by the residents in the area known as ‘Back of the Yards’. These ranged from similar concerns such as garbage accumulation, but with the added hazard of harmful by-products of the manufacturing process of the Union Stockyards. As with the residents who felt an obligation to Alderman Powers in the Nineteenth ward, the residents of the stock yards were also in a conflicted position: they relied on the factories for work, but their health was being harmed, in part, by their employers.

It was clear that the community of the Back of the Yards were experiencing discriminatory practices and were victims of environmental inequalities. The living conditions were one area of concern for those who studied this neighbourhood with Charles Bushnell noting that in comparison to other areas of the city where the population had a higher percentage of American-born residents and the streets were paved, the Stock Yard district was severely deteriorated. He noted ‘this area is very badly paved, most of it is wood

in a very bad state of repair. […] This wood paving, of course, absorbs considerable impurity from the drainage and from the air'.[68] Mary McDowell further supported his observations and drew attention to the fact that it was not only the outside environment which was in a state of disrepair but also the homes which were often old, mouldy with 'hundreds of families existing in dark, unventilated rooms with two, three and four families crowded together in cottages originally built for one family'.[69] This underscores that the housing shortage was still not a priority in Chicago and that the workers of the stock yards and their families had limited options in where they could live. They moved to areas that were already densely populated which exacerbated health and environmental inequalities.

For the low-paid workers of the stock yards, the squalid living conditions were made worse by the pollution of the natural environment as a result of the hazardous waste from the packing plants. Environmental historian William Cronon articulates these issues, describing the detrimental effect of the organic waste on the water supply because 'the beef and pork went through a series of mutations that rendered them first unpalatable, then inedible, and finally dangerously toxic'.[70] This waste would eventually end up in the Chicago River. A 1915 report by the Woman's City Club of Chicago estimated that sewage from one million residents of the city was poured into the river into what became known as Bubbly Creek, a branch of the sanitary canal of the Chicago River that bordered the Back of the Yards on one side. [71] This deliberate pollution is illustrative of how the health of the residents in these areas was not considered when disposing of waste because they lived far from established residential neighbourhoods, which would likely have protested if this was happening where they lived.

---

[68] Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter II', p. 300.
[69] MS Mary McDowell Settlement Records, Letter to City Plan Commission, 5 October 1910 Box 4, Folder 20.
[70] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p. 225.
[71] MS Woman's City Club of Chicago Records, 'Report on Candidates for Sanitary District Trustees', *Woman's City Club Bulletin 5*, 1915.

A further issue was the garbage dumps that were situated in close proximity to the homes of those residing in the Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth wards. As noted earlier, the 'put it on the edge of the city' attitude prevailed amongst those that neither lived in the area nor had any concern for the effects of this on those that did live there. What these examples illustrate is that the residents of this area of Chicago, often foreign-born, low-paid, and considered to be low-skilled, were subject to disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards. Sylvia Hood Washington defines this as a 'classic story of environmental racism' when deciding on the location of these garbage dumps and this is evident in the views of city officials and men in prominent positions at this time. [72] Their views were summarised in a speech given by Mary McDowell and later reported in the 1913 edition of the *Bulletin* in which she remarked:

> The old attitude of mind was represented by a lawyer before the Finance Committee in the City Hall when he said: Gentlemen, in every great city there must be a part of that city segregated for unpleasant things, and, of course, you know that people in that part of town are generally not sensitive.[73]

In McDowell's mind, there was an acknowledgement that these 'things', including garbage dumps and locations for waste disposal, were harmful, although it was couched in the term 'unpleasant' as to do so otherwise would be admitting that no part of the city with inhabitants should be subjected to the dangerous effects. The word 'unpleasant' also seriously downplayed the harmful effects in what was either ignorance or indifference. For this lawyer, the waste had to be put somewhere. The people he was referring to as being 'not sensitive' were the immigrant populations and workers in the stock yards, and it is implied that they would not complain or contest the chosen location because of their class status as low-skilled and poorly paid employees. They were literally on the edge of the city and metaphorically on the edges of society, and as a result possessed no political or social power. McDowell's

[72] Washington, *Packing Them In,* p. 88.
[73] MS Woman's City Club of Chicago Records, *Bulletin,* 20 December 1913.

response to this view was a rallying call to action as well as a warning that the residents would fight back through legal means. As she declared:

> Well, human beings live way out on the edge of town and Chicago hasn't got such low standards on the edge of the town that you can afford to put anything unpleasant there. People won't tolerate it any more and they are going around with injunctions in their pockets.[74]

This statement has been echoed by many of the modern environmental justice groups and is now characterised by the 'Not In Anyone's Backyard' (NIABY) principle of grassroots organisations which demonstrates how the work of activists such as Mary McDowell, who was vocal about environmental inequalities in the early twentieth century, can be considered as part of this environmental justice narrative that came to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s.[75]

McDowell was not above admitting the limits of her democratic ideals, particularly when she tried to force her neighbours to adhere to these. She detailed how she attempted to create a neighbourhood guild because she believed that the citizens should be responsible for looking after their community, however this guild only lasted a year. Reflecting on this with one of the residents, McDowell reasoned that 'that neighbourhood guild was the only thing I have ever thrust upon you, the only thing that did not grow out of a natural need'.[76] This realisation can be connected to the tenets of environmental justice of the meaningful involvement of all people, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work. Rather than impose her ideals on the community in a moralistic manner, McDowell realised that effecting change had to be a collaborative process that met the needs of the community, which was also practised by Jane Addams and the residents of Hull House and remains a key component of grassroots organising in the modern environmental justice movement.

---

[74] MS Woman's City Club of Chicago Records, *Bulletin,* 20 December 1913.
[75] Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p.132.
[76] MS Woman's City Club of Chicago Records, *Bulletin,* 20 December 1913.

Mary McDowell became known as the 'Garbage Lady' because of her activism against the garbage dumps in the Back of the Yards. The origins of this title are not documented but it was likely due to the talks she gave to city clubs and city officials of garbage disposal methods and her research for the City Waste Commission in 1913. This would be the fight against environmental inequality that would characterise her time in the settlement house along with the dumping of waste in Bubbly Creek. She articulated the difficulties she faced in her campaign along gender lines stating 'It was not a delectable cause for a woman to embrace'[77] which speaks to the separate spheres ideology that served as a barrier for other women's organisations. The word delectable implies it was seen as distasteful by men. Further reinforcing the gender divide was that she was referred to as a 'she-devil of the back of the yards [sic]' by those who opposed her active campaigning and visibility in the corridors of City Hall.[78] As she chose to speak out in a male political area, literally and figuratively, she was characterised in a way that suggested she was malicious and ill-tempered. Such descriptions were not uncommon for female activists at the time, and still persist today, as men sought to retain some sense of power, highlighting how women of all classes were still viewed through the lens of traditional and outdated gender traits. When a woman challenged male power, they were sometimes reduced to (supposed) negative traits such as hysterical, loud, or angry and this would continue to be a way men responded to women who were active in the environmental justice movement in the latter half of the twentieth century, and indeed into the twenty-first. Garbage was unhygienic, dirty and unfeminine and therefore, according to these traditional notions, was not a suitable

[77] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste' in *Municipal Housekeeping Symposium,* A collection of essays from Mary McDowell's personal papers were published under the title 'Mary McDowell and Municipal Housekeeping: A Symposium' after her death on 14 October 1936. The distinction will be made between the edited volume which contains additional essays and the original versions housed at the Chicago History Museum.

[78] Graham Taylor, 'Mary E. McDowell-Citizen' in *Mary McDowell and Municipal Housekeeping: A Symposium*, ed. by Victor Yarros, Mrs. George C. Sikes and Mrs. W.W. Ramsey (Chicago: Millar Publishing Company, 1937) p.xi.

occupation for a woman to become involved with. Despite these characterisations, McDowell worked tirelessly with her neighbours against the 'unpleasant things' that were imposed upon the community.

A common barrier to achieving change in sanitary practices was the view of male city officials that women lacked the requisite scientific expertise to justify their demands for reform. This was the case for many grassroots organisations. However, the common theme that women such as Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, and Hazel Johnson can be linked by, despite the different time periods, is that they educated themselves on the hazards in their immediate environments and sought out the expertise of health officials to support their findings. This method of self-education crossed class and race boundaries and became a shared characteristic of women-led grassroots organisations. It came about because of indifference from public officials as well as the need to gather tangible evidence of the detrimental health effects of environmental inequality. This is clear when analysing the issue of garbage dumps in the Stock Yards and the campaigning of the residents to stop the city's waste being dumped in their neighbourhood. Although it can be argued that white, middle-class women such as McDowell had greater access to different forms of education and sponsorship to support their efforts, the striking factor is that this work was being undertaken by a woman with no formal training. McDowell lived in the neighbourhood and was affected by the same issues as the immigrant communities. This makes her work all the more remarkable and why this case is as noteworthy of that of Jane Addams and her environmental reform efforts.

The residents of Back of the Yards were disproportionately exposed to health hazards associated with garbage because the location of the city dump was between forty-fourth and forty-seventh streets which bordered the dwellings of the residents and workers to the west.[79]

[79] Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter II', p. 302.

This dump consisted of clay pits which were filled with refuse from the plants as well as general solid waste from the surrounding predominantly white neighbourhoods. It was not just odours from the dump that caused a problem but flies and other pests. As Mary McDowell remarked during one of her investigations into infant mortality rates:

> I visited the cottages one August, when babies in the district were dying at the rate of one out of every three born. The Egyptian plague of flies had invaded Lincoln Street. The houses were so black with them that the color of the paint was only seen in small spots. These homes belonged to immigrants.[80]

The infant mortality rates were also extensively researched by sociologist Charles Bushnell who compiled maps showing the highest proportion of deaths of children under the age of five and from these it is evident that these cases were concentrated in areas located in close proximity to the garbage dump and other environmental hazards. He compared the rates with the district of Hyde Park which had a 60% native born population and found that in the period from 1894 to 1900, there were 5049 deaths in the Stock Yard district compared to 931 deaths in the Hyde Park area.[81] Infant mortality rates became a focus of Mary McDowell and her associates, and she linked these with the fact that they lived on the edge of a garbage dump. She noted:

> The death rate for children of that district was greater than that of the city as a whole and double that of the Lake Shore wards that were innocently sending garbage from their neat back yards to the dumps on Lincoln Street.[82]

Both Hyde Park and Lake Shore were home to a majority white population and were two of the most desirable areas of the city due to the open spaces and size of the houses. McDowell's observation that Lake Shore residents were 'innocently' sending their garbage to the Back of the Yards district, implies a degree of ignorance from the middle and upper-class residents of Chicago as to where their garbage ultimately ended up. It also highlights a stark

[80] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste' in *Municipal Housekeeping Symposium*, p. 2.
[81] Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter II., p. 298.
[82] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste' in *Municipal Housekeeping Symposium*, p. 2.

contrast between the environment of the neat lawns of Lake Shore and the crowded immigrant districts that were adjacent to garbage dumps and plagued by flies.

In response to the growing garbage problem, the Woman's City Club created the City Waste Committee and appointed Mary McDowell as Chair. This certainly increased the visibility of the problem as regular bulletins were published by the WCC which were reproduced in city-wide publications and detailed the extensive research about the problem, as well as possible solutions. These would have been read by other female reformers, the wider public and city politicians. There is no doubt that McDowell used her class status to her advantage and her position on this committee benefitted her in several ways. Firstly, as a member of the city club she was given a grant to travel to Europe to study scientific systems of disposal and collecting city waste which, were she not affiliated with this organisation, would possibly not have been available to her. [83] Secondly, the WCC had close links with male-led clubs in the city and many of the members were married to men in prominent positions, thus increasing the profile of club-sponsored activities. This is one of the major differences between Progressive-Era environmental equality campaigns and those of the environmental justice movement in the 1970s and 1980s, in that class status served as a beneficial means of widening access to education, money and sympathetic audiences. This access to prominent social circles enabled Mary McDowell to attain some level of credibility as shown when she reported that 'I came back to Chicago primed with facts and pictures and took my story to every social group from the esthetic ball room on the North Side to the Chicago Federation of Labor in the center of the city'.[84] McDowell conducted public outreach campaigns in all sectors of Chicago society in a concerted effort to gain influential support which would no doubt place pressure on city officials. More significantly, is that that through her research into garbage disposal methods such as reduction and incineration, she

[83] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p.4.
[84] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p.4.

had established herself as a woman with a certain degree of expert knowledge. This complicated established ideas about femininity and womanhood as seen in her comment that it was not viewed as a suitable cause for a woman. To support her findings, the Woman's City Club hired experts in the reduction and incineration methods to compile reports that would be put before the City Council which is a strategy that can be seen in other women's organisations and is indicative of the view that citizens who were viewed as non-experts were not taken seriously when it came to matters of public health, despite having support from other sectors of society. This was articulated in an observation by Mary McDowell that despite five years of campaigning

> Our city Waste Committee of women, with a generous press behind it, received from the Municipal Government a sympathetic response but we got no results. […] They had met with futile politeness that sorely tried their patience, until in July 1913 the women of Illinois received the municipal franchise. Then they at once tested their new power by visiting the committees of the City Hall.[85]

By continuing to campaign and bring public awareness to the study of the garbage problem, even though they repeatedly encountered resistance and apathy from city officials, Mary McDowell and the City Waste Committee demonstrated a commitment to providing solutions when others would not. They were finally able to implement their plans and did achieve success once they received voting rights in 1913, because within a week they were awarded ten thousand dollars to conduct further research and two women were appointed to a commission to oversee the work. Two engineers were also hired to study disposal methods and in their report they recommended municipal ownership and construction of a central reduction plant. These recommendations were accepted, a reduction plant was built, and the dumps were eliminated. [86] It is reasonable to interpret these results as a success, despite the length of time it took to achieve them, because had the public campaigns, visits to the City Council and letter-writing campaigns not been undertaken then this issue may have continued

[85] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p. 5.
[86] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p.5. Oakley, '*Women, Peace and Welfare,* pp. 84-85.

to affect the residents of Back of the Yards. The longer-term health benefits, as well as the new process for managing garbage disposal were significant victories and would not have been possible without the activism of McDowell and the immigrant residents of her community. A further considerable achievement was that McDowell had cleverly used the criticisms about a lack of expertise against her detractors by employing two engineers, who would have been regarded as suitable experts, effectively giving them no further reason to oppose her. This was directly funded by the City lending credibility to McDowell's claims.

Connected to the barriers that McDowell encountered was that many of the residents of Chicago were ignorant or chose to ignore where their garbage was going as it did not directly affect them. But Mary McDowell got people to consider this form of environmental inequality, seen in comments made by a judge to McDowell, after she gave a speech in a local church: 'I never knew where our refuse was taken; now I know and this injustice must be ended'.[87] However, this was not the case for the notorious Bubbly Creek which was the South branch of the Chicago River to the north and northwest of the Stock Yards. This vivid description from Mary McDowell encapsulates municipal and industry attitudes towards the residents whose homes were located near this hazard:

> Another of the 'unpleasant things' forgotten by the citizenship as well as by city government was a nuisance called 'Bubbly Creek' because of its habit of bubbling with noxious gases. This creek, once an innocent little stream with willows and wild flowers along its banks, had been turned into a cess pool. For fifty years public indifference had permitted human sewage from over a million population, as well as grease, hair and other noxious ingredients from the many packing houses and stock yards within one square mile to pour into this little stream.[88]

McDowell was calling out those who did not care about where waste ended up and highlighting the ignorance of the wider population. She also placed the blame on city officials in a similar manner to Addams. She demonstrated how this hazard to public health was not of concern to city government and Chicago citizens because they did not have to live there and

[87] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p.3.
[88] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p. 7.

experience it directly as indicated by the 'forgotten' comment, indicative of out of sight, out of mind. But the City was not able to ignore this hazardous creek when it threatened the wider population because of the discharge of sewage into Lake Michigan which caused a number of cholera and typhoid outbreaks in the Chicago metropolitan area.[89] Once the wider city was threatened by environmental hazards and disease it was no longer just an issue for the edge of the city and the larger population was brought into direct contact with issues that they had previously not had to contend with. As a result, measures were taken which included reversing the flow of the Chicago River from north to south which, as Sylvia Hood Washing notes, worsened the environmental state of Bubbly Creek.[90] This was mainly due to the accumulation of pollutants in the creek that already existed, and it meant that the sewage that ended up in Lake Michigan, now amassed in Bubbly Creek.

Where this becomes clear evidence of environmental inequality is that the residents of Back of Yards along with Mary McDowell petitioned the Sanitary Committee to investigate ways of alleviating the pollutants as well as creating new drainage systems, but nothing was done to lessen the impact of this noxious creek.[91] No action was taken until it affected the native, white population. This was likely due to the fact that the only people who were immediately affected were the marginalised communities of Back of the Yards, and it is conceivable that, based on their lower social class status, these people were victims of environmental racism as defined by David Pellow and Sylvia Hood Washington. The decisions surrounding Bubbly Creek were certainly an example of environmental inequality as the health of the marginalised communities was forsaken in favour of the longer-standing, middle-class communities. There was evidence of unequal protection, and they carried the burden of the pollutants created by the industries of the Stock Yards with disparate exposure

[89] Thomas J. Jablonsky, *Pride in the Jungle: Community and Everyday Life in Back of the Yards Chicago* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.10.
[90] Washington, *Packing Them In,* p.92.
[91] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p. 8.

to and health impacts of these hazards experienced by the residents. Charles Bushnell remarked on a visit to the area that 'small animals and fowls may sometimes make their way across the river upon its coating of filth and grease. The effects of such a condition upon the health of neighbouring families may perhaps be imagined'.[92]

One of the ways that residents and in particular Mary McDowell campaigned for change was to utilise the press. Similar to the way the Press Department of the Chicago Women's Club recognised that the city's publications could be used to their advantage, McDowell and the WCC purposefully publicised the deplorable conditions, often in a manner to garner maximum attention. Articles regularly appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* including a 1909 article with the headline 'Fight Dump to Save Babies' which detailed the efforts of campaigners to ban all forms of dumping except dry garbage. The article details how 'among the poorer classes here are more cases of scarlet fever, diphtheria, whooping cough and infantile paralysis' demonstrating the disparate health impact of environmental inequality. A quote from Dr Caroline Hedger, who worked closely with McDowell and the Woman's City Club and worked for the health department, stated 'the poor health of these children is directly traceable to bad sanitary conditions'.[93] This public announcement of such a direct link was a strategic appeal to those who subscribed to the ideals of municipal housekeeping as well as an implicit critique of the municipal government and the polluting industries. The emotive headline in the *Daily Tribune* was no doubt intended to appeal to the mothers of the city and, as a result, their male relatives or spouses as these women would have placed pressure on the men to act. By employing this gendered rhetoric as well as conveying the horrific effects on the health of children, this specific campaign used women's contemporary understandings of their maternal instincts in an attempt to seek a solution.

---

[92] Charles J. Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter III. The Relation of the Chicago Stock Yards to the Local Community', *American Journal of Sociology*, 7:4 (1902) 433-474 (pp. 436-37).
[93] 'Fight Dump to Save Babies', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 October 1909.

Another strand of McDowell's public relations campaign was to invite the newspapers to see for themselves the terrible environmental conditions. A series of articles was published in the *Tribune* with accompanying pictures of chickens standing on crusts of sewage in the river. Considering that the *Tribune* was a daily paper distributed across Chicago, the visibility of this issue reached a much wider audience than McDowell could have achieved without the paper's support.

Several of the proposals that were put forward by engineers included building a new sewer connecting with the Western Avenue sewer in order to increase the flow from Bubbly Creek which had become stagnant. Yet this proposal was not fit for purpose because Bubbly Creek was so full of hazardous waste which would be subsequently carried through the connecting sewers causing pollution in other areas.[94] The City Waste Committee continued to petition the Mayor, the Sanitary Board and even Congress but were met with resistance, indifference and non-cooperation from the packing industries. There was some measure of support from the Sanitary Board but it would not come until 1924 when they filed a bill in the District Court of the United States which would ban industries from dumping their waste into the canals.[95] It is likely that the delay was due to the fact that the perpetrators of these environmentally degrading practices were also responsible, in the 1900s, for providing employment for 225,000 people of Chicago as well as indirectly giving work to another 225,000 as by 1900 the live-stock and meat-packing industry was the foundation of Chicago's growth and prosperity and its leading industry.[96] These were reasons it took so long to get a resolution because of the economic impact it would have had as well as the impact on relationships with these industries. However, as with the campaigns against the garbage dumps, if awareness had not been raised amongst the wider public or if the stories

[94] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p. 8.
[95] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p. 8.
[96] Bushnell, 'Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter I', p. 146.

had not been reported in the newspapers, then the reform movement would not have had the legacy it did. Although Bubbly Creek was eventually filled in and paved over as part of the City Beautiful scheme in 1923, as Mary McDowell remarked:

> Our settlement was the first on the field to protest against this open sewer and has perhaps done more than any other agency to awaken public opinion to the disgrace of the ugly and unsanitary stream which was filled up only when the great industries needed the land.[97]

She purposefully made a broader appeal outside of the confines of the male-dominated political sphere, demonstrating how female reformers were seeking alternative forms of support than their elected officials. This awakening of public opinion is indicative of Progressive-Era civic consciousness and Mary McDowell was the epitome of a leader of urban environmental reform because she had an insider's perspective. Although she had a more privileged status than her neighbours, she lived the experiences alongside them.

Conclusion

Applying alternative frameworks to historical case studies can be a way to reveal narratives that can show how aims and strategies are carried forward and sometime replicated. The Back of the Yards area of Chicago and the work of Jane Addams and the Hull House settlement have been examined from an environmental inequality perspective to explore how women's civic clubs and individuals evolved in their activism beyond the ideology of municipal housekeeping to incorporate aspects of social justice. By employing approaches such as educating themselves in sanitary practices and effective garbage disposal, and researching the methods of other countries, activists such as Addams and McDowell moved beyond the maternal and domestic rhetoric of municipal housekeeping and proved that their primary goal was to improve public health, placing this purpose above concerns for the mere aesthetics of the city. Jane Addams purposely entered the public sphere of politics, twenty-

[97] MS Mary McDowell Records, 'City Waste', p. 10.

eight years before women in Chicago could vote on municipal issues. This adds depth to the analysis of women's work in municipal reform and demonstrates that they had a keen awareness of the needs of the individual as well as the city as a whole. As this chapter has shown, the principles of environmental justice can be applied to these case studies and links can be made with the aims and strategies of modern environmental justice groups. Although the common contention is that the roots of environmental justice can be traced to the Civil Rights Movement, there is a growing field of scholarship which places Progressive Era reform within this narrative because of the similarities in the case studies. Historians such as Maureen Flanagan and Sylvia Hood Washington and Sociologist David Pellow have expanded the environmental justice discourse to include Addams and McDowell. When viewed from the perspective of environmental inequality, this becomes more obvious because immigrant communities in Chicago were viewed with distrust and ignorance, and they were firmly in the category of the 'other' because of their customs and language which meant that they were marginalised in societal and political life. They were also subject to low-paid work which led to a forced segregation into homes which they had few prospects of escaping in areas of the city that were unsuitable for human habitation, perpetuating the cycle of inequality. Through an examination of personal papers, club records, contemporary studies of the Stock Yards and reports on the environmental impact of industry in Chicago, it is clear that Jane Addams and Mary McDowell were the forerunners of the modern environmental justice movement.

Although this chapter has focused on two specific neighbourhoods that were predominantly white, albeit primarily inhabited by immigrants seen as outsiders and often ethnically different from white communities, there are other instances of environmental inequality in Chicago which will be explored in the next chapter that directly affected Black residents. These were concentrated in the so-called 'Black Belt' of Chicago which was home

to African American migrants from the South. These migrants were viewed in a similar manner to the residents of the Nineteenth ward and the stockyards because they supposedly did not conform to middle-class values. They formed their own organisations, in a similar way to Addams and McDowell, because they were excluded from existing power structures. These organisations would continue the movement for environmental equality in Chicago and evolve into community-led groups that were a precursor to environmental justice groups in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Chapter Four - The Block Club Movement in Chicago and The Women of the Chicago Urban League: 1917-1954

Chicago experienced two significant periods of African American migration from the South, first the 'Great Migration' from 1910 to 1930 and then in the period 1940 to 1960. For African Americans migrating with hopes of economic improvement, the reality they found themselves in was often one of racially segregated neighbourhoods with inadequate housing and harmful environmental conditions, and little opportunity to move to a better area of the city. They were victims of environmental inequality because they were forced to live in degraded housing in segregated spaces which was enforced by restrictive real estate covenants. A lack of action from city departments because of negative, racialised perceptions from the white population of Chicago worsened the conditions and there was limited option for any form of movement to more sanitary areas of the city.

This chapter will examine how the activities of the women-led departments of the Chicago Urban League (CUL), between 1917 and 1954, evidence an evolution in how African American communities sought to improve their environmental conditions during a period when segregation was legally enforced. An examination of the annual reports of the CUL and the writings of Alva Maxey, director of the Department of Community Organisation, reveals the purpose and motivations of African Americans in this period and demonstrates how perspectives that were rooted in Progress-Era reform, such as those seen in the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), evolved to ones where communities could empower themselves. This chapter explores how these communities moved from a position of being reliant on outside agents, to one of internal organisation which was concerned with protecting and preserving their existing environments. The block clubs, organised and supported by the women of the CUL, emerged as a force to counteract negative

perceptions and, more importantly, to remedy the degraded environmental conditions in African American neighbourhoods. This was done from a grassroots position because they were people who lived with these conditions on a daily basis. They demonstrated a resilience that was marked by the formation of a network of local clubs that collaborated with outside agencies, including the University of Chicago and the CUL, to achieve targeted aims. The nature of these activities that took place in the middle decades of the twentieth century marked a transtion from Progressive-era reforms that were largely led by those in privileged positions, to organisations that were formed by residents in affected communities.

A major impediment to any form of mobility for African Americans who lived in these harmful environments was how they were perceived by white Chicagoans as well as settled African Americans who embraced middle-class values. In the introduction to *Black Metropolis*, the landmark study of African American life in Chicago, written by sociologists St Clair Drake and Horace Cayton in 1946, author Richard Wright wrote that migrating African Americans had to build up a world dictated by their 'separate subordinate status'.[1] This view perfectly articulates why African American communities, such as those within the Black Belt, were disproportionately affected by degraded environmental conditions; they were forced to live in already crowded areas that did not have the required sanitary infrastructure because of de facto segregation, and they did not operate from a position of privilege because of their perceived lower class status which meant that too often, city officials could ignore them.

A variety of means were used to enforce this separate status including legislation and violence carried out by white citizens. This situation was compounded by restrictive covenants that prohibited them from moving into certain areas of the city, all of which were majority white. Moreover, African American migrants from the rural South were perceived as

[1] Richard Wright, Introduction to *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, by Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946) xix.

subordinate by not only the white population of Chicago, but by the middle class African American residents of the city who had settled there prior to 1900. George Hall was a prominent African American physician and held the position of Chief of Staff at Provident hospital and in an address given to residents and supporters of the Frederick Douglass Center he remarked: 'Those of the race who are desirous of improving their general condition are prevented to a great extent by being compelled to live with those of their color who are shiftless, dissolute and immoral'.[2] His remarks echoed those of Jane Addams about the immigrant residents of the Nineteenth ward and demonstrate anyone who was not an established resident of the city, was viewed as being of an inferior status.

The tension in the perception of the conduct of southern migrants versus that of the more established residents of Chicago would characterise the activities of women-led departments of the CUL in the early years of organisation from 1917. Historians who have written extensively about the CUL, including Arvarh Strickland, Touré Reed, and Amanda Seligman, contend that this tension was one of the primary factors that drove the various activities of the CUL and that it exemplified the politics of respectability, proposed by historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham.[3] In a similar manner to the ideology of racial uplift that the National Association of Colored Women espoused in the 1890s, the women of the CUL believed that improving race relations, and in turn promoting the middle-class values that they subscribed to, began with educating those whom they perceived as the lower classes of African Americans – generally migrants and the poor.

In order to mitigate negative views about the behaviours of those new to urban living, the women of the CUL incorporated the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping with that of civic

---

[2] George C. Hall, 'The Health or the Sanitary Condition of the Negro in Chicago', *Broad Ax*, 31 December 1904.

[3] Amanda I. Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs: How Neighbors Shape the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), Arvarh E. Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), Touré F. Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League and the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008)

motherhood that has been explored in previous chapters. This was for two key reasons: to encourage participation from residents in keeping neighbourhoods clean in order to protect public health and to present a more favourable image of the people and physical spaces to outside agencies. The women-led civics department of the CUL was also instrumental in facilitating a community-led approach through their block club programmes which became more prominent after World War II.

This chapter will focus on the civic improvement work of the Chicago Urban League and in particular the Department for Social and Civic Improvement, later renamed the Community Organisation Department, which was organised primarily by African American women. Although the CUL had a broad remit, its work in improving African American environments is significant as it provides a link between Progressive Era environmental reform and the modern environmental justice movement. This is evident in how the aims of these civic improvement departments evolved. These departments oversaw the work of block clubs that focused on improving their immediate neighbourhoods through a range of environmentally focused conservation initiatives. Although this work started in 1917, the most significant periods of conservation activities were in 1926-1929 and 1951-1954 due to changes in leadership and a renewed focus on civic improvement.

A criticism that has been expressed by historian Arvarh Strickland in his comprehensive history of the League is that these block improvement projects were largely superficial. They were viewed in this way as they did not deal with structural issues, namely inadequate housing and segregationist housing policies, instead focussing on preserving existing neighbourhoods, but like the women of the NACW, these organisations had to work within a set of circumstances outside of their control. This critique is valid in relation to the short-term impacts. However, it is evident that the work of block clubs and the longer-term

impact of these programs was anything but superficial, particularly as these organisations still exist today and are city-wide.

An example that highlights the profound impact of block club work was in 1953 when legislation was passed that dictated minimum housing standards for specific areas as well as setting a time limit for property owners to meet these standards. This was made possible by a group of block clubs that had lobbied city planning officials for two years and as a result of their campaigns, legislation was introduced, and the city government set up the Neighborhood Conservation Commission.[4] This is a prime example of how block clubs were fighting environmental inequalities from the ground up, which was made possible by the work of the African American women who led the Community Organisation Department of the CUL.

Separate Spaces: The Black Belt

A major concern of the CUL, as well as the white population of Chicago, was housing. For the latter this meant the location of African American neighbourhoods and for the former the environmental conditions within these neighbourhoods. Environmental inequalities were perpetuated because African Americans were forced to remain in densely populated areas with inadequate sanitary infrastructure due to a lack of concern from city officials, who were of course mostly white, and unsustainable housing through racially restrictive covenants and direct violence. This necessitated the need for departments solely focussed on civic improvement to be formed within the CUL in an effort to improve the conditions within these neighbourhoods. These departments were the first of their kind in Chicago for African Americans and were specifically organised to address issues of environmental equality. To further understand this need it is vital to explore how these conditions were predicated on

[4] Alva B. Maxey, 'The Block Club Movement in Chicago', *The Phylon Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No 2 (1957) 124-131 (p.130).

racist housing policies, including restrictive covenants that were created in response to mass migration to Chicago from the South.

The CUL was formed in response to huge numbers of arriving African Americans known as the Great Migration that began in 1910 and was accelerated by World War I. It was estimated that the African American population grew 148.5 percent between 1910 and 1920 and the Federal Census Bureau reported that 65,491 African Americans had moved to Chicago in this period.[5] This first wave of migration was due to war-time labour shortages and a concerted outreach campaign by northern recruiters to fill the gaps left by the halt to European immigration during World War I. Northern cities like New York, Detroit and Chicago were all experiencing shortages but as historian James Grossman noted, Chicago was the logical destination as it was easily accessible via the Illinois Central Railroad that ran through Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana.[6] This accessibility combined with the promotion of Chicago during the 1893 Columbian Exposition (the first world's fair), and the availability of work in industries like the meat packing industry served as enticing draws for those looking for an improved standard of living.

The area where African American migrants initially voluntarily, and later involuntarily, settled became known as the Black Belt. Sociologists Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake described this area as a colony like other neighbourhoods that were defined by language, nationality or racial group and one that provided space for a 'filtering in' of new residents. From 1915 onwards, this area would expand to become the largest African American area in Chicago.[7] Figure 1.3 shows the population density of the Black Belt as well as how African Americans were confined to a limited geographic space.

---

[5] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), p. 106.
[6] James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), p.4.
[7] Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, p.47, p.167.

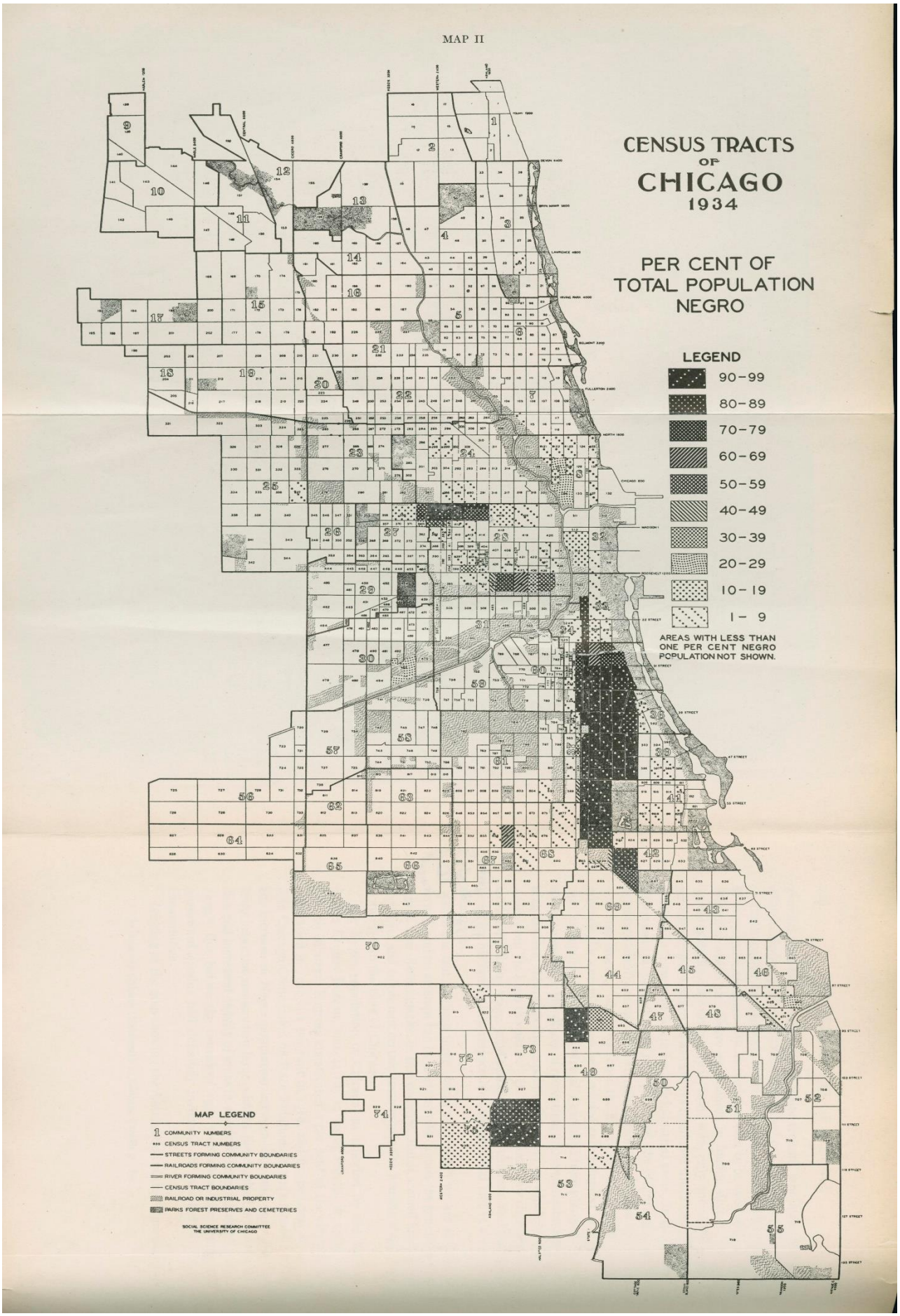

Figure 1.3 Map of census tracts in 1934 showing the percentage of African American residents per area. Printed in Edith Abbott, *The Tenements of Chicago: 1908-1935*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936)

It is also indicative of why this area was called the Black Belt because of its shape. The Black Belt was bordered by neighbourhoods that were predominantly white and were generally more affluent and these residents were intent on keeping themselves separate, both physically and metaphorically. Initially African Americans chose to live here but as the area expanded and the population grew because migrants from the South joined friends or relatives, a range of methods were used to prevent them from moving into white areas of the city and keep them segregated in these densely populated neighbourhoods. By 1930 the Black Belt encompassed an area between 12th Street to the north, 71st Street to the south, Cottage Grove Avenue to the east and Wentworth Avenue to the west. Historian Thomas Lee Philpott explains how in '1930, *two out of three* black Chicagoans were packed into tracts where, how even in 1900, 'the extent of black segregation was already extraordinary' as the population was 90 percent black or more'[8] This pattern of segregation had evolved over the decades and was reinforced in each period of migration by violent and non-violent means.

Between 1917 and 1921, the violence included a spate of bombings of African American homes, as well as the homes of whites and African Americans who rented or sold property to the 'newcomers'.[9] These violent tactics were used to reinforce the notion of a separate status that Richard Wright wrote about, and this left African Americans with very little opportunity to move to more desirable areas of the city. More insidious than the overt violence were the restrictive real estate covenants and racial zoning laws put in place as these had a significant long-term impact on the lives and the health of African Americans. These restrictions on where African Americans could live also affected decisions on public housing projects, such as Altgeld Gardens, which were built in environmentally hazardous locations. Sylvia Hood Washington puts it succinctly when she states, 'Chicago's history is an

[8] Thomas L. Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 132-33.
[9] Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, p.64.

exemplary history of how planning and planners created separate geographical spaces for African American communities that would for generations be subjected to environmental disenfranchisement'.[10] The separate space of the Black Belt forced African Americans to live in a degraded environment with no options to move anywhere else in the city which served as the motivation to conserve their neighbourhoods.

An example of such a covenant was one initiated in 1924 by the Chicago Real Estate Board. This city agency was formed in 1883 in response to the growing property market. Drafted by Nathan William MacChesney, Article 34 was added to the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Real Estate Boards. It meant that any member who violated this code could have their license revoked per a real estate licensing act that was also drafted by MacChesney. The reason Article 34 was so widely used and why it reinforced segregation of African Americans was because it forbade realtors from introducing 'members of any race or nationality into neighbourhoods where their presence would damage property values'. A drive by the Board to protect what it perceived to be desirable communities in the latter part of 1926 meant that African American movement was restricted by the use of Article 34 as it prohibited African Americans from renting or buying any property that was covered by the covenant.[11] Article 34 was specifically written and used to bar African Americans from certain parts of the city, namely white communities that bordered the Black Belt such as Hyde Park. Effectively, this legal method of maintaining separate spaces would compound the environmental problems in African American neighbourhoods as it forced greater numbers of African Americans to live in a small area in inadequate housing.

[10] Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2017), p.145.
[11] Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, pp.192-93.

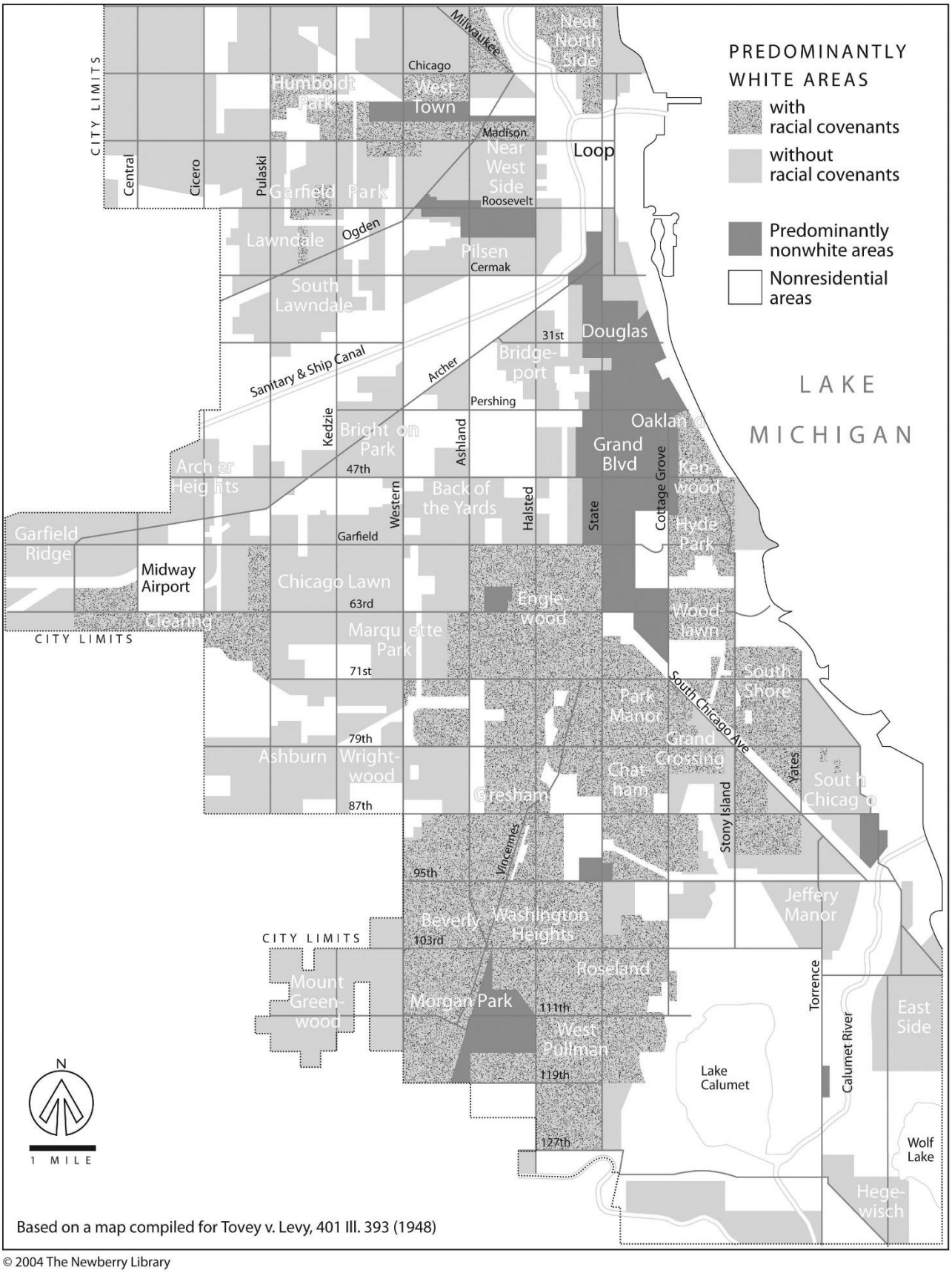

Figure 1.4 Map indicating areas covered by restrictive covenants in 1947. Created by Robert Weaver, courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago, 2004.

This was further exacerbated by the second period of wartime migration beginning in 1940, when once again the prospect of employment drew an estimated 65,000 African Americans to already overcrowded neighbourhoods.[12] Figure 1.4 represents the areas of Chicago covered by covenants and the majority of these areas surrounded the Black Belt indicating how these predominantly white neighbourhoods were complicit in enforcing segregation. The map highlights how the residents of the Black Belt had no choice in where they could reside which provides some explanation as to why the women of the CUL had to focus on improving the conditions in existing areas, as there were no other options.

One of the results of restricted living space and overcrowding was highly unsanitary conditions. A system of categorisation used was that assessed housing from type A which was the best to type D which was described as the 'least habitable of all'.[13] The Chicago Commission on Race Relations (CCRR) carried out extensive investigations in the period from 1919 to 1921 and found that of '238 blocks surveyed, 40 percent of housing was type C and 45 percent in the poorest, type D'. In these areas it argued that the environmental conditions were dire and a direct threat to the health of residents. The investigators described how the surroundings were 'in a condition of extreme neglect, with little apparent effort to observe laws of sanitation. Streets, alleys and vacant lots contained garbage, rubbish, and litter of all kinds'.[14] The causes of these conditions could be traced back to overcrowding which was a direct result of the racially restrictive covenants in place. The lack of effort to adhere to sanitary regulations could be attributed to a lack of knowledge on sanitary practices in an urban environment rather than a lack of effort but the prevailing perception was that it was because of the ignorance of the rural migrants of urban living epitomised by George Hall

[12] Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League*, p.138.
[13] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago,* pp.186-187.
[14] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago,* p.192.

in his remarks printed in *The Broad Ax*. He contended that a large proportion of the migrant population did not understand the importance of proper ventilation and sanitation in relation to public health. He laid the blame for these harmful conditions on city officials who offered 'no solution or assistance' when it was their job to prevent conditions that caused diseases.[15] There was also a distinct lack of city services, including garbage removal, in these neighbourhoods which exacerbated the problem.[16]

As well as the CCRR investigations, noted white social worker Edith Abbot conducted in depth research in the tenements of Chicago, including the Black Belt area. Abbot held a PhD in Economics from the University of Chicago and became the assistant director of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy. She also lived at Hull House which no doubt influenced her study of the tenement districts. She confirmed the findings of the CCRR when she reported that the odour from decaying garbage and dead rats in the area was 'insufferable and there was evidence of neglect from the proper city departments.'[17] Abbott was corroborating what the residents already knew, but she was also demonstrating how women – white and African American – were responsible for bringing attention to poor environments as well as challenging the inaction of city officials. All of these factors provided the Chicago Urban League and the departments that dealt exclusively with civic matters with a purpose and in the area of improving housing and health conditions, it turned to its female leaders.

The Founding of the Chicago Urban League and the Politics of Respectability

The CUL was established in 1917 in response to the arrival of southern migrants and the increasing racial tensions, which often culminated in violence. Their purpose was two-fold: to

[15] Hall, The Health or the Sanitary Condition', *Broad Ax*, 31 December 1904.
[16] Washington, *Packing Them In*, p.168.
[17] Edith Abbott, *The Tenements of Chicago: 1908-1935*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), p. 121.

improve race relations in the city and living and working conditions for African Americans. In the early formation of the CUL the politics of respectability was a key theme. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham proposes in relation to southern African American Baptist women, this concept involved a 'reform of individual behaviors and attitudes as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations'.[18] Amanda Seligman elaborates on this when she contends that the CUL 'sought to elevate the reputation of "the race" among whites by bringing the behavior of other blacks into line with middle-class values and norms.'[19] The CUL was following the work of the NACW in this respect because of entrenched racial prejudices against all African Americans. They viewed this as a method for segregated communities to improve their immediate environments through modifying their behaviours as well as a way to mitigate what they perceived as the denigration of the race as a whole. In its first annual report published in 1917, the CUL set out its mission as providing the newcomers with advice on housing, employment, health, and being orderly citizens. This advice was promoted in pamphlets distributed by the women of the CUL and included 'self-help' tips as follows:

> 1.Do not loaf. Get a job at once. 2. Do not live in overcrowded rooms. 3. Do not carry on loud conversations in street cars and public places. 4. Do not keep your children out of school. 5. Do not send for your family until you get a job. 6. Do not think you can hold your job unless you are industrious, sober, efficient, and prompt.[20]

It is clear that this advice was focussed on correcting behaviours that could affect outside perceptions as evidenced by the comments on loud conversations and getting a job immediately. In this respect, the CUL aimed to show that all Blacks were industrious, not

---

[18] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.187.
[19] Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs*, p.29.
[20] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Reports*, 1917. (Adam Matthew, Marlborough), African American Communities,
<http://0-www.aac.amdigitial.co.uk.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/Documents/Details/UIC_CULR_02_0221_2182> [Accessed 29 July 2020] The records of the CUL were accessed as part of a free trial offered by Adam Matthew Digital through the University of Essex whilst libraries and archives were closed.

lazy, and maintaining sobriety would show they had a strong moral character. Pamphlets such as these are evidence that rather than challenge pervasive racist stereotypes, officials from the CUL believed that without their guidance, migrants would not become respectable citizens. It was their duty to ensure that they adapted to northern racial patterns, urban life, and acceptable behaviour in order to enhance the reputation of all Black people in the larger white community.[21]

Although in the early years of formation from 1917 there was focus on the assimilation of Southern migrants to urban living, the CUL also actively sought to reduce unsanitary housing, prevent overcrowding and target high rents that were being charged by landlords.[22] In this way the League was concerned with improving the environment for African Americans, echoing the earlier work of Jane Addams and Mary McDowell that was focussed on immigrant neighbourhoods. These city clubs that were formed by middle class white and African American women in the Progressive Era shared many similar activities, although their organisations remained distinctly separate up to this point. In contrast, interracial collaboration was at the core of the organisation of the CUL when it was formed in 1917. It was made up of white and African American members, both male and female. The initial purpose, as stated in the first annual report, was to assist migrants from the South with 'employment, housing and adjustment or assimilation'.[23] This included helping them to adapt to urban living conditions and imparting what they considered to be appropriate behaviours to the newly arrived migrants to counter what they perceived negative customs from the South.

The settled African American residents of the city were concerned because they felt they were viewed negatively by white society even though they upheld higher moral and social standards than those they considered to be their lower-class counterparts. They directed

[21] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, p.145.
[22] CUL, *Annual Reports*, 1917.
[23] Chicago Urban League, *First Annual Report*, 1917.

their concerns at the Southern migrants, and this was articulated by Alva Maxey, who led the Civics Department of the CUL, when she stated:

> The Americanization of the Negro is vital and in many instances his lack of this orientation is a contributing factor in many of the stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations extended towards Negroes in northern cities. The unurbanized behavior of the Negro newcomer is just as disturbing and unacceptable to the older urban Negro residents as it is to the whites.[24]

It is interesting that Maxey referred to 'Americanization' as this was an ideology that was proposed for European immigrants at the outbreak World War I to promote patriotism and the 'common duties of all Americans, wherever born'.[25] Louis D. Brandeis, lawyer, reformer, and later Supreme Court Justice, characterised this as 'true Americanism' in a speech he gave in Boston in 1915. He outlined the principles of Americanization as a superficial adoption of clothing, manners and customs of the United States, and more importantly, substituting their native language for English.[26] For Maxey to refer to African Migrants from the South as needing to be Americanized indicates that she viewed them as foreigners in the same way that European immigrants were perceived. She was explicitly categorising them as outsiders to Northern society because of their manners, lack of education, and customs, which paralleled the views of clubwomen in the 1890s and lay the blame for negative perceptions of African Americans as a collective, on these factors. Grossman notes that the more established residents of Chicago were particularly concerned with public displays of southern backgrounds including streetside barbecue stands, and the wearing of head rags, particularly by women.[27] These public displays of more rural customs were likely the factors that Maxey believed were perpetuating racist stereotypes. In the 1920 report of the CUL, a leaflet was

---

[24] Maxey, 'The Block Club Movement in Chicago', p.125.
[25] Howard C. Hill, 'The Americanization Movement', *The American Journal of Sociology,* 24:6 (1919) 609-642 (p. 616).
[26] Louis D. Brandeis, 'True Americanism' address at Faneuil Hall, Boston. 5 July 1915, *Social Welfare History Project* https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/issues/immigration/true-americanism-address-louis-d-brandeis-1915/ [accessed 30 March 2022]
[27] Grossman, *Land of Hope,* p.150.

included that demanded that migrants pledged to 'refrain from wearing dust caps, bungalow aprons, house clothing and bedroom shoes out of doors' as they viewed this as a mark of servitude that had no place in the North.[28] What this guidance failed to appreciate was that these people were merely dressing in the manner that they were expected to by their former employers in the South and were not yet familiar or aware of the different standards in the North.[29]

Maxey likely held these views because of her class status and because she was part of a group of women who viewed themselves as upholding the highest moral standards. She was born in Georgia in 1913 and gained her Master of Science degree in Social Administration in 1938. She moved to Chicago in the 1940s to work as a social worker and began working for the League after World War II. She served as the Community Organisation director from 1950 to 1955.[30] Her position in the CUL combined with her attitude that migrants had to conform to white and Black middle-class ideals demonstrates one of the organising principles of the CUL.

Maxey sought to distance herself and other middle class African Americans by denouncing the behaviour of rural migrants that she felt was damaging the reputation of the middle-classes, including herself. She argued that they had to conform to expectations of life in a Northern city, which included following sanitary practices both inside and outside of the home. These would be facilitated through programmes of education and assimilation. This attempt to change behaviours would become the mission of the Civics Department and was predicated on what Touré Reed describes as the white's tendency to judge the whole race by the deficiencies of unacculturated African Americans.[31] This is indicative of the complexities

[28] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Report,* 1920.
[29] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, p.150.
[30] Black Metropolis Research Consortium *Alva B. Maxey Biographical Note* <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/bmrc/view.php?eadid=BMRC.HARSH.MAXEYBOYD#idp147880616> [Accessed 10 January 2021]
[31] Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity,* p.7.

involved when analysing how the women of the CUL viewed their purpose. They were exacerbating the white response to increased migration by allowing such responses because they too subscribed to these perceptions and did not actively denounce racist stereotypes. For women such as Alva Maxey, it was imperative that those she viewed as the lower classes adhered to prescribed societal norms as a method to counter 'racist images and structures'.[32] But in conjunction with this, they were actively seeking methods to provide equal opportunities for social and economic advancement through programmes of self-help and the building of community organisations which illustrates the inherent contradiction in the dual purpose of the CUL.

African American concerns over the white population's response to the Great Migration were valid. This was evidenced in editorials appearing the *Chicago Tribune* with headlines such as 'Black Man, Stay South' and which described the migration north as a 'huge mistake'. The article claimed that many whites believed that racial tensions meant the city would soon experience a riot like East St. Louis, Illinois had in July of 1917 and their response was to demand a halt to the migration. In the editorial, the writer stated that 'the Negro is happiest when the white race asserts its superiority' and that they were 'detested' in the North.[33] In response, the CUL employed the politics of respectability as a way to disprove these claims although this was clearly problematic because it validated them by enforcing the notion that migrants' behaviour needed to be adjusted in the first place.

However, employing this rhetoric also served as a method of empowering African American communities to demonstrate that they should not be subordinate to whites and that they shared the same concerns as other communities in Chicago including the health of their neighbourhoods. Although the CUL imposed their idea of what being a respectable citizen entailed, the evolution of the block club would disrupt this top-down approach and create

[32] Higginbotham, '*Righteous Discontent'* p. 187.
[33] 'Black Man, Stay South!' *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 May 1917, p.6.

their own interpretation of respectability which was that neighbours could work together to solve their concerns. These block clubs moved away from relying on outside agencies and instead created their own structures based on the needs of their communities. For them, respectability became about a healthy and safe place to live, not what outsiders thought about the appearance of their residents or houses. These organisations were founded on the principle that these communities had the right to a healthy environment which was also a key tenet of the environmental justice movement emerging in the 1970s.

Early Campaigns of the Chicago Urban League

In the initial years of formation from 1917, the CUL built upon the work of other civic organisations in Chicago by adopting a similar approach to further the aims of improving race relations, and employment and housing conditions for African Americans. For the first time in Chicago, there was an inter-racial organisation that was created solely for the benefit of African Americans, and this was largely because of the role women of both races played.

A strategic way that the CUL sought to denounce racist attitudes was through interracial collaboration and building on the networks of established City Clubs and social settlements such as Hull House. The CUL was formed in collaboration with prominent male and female members of organisations such as the Chicago Federation of Colored Women's Clubs as well as white female advocates including Amelia Sears, superintendent of the Juvenile Protection Agency, who served as vice-president, and Celia Parker Woolley who was the founder of the Frederick Douglas Center.[34] Mary McDowell and Jane Addams also served on the executive board of the League, appearing on the list of board members as early as 1917 through to the 1950s. This collaboration with white women who had vast experience of civic reform and environmental issues crossed racial lines and demonstrated an evolution

[34] Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League*, p.27.

in the way that social agencies were formed. It also marked a departure from the exclusive nature of Progressive-Era women's clubs that African American women were prohibited from joining. Yet it still retained a clear class distinction as African American female officers and executives, including Maude A. Lawrence and Alva B. Maxey who were both directors of the Civic Department, were almost exclusively middle-class.

As early as 1917 the women of the League were concentrating their welfare efforts on block work in an attempt to 'promote good citizenship'. This effort served the dual purpose of trying to improve environmental conditions and public health through cleaning city streets and removing garbage while presenting a more favourable image to the white residents of Chicago. League members would visit the homes of newcomers in neighbourhoods where the migrants lived and provide advice on the care of children, overcrowding, and health and cleanliness by speaking directly with the women of the house.[35] Employing this method underscores how these activities were conforming to gendered notions of domesticity but also the important role that women in these communities had in ameliorating environmental hazards. The women of the CUL who undertook this task encouraged residents to play their part by linking their approaches to the health of the children in these communities with the sanitary conditions outside of the home. This maternalistic rhetoric was also intended to encourage wider municipal housekeeping.

The activities of the women-led departments of the CUL were similar to those of women's clubs that were formed in the 1890s. This exemplifies how qualifying the neighbourhood as an extension of the home, not a separate entity, and the significant role that women occupied outside of their domestic spheres, was a successful strategy to engage all women in communal action. This strategy would be used by the block club movement in ensuing years.

---

[35] Chicago Urban League, *First Annual Report*, 1917.

The early civic improvement work of the League was supported by whites and African Americans, but the focus would shift to industrial work and strengthening race relations between 1919 and 1924 with welfare work dependent on financial contributions which were dwindling. There were two significant events that would shape the direction of the civic work of the CUL in the years leading up to the Great Depression. The first was the Chicago Race Riot which started on 27th July 1919 and lasted for five days. Other Northern cities such as Washington D.C and, as noted earlier, East St Louis, Illinois experienced racial violence around this time as a result of white responses to growing African American populations.

Existing tenuous race relations were strained and often violence was ignited by an alleged infraction of the social order. In East St. Louis it was because of rumours that an African American had killed a white man.[36] In Chicago the riots started after fourteen-year-old African American Eugene Williams was playing on a makeshift raft and drifted onto the 'white' side of the water of a beach on Lake Michigan. He was hit with stones thrown by a man enraged at his intrusion, resulting in his drowning.[37] Arvarh Strickland wrote that this was 'the spark that activated the latent hostilities which had accumulated throughout the war years'.[38] Such hostilities included strikes by white workers where African Americans had been drafted in and increasing migration from southern states. The ensuing riots moved through the Black Belt, and homes and businesses were targeted.

White perceptions of African Americans thus became increasingly hostile resulting in violence and, as a result, the Chicago Commission on Race Relations was formed in August 1919, consisting of six white and six African American members. The Commission carried

[36] 'The Migration and Northern Race Riots', in *The Black Worker from 1900 to 1919,* ed. by Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), pp.283-366 (p.284).
[37] Colin Fisher, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p.98.
[38] Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League*, p.59.

out an extensive study on African American life in Chicago, publishing the findings in 1922 with the title *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot*. The findings on housing conditions as well as the prevailing negative perceptions of African Americans among the white community detailed in the report would directly influence the work of the Chicago Urban League in the years leading up to the Depression.

The Department for Social and Civic Improvement 1925-1929

The CUL operated in a similar manner to the women's clubs that were formed before 1900 in that it organised departments devoted to specific issues. An example of this was the Department for Social and Civic Improvement that was formed in1925 and had the sole purpose of improving the environmental conditions in African American neighbourhoods. It was initially led by Maude Lawrence. Although little has been written about Lawrence and her contributions, it was significant that the first civics department was led by a woman and spoke to the achievements of African American and white clubwomen in advancing urban municipal reform. Under her leadership, the Department for Social and Civic Improvement demonstrated an evolution in how the CUL approached environmental inequalities as they focussed on a more community-led programmes in collaboration with established clubs in the city. The department worked in conjunction with representatives from several African American and white organisations including the Chicago Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, The Chicago Woman's Club, the Chicago Council of Social Agencies, and the Northwestern University Settlement. The interracial civic committee that worked in collaboration with the department was comprised of eighteen members: two men and sixteen women.[39] From the outset the remit of this department was clearly defined by using the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping. In order to improve the conditions in African American

[39] Chicago Urban League, *Tenth Annual Report*, 1926.

communities and ameliorate the negative external perceptions of African American migrants from the South, Lawrence and the female volunteers declared that 'the need for cleaner streets, well-kept houses, [and] more attention to personal hygiene is urgent'.[40] The aim of this department was to protect and improve existing neighbourhoods through conservation programs. This focus was because of the restrictive covenants in place, and they recognised that there were limited options for African Americans to move out of these areas.

It was during this period of operation that the Department for Social and Civic Improvement implemented a broad range of programmes including educational activities and public relations which Arvarh Strickland describes as 'rather superficial'.[41] This view fails to connect these activities to the circumstances that these women were operating within, in that they still received little support from municipal government and were in a constant fight against prevailing racist attitudes. It is also not accurate because although the activities may have been broad in scope, they incorporated deliberate strategies that did succeed in gaining the attention of a wider audience, as well as strengthening partnerships with city departments which had a longer-term impact on the health of the city.

An example of one of these initiatives was the Clean-up, Paint up and Plant up campaign of 1927. Focusing on a healthier environment, this week-long programme was initiated by the State Health Department in conjunction with the Department for Social and Civic Improvement. It 'encouraged residents to remove garbage from their streets and vacant lots, paint unsightly exteriors and plant shrubs and flowers', and it was so successful that it was extended to a month-long city-wide series of events.[42] This demonstrates how these women-led departments were initiating significant change on a larger scale and were gaining the support of municipal government through education and public relations campaigns. It is

[40] Chicago Urban League, *Tenth Annual Report*, 1926.
[41] Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League*, p.89.
[42] Chicago Urban League, *Eleventh Annual Report*, 1927.

also important to note that programmes that were initiated in African American communities were adopted across Chicago in white areas too.

Another area of success was garbage collection. Garbage was a particular problem with insufficient collections and apathy from tenants which led to infestations of rats. These problems were focused in African American neighbourhoods, which faced similar issues to the immigrants of the Nineteenth ward as detailed in chapter three because they received a lack of outside aid. In a particularly unpleasant example of its report, the Chicago Commission noted that during its investigation alleys in African American neighborhoods were badly littered with garbage and so, for example, a Mr. Jones, a tenant on the South Side of Chicago, had to cover the holes in his floor with tin in order to keep out the rats that thrived on it.[43] Encouraging residents to dispose of garbage properly and keep their streets clean through these types of campaigns was therefore intended to be a preventative measure that would not only improve the look of the neighbourhoods but also provide health benefits.

As part of its approach, the activities of the Department also engaged in a clear strategy of public outreach. The main activity was conducting educational tours which would continue into the 1950s. These were led by a female member of the Civic Department and would educate students and other organisations on African American life in Chicago.[44] Raising awareness of the environmental conditions in these areas was a deliberate strategy to garner support for the League's activities as well as highlighting the issues to the wider white communities. This was a method that Jane Addams also used by inviting outside agencies to Hull House and tour the local tenement district. Hazel Johnson would also conduct tours of the heavily polluted Altgeld Gardens from the 1980s onward, which highlights how a common theme for women who were fighting environmental inequalities was to purposefully invite outsiders to witness for themselves the degraded environmental conditions. This was

[43] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, p.97 & p.191.
[44] Chicago Urban League, *Eleventh Annual Report*, 1927.

an effective and calculated way to bring these issues into the consciousness of a wider audience and meant that these people could no longer claim lack of knowledge as an excuse for not taking action. A further mechanism to raise public awareness and gain support for environmental activities was participating in conferences. The department presented photographs of dilapidated dwellings at a housing conference in 1927 that was organised by the Woman's City Club of Chicago and took part in several other housing conferences in the next few years.[45] This interracial collaboration with an established city club shows how women across racial lines were working together to find solutions to the severe housing problems in Chicago, and it further highlights how poor housing was still not being addressed by city officials in the 1920s.

A significant barrier to these women's work continued to be the negative external perceptions of the African Americans living in the Black Belt. In fact, highlighting the terrible conditions that African Americans faced in some cases actually exacerbated the negative perceptions of poor African Americans. Headlines appearing in publications, including the *Chicago Tribune*, proclaimed, 'Committee to Deal with Negro Influx: Body Formed to Solve Problems Due to Migration to Chicago from South' and 'Negroes Arrive by Thousands—Peril to Health'. In this article they were classified as 'immigrants' which resembled Alva Maxey's view that they needed to be 'Americanized' and this characterisation that they were foreign to the United States was linked with notions that they would spread disease. As we have seen, this was also how European immigrants were viewed and there were similar concerns voiced that Southern migrants' 'living habits' would lead to an outbreak of tuberculosis.[46] This article was laying the blame for environmental inequalities at the door of the affected communities through language such as their 'living habits', suggesting that it was their inability to conform to urban living that was the root of the

[45] Chicago Urban League, *Twelfth Annual Report*, 1928.
[46] Negroes Arrive by Thousands; Peril to Health' *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 15 March 1917, p.11.

problem. It also explicitly linked increasing numbers of migrants with epidemics such as tuberculosis that would threaten the existing population, further adding to the negative stereotypes of African Americans living in the Black Belt as disease carriers. Of course, it was poor housing with limited ventilation, high rents, and limited housing options that were the issues, and Touré Reed argues that these communities were in decay long before the arrival of the newcomers.[47] But because there was no viable alternative due to the restrictive covenants in place and overt violence, these people had no choice but to live in these deteriorated areas. Further intensifying the housing problem were the very poor wages that most of these people were paid, which led to more families sharing rooms, enabling the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis.

Articles such as those in the *Tribune* were a reason why the public relations campaigns were so important, because they served to counteract headlines such as these and provide a realistic view of the environmental problems African Americans faced. These campaigns were vital in highlighting that these environmental problems were not the fault of the residents and that there were clear and achievable solutions to the issues. The language in these headlines explicitly placed the blame for these conditions on the African American communities themselves. This meant women such as Maude Lawrence had to work on solutions which included encouraging residents to care for their homes and surroundings in an effort to conserve the environment that they were forced to live in. Providing education on the links between hygiene and public health is still a common strategy employed and it was used by the CUL to prevent the spread of disease. It also had the purpose of presenting a more favourable image of African Americans to the wider white population because the clean and hygienic appearance of blocks demonstrated that the rural southern migrant could, in fact, adjust to life in an urban city. Strickland explains that this dual approach represented the

[47] Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity*, p.29.

understanding of those within the League that they would not exist without white support and that they were 'bound to the Negro lower classes by the stigma attached to their race'.[48] However, the CUL and the Department for Social and Civic Improvement used the support from whites to their advantage by expressing shared values and goals. They also built on a tradition of interracial collaboration that started in the 1880s with the Chicago Woman's Club and the principles of social work that Jane Addams and Mary McDowell promoted in their social settlements. Thus, it was not necessarily a case the CUL would not have existed without white support, but it did benefit from these partnerships.

These competing attitudes would continue to determine the work of the League throughout the 1930s, but would also result in positive developments including a more aggressive stance on restrictive covenants and a renewed effort to promote self-improvement within African American communities. The League recognised that as long as these covenants were in place, the housing problems and associated environmental degradation would continue. This change in rhetoric was officially recorded in the annual report of 1937, which stated:

> Recent evidence in Chicago of confining Negroes to certain areas or 'ghettos' by means of restrictive real estate covenants indicates that to the present problems there is to be added more intolerable living conditions…Therefore, the prevention of slum conditions along with the fight against restrictive covenants become major objectives.[49]

This marked a clear departure from the ideals of the 1920s which were more in line with notions of respectability and the perceptions of white Chicagoans. It demonstrates adoption of the rhetoric of activism with the use of words such as 'prevent' and 'fight', and the clear objectives of challenging the racist practices of real estate agents and city departments, including the Chicago Real Estate Board. It is also evidence that the CUL recognised, and was willing to state, that external forces were the main reason for these 'intolerable' living

[48] Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League*, p.123.
[49] Chicago Urban League, *Nineteenth Annual Report*, 1937.

conditions rather than the actions and behaviour of the residents, and that assimilation and adjustment were not the answer to solving poor sanitary conditions. They were openly stating that racist, segregated housing policies were leading to environmental inequalities. This shift in rhetoric led to a more direct form of activism by African Americans and empowered them to find solutions to unsanitary conditions, either by themselves or through partnership with outside organisations.

The Block Club Movement

The League also embraced the idea of community organising and a grassroots movement would take shape in the ensuing years in the form of block clubs. Block clubs in Chicago were the original grassroots organisations formed in response to urban environmental deterioration. Like PCR, these organisations were formed by residents of affected communities to deal with issues specific to their neighbourhoods, and like the settlement house workers that preceded them, they worked with their neighbours to seek improvements.

The Department for Civic Improvement was dissolved in 1930 due to insufficient funds, partly because of the Great Crash in 1929 and subsequent depression but was revived as the Community Organisation Department in the 1940s in response to wartime migration and deteriorating environmental conditions in already degraded African American communities. The block club movement would gain traction in the early 1950s due to the significant achievement of this department in formally organising the existing block clubs and providing opportunities for grassroots community leaders to emerge. These leaders tackled environmental issues and petitioned city officials to improve their communities, echoing the work of the Progressive Era female reformers and early female leaders of environmental justice campaigns. Like these organisations, most of the work of block clubs was undertaken by women because they had more exposure to harmful environments through caring for children’s health and domestic responsibilities. Historian Amanda Seligman

describes this as an assumption that block work was women's work due to a division in family labour.[50] This speaks to the tenets of municipal housekeeping that women were responsible for domestic duties within their own homes but also in the wider communities, and this now incorporated leading block clubs in urban conservation.

The emphasis had now shifted from the CUL teaching African Americans about civic improvement to promoting community-led education and activism. This was because the block clubs were narrow in their geographic scope and comprised voluntary members drawn from the immediate neighbourhood.[51] The Community Organisation Department had an important role in the success of block clubs particularly as their aim was for these grassroots groups to develop leaders who would raise the level of civic interest of their neighbours, leading to increased participation in city-wide projects.[52] This participatory approach was in contrast to earlier programmes where it would be the women of the CUL encouraging involvement as decisions were made by the affected communities rather than outsiders. This shifted the power dynamic. There was an emphasis on conservation of the immediate environment through street cleaning campaigns and education in the area of community leadership. This was vital in encouraging the residents of the Black Belt to take direct action to improve the sanitary conditions of their neighbourhoods, but it also mobilised these communities to challenge inadequate resources more broadly and press for better public services.[53] This marked a clear transition towards the structures and activism of environmental justice groups.

Block clubs had existed in a loosely organised form since 1917 but the League turned them into a unified voice whilst still retaining their community focus. The 1951 annual report of the Community Organisation Department highlighted their role in 'strengthening the

[50] Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs,* p.7.
[51] Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs*, p.3.
[52] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Reports*, 1951-1954.
[53] Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity,* p.173.

organizational structure and inter-relationship with each other, through the councils and federation'.[54] Block clubs organised on an individual level but were coordinated by area councils and overseen by the Federation of Block Clubs and led by Alva B. Maxey as director of the department. Maxey's background in social work and her education level was similar to that of Mary McDowell who was still serving on the advisory board of the League at the time that Maxey was involved. Both women shared the goal of reducing environmental harm and exploring collaborations with outside agencies to further their aims. In a 1957 article for the *Phylon Quarterly*, Maxey wrote that the block club had become the 'natural and popular vehicle for developing an element of community cohesion in the otherwise disorganized neighborhood'.[55] This community cohesion was built around a sense of pride in the neighbourhood which was an extension of the work carried out in the 1920s, but also as a mechanism for block clubs to deal with environmental issues specific to their communities.

Like the grassroots environmental justice groups that would emerge in the 1980s, block clubs consisted of members and residents that generally had no formal education about environmental practices. However, through education provided by outside experts, the CUL, and their own lived experiences, these groups undertook their own campaigns to improve their neighbourhoods. A lack of education in this area or any form of expertise was not seen in a negative light by block clubs as it was 'their philosophy that every individual has a contribution of value no matter how limited his education or experience'.[56] These groups had adopted an inclusive ethos that would be seen in organisations such as People for Community Recovery in Altgeld Gardens, demonstrating a noticeable shift in attitudes from the early years of operation of the CUL where there was a distinct focus on the 'Americanization' of rural migrants. Block clubs were not organised along class lines as previous civic groups had

[54] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Reports*, 1951-1954.
[55] Maxey, 'The Block Club Movement in Chicago', p.125.
[56] Maxey, 'The Block Club Movement in Chicago', p.126.

been and opportunities for leadership were open to all. Their purpose was to affect change where it mattered most to them rather than tackle the wider urban environment. But if each block club cleaned up a part of the city, then it meant that conditions were improved on a wider scale. Block clubs also served the additional purpose of promoting a particular image of a neighbourhood. Therefore, an improvement in the physical conditions of a neighbourhood was seen as a way to communicate the quality of the residents and as a signal of expected standards to potential neighbours and observers.[57] Their primary focus, however, was to conserve their environments.

Block Clubs and Urban Conservation

It is clear that block clubs were a precursor to environmental justice organisations because they were led by residents and focussed on specific issues of concern for their communities. They were also formed on the principle of equal involvement of all participants in decision-making processes which became a core tenant of the movement for environmental justice in the 1980s.

Block clubs were engaged in a number of conservation efforts to make their areas cleaner and safer because they realised that they could prevent urban decay through community involvement, and so every resident was responsible for creating a better environment. Seligman notes that block clubs were focussed on issues that they could solve by themselves, including picking up garbage to prevent rats in a particular neighbourhood or clearing up untidy parkways.[58] Garbage was still an issue after World War II because of a change in a city ordinance determining who was responsible for garbage collection. Buildings that were made up of four or fewer residential units were eligible for public collection whereas those of a higher number had to contract with private companies. What made matters

[57] Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs,* p.20.
[58] Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs,* p.7.

worse were negligent tenants and landlords which led to an increase in garbage on the streets.[59] For some block clubs garbage removal became a priority due to the disorganisation of municipal departments and the ineffective collections of private contractors.

A prime example of how community-led organisations sought to improve their environments with direct action was the Miller-Carpenter Street Block Club, formed in 1953. Members of this project implemented an anti-garbage campaign which consisted of an education programme rooted in public health concerns. They also provided tools for garbage collection, ran demonstrations, and collaborated with local businesses and city officials to clean up problematic areas such as vacant lots.[60] These types of activities appear to be superficial and with little significant impact which may be the case when individual efforts are examined, however block clubs on a city-wide level had longer-term impact even acting as a mechanism for improved services just by the fact that they existed. A resident of the 6300 block of South Ingleside Avenue remarked in 1952:

> The neighbors felt that soon after the Negroes moved into the area they stopped getting adequate garbage collection and other city services. One of the first things the block did was to check these things with the alderman and the Ward Superintendent's Office. They wrote letters and each individual of the block would call the office and plague them. This brought results. They stated that the garbage collectors themselves stated that where blocks are organized, they are much more careful to keep to schedule. They even sweep the alleys. Where there is no block organization, they don't feel they have to do anything.[61]

This observation indicates several important issues; firstly, that inadequate services were because the residents were African American, secondly that direct action from residents resulted in change, and finally that the existence of a block club, in the words of service providers themselves, meant that they were much more likely to carry out their duties. The first issue was indicative of the pervasive racist attitudes towards African Americans that was also seen in the case study of Back of the Yards and the polluting industries in the Stockyards

[59] Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs,* p.145.
[60] Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs,* p.146.
[61] Lewis James, resident of 6356 South Ingleside quoted in Amanda Seligman, *Chicago's Block Clubs',* p.158.

in the early 1900s and would be termed environmental racism in the 1980s. This pattern of prejudice often led to residents and their supporters campaigning against these forms of environmental inequality using a variety of means as seen in the continued phone calls to city officials. Finally, the existence of an organisation acting as a deterrent was an indicator of success as it meant that residents could use the power of being organised as a way of ensuring city officials and private contractors carried out their duties effectively. It was also a method of preventing further environmental degradation in their neighbourhoods because outside polluters were less likely to enter these neighbourhoods if they knew they would face resistance.

Block clubs proposed solutions to urban decay by also changing land uses and creating public spaces that were beneficial to the neighbourhood, including parks and other recreational spaces. An example of this was recorded by Alva Maxey about a block club that used surplus funds from a collection for a floral tribute to deal with a local vacant lot that had become a dumping ground for garbage. The residents used the funds to level and fill the lot and turn it into a community garden.[62] This type of action created a healthier environment both physically and mentally. A community garden provided them with a shared outside space which fostered collaboration with neighbours as well as removing an option for those who sought a place to dump their garbage. Projects such as these can seem minor on an individual level but when analysed city-wide, they become more significant. They were indicative of a growing grassroots movement that sought to remedy the effects of environmental inequalities in their immediate neighbourhoods.

The individual aims of block clubs often intersected with the remit of municipal government, and this was how the CUL played a significant role in working with individual clubs to seek improvements. A particular example which highlights this collaboration took

[62] Maxey, ‘The Block Club Movement in Chicago’, p.126.

place in 1952. A project was launched for more effective street cleaning, including the regular collection of garbage, and the Community Organisation Department worked with block clubs to lobby city officials for these services. They were successful and in 1953 worked in conjunction with the City Bureau of Streets and Sanitation and the Mayor's Committee for a Cleaner Chicago campaign to stage street cleaning demonstrations in particular areas of the city. As a further indicator of the impact these grassroots campaigns had, the program was adopted by Democratic Mayor Richard Daley, and made a regular function of municipal government in 1955.[63] As Maxey wrote, this was a tangible success which contradicts the contention that block work was superficial. Although activities such as street cleaning and effective garbage disposal could be argued to have little impact on the overall quality of the environment, it would prevent pests such as flies and rats in the short term and have longer-term impacts. The fact that what started as individual blocks clearing garbage became a function of municipal government is evidence of significant change in how African American communities were perceived. No longer was there an 'ignorance of sanitary conditions' as noted by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations.[64] Rather, residents were educated in the detrimental health effects that flies and rats had, a further signifier of impacts campaigns started by block clubs were adopted on a city-wide level and support by municipal government.

Another success of the Community Organisation Department was in its education programs, in particular the block club organisers' seminar. A particular problem for the department that was noted in the 1952 report was the 'apathy of people…as a result of their feeling that they are helpless because the "outer" community has no appreciation for their efforts'.[65] This 'outer' community was in reference to the white inhabitants and the growth of

[63] Maxey, 'The Block Club Movement in Chicago', p.130.
[64] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago,* p.192.
[65] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Reports,* 1952.

white suburbs which was accelerated after World War II. It was further indicative of the impact of the negative racialised perceptions that were perpetuated in the earlier periods of migration, and continued in the post-war period. Implementing leadership seminars was a way of empowering African American communities and forming an organised network of grassroots leaders through the sharing of knowledge and experiences as well as creating a powerful force that could not be ignored by city officials. These seminars were sponsored by the University of Chicago with the explicit purpose of training grassroots leaders to help blocks anywhere in the city organise for civic action.[66] This was an important step forward as it created opportunities for active participation as well the tools to resist outside influences that would harm the neighbourhood and it was a successful method to overcome feelings of helplessness. Evidence of this can be seen in an incident detailed by Alva Maxey when she described a meeting that was held in opposition to a 'disrupting institution' that was planning on locating itself on a particular block. Five hundred people attended this meeting to protest.[67] What this 'disrupting institution' was, is not stated, but it was likely something that would negatively affect the block so perhaps a bar. What is noteworthy is the way that this substantial number of people was organised in a short space of time and this shows the importance of having community leaders as part of a larger network and how these leaders encouraged their residents to participate in action which would overcome apathy. It was also an example of how the experience of the neighbourhood and the challenges within it over formal education could become a legitimate form of evidence when dealing with outside officials.

The Community Organisation Department quantified their success by the number of block clubs that had formed between 1951 and 1953, recording that in December of 1950 there were sixty-nine active clubs and in December of 1953 this had increased to one hundred

[66] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Reports*, 1952.
[67] Maxey, 'The Block Club Movement in Chicago', p.129.

forty-one clubs.[68] This achievement was in part due to the work of Alva Maxey and her department in providing a structure and training opportunities for block clubs and encouraging neighbourhoods to perform their civic duty. The increase in active clubs could also be attributed the Block Beautiful contest that was started in 1945 but gained prominence in the 1950s. This annual contest was sponsored by the leading African American publication *The Chicago Defender* and also gained support and publicity from *The Chicago Daily News* and *Chicago Daily Tribune.* This contest had two clear aims. Firstly, it sought to improve the aesthetic and environmental conditions in neighbourhoods by encouraging individuals to work together. Secondly, it aimed to improve race relations. It did this by inviting white judges into these neighbourhoods so they could see first-hand that the stereotypes of slums were false.[69] The contest was not only to award prizes for attractive neighbourhoods, but it also served to highlight to outside communities the collaborative efforts of residents, leadership and initiative, and the sense of responsibility that block club members felt for the welfare of their communities. It was all these aspects that Alva Maxey and other members of the CUL believed would lead to 'full integration and unrestricted participation in the American way of life'.[70] This was in reference to the racially restrictive covenants which would not be fully abolished until the Fair Housing Act passed in 1968 that segregated residential spaces in Chicago and also to the continued racial prejudice that African Americans faced. Although there were echoes of the rhetoric of respectability in the aims of the Block Beautiful contest, more importantly it was a way for communities to work together and publicise their activities to the wider city.

Providing an incentive to block clubs in the form of a contest that awarded winners was an effective method to increase participation by new block clubs as well to strengthen the

[68] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Reports,* 1953.
[69] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Reports,* 1954.
[70] Chicago Urban League, 'Block Beautiful Awards Program' in *Annual Reports,* 1950.

department's public relations campaign. Collaborating with white organisations to put on the contest as well as publicising it in newspapers read by the wider white population was a means of refuting negative perceptions of these communities. Moreover, providing an opportunity for insight into life in the Black Belt was essential to raising the profile of the department's work as 'many of the people who served as judges had never visited these sections of the city, had no knowledge of the efforts which are made and problems which must be overcome', as the Annual report put it in 1954.[71] So as well as presenting a positive image to the white judges, to white city clubs and to the wider population, the Block Beautiful contest also served to highlight specific problems, including environmental issues.

The Chicago Urban League and Public Housing

The significance of the work of the CUL in creating a better environment for African Americans cannot be understated but they would also, unknowingly, contribute to the circumstances that the residents of Altgeld Gardens faced. This was because the CUL promoted public housing projects as a solution to urban decay in African American neighbourhoods. The history of public housing will be explored in chapter five, but it is important to examine the role that the CUL played in promoting a programme that enforced segregation and perpetuated environmental inequalities.

Conceived as an effort to provide better housing and job opportunities for African Americans, the Ida B. Wells housing project began construction in 1939 in the heart of the Black Belt. It was seen as a way for the lower classes to achieve social mobility to the lower-middle classes and a symbol of good living.[72] Although this may have been an accurate portrayal, in reality it reinforced segregation as all of the tenants and applicants were African American which was a deliberate policy. Two other public housing projects in Chicago at the

[71] Chicago Urban League, *Annual Reports*, 1954.
[72] Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, p.660.

time were the Julia Lathrop and Trumbull Park Homes which were located in white areas and excluded black residents.[73] These circumstances along with government urban development and renewal policies created, what Historian Arnold Hirsch termed, the second ghetto.[74]

The role of the CUL in this creation was to promote this project. They canvassed for favourable support both within, and external to African American communities.[75] They also promoted the benefits of jobs and better housing to the residents of the Black Belt as the project was to be built in their neighbourhoods which would have displaced groups of residents. The League went as far as petitioning the City Council and state legislature to support the construction as it had been stalled by objections from the adjacent white communities of Hyde Park, Kenwood and Oakland over fears of the expansion of the Black Belt.[76] The CUL was instrumental in getting the Ida B. Wells Homes built without realising they were setting a precedent for segregated public housing in Chicago.

Conclusion

Although the work of the Community Organisation Department declined after 1954, the legacy of grassroots organising would continue and many of these block clubs are still in existence in Chicago today, indicating the longevity of community-led organisations. The organisation of block clubs was taken over by the Chicago Police Department in 1996 and as part of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy, residents are encouraged to form block clubs to identify quality of life issues, raise awareness amongst neighbours and improve safety on the block. [77] The CPD even encourages residents of high-rise apartment buildings to form 'vertical block clubs'. What started as a small-scale initiative, supported and organised

[73] Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1998), p.14
[74] Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, p. 10.
[75] Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League*, p.127.
[76] Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League*, p.127.
[77] 'About Block Clubs', *Chicago Police Department*, https://home.chicagopolice.org/community-policing-group/block-clubs/about-block-clubs/ [accessed 20 February 2022]

by women, has grown into a city-wide programme organised by a major city department. This further illustrates that the long-term impact of block clubs was not superficial and that the CUL achieved a key aim in improving race relations in the city.

African American women such as Maude Lawrence and Alva Maxey were vital in leading the fight on blight.[78] Although their contributions were not extensively covered in Arvarh Strickland's *History of the Urban League*, their leadership led to an organised network of grassroots groups that could effect change in their environmental conditions and this explicitly challenges Strickland's criticism that these block improvement projects were largely superficial.[79] Although the early years of the CUL focussed on respectability and the perceptions of African American migrants from the rural south, there was a definitive shift in the ideology of the CUL as seen in the work of the Community Organisation Department. From 1937 they publicly opposed racially restrictive covenants and linked poor public health with deteriorated housing. They viewed the primary cause of these issues as segregated spaces, and this impelled them to focus on preventing slum conditions and empowering communities to fight environmental inequalities in their own neighbourhoods. Without the work of women such as Maxey and Lawrence, it is possible that the block clubs would not have achieved the successes detailed in this chapter. This was a transformative period for women-led organisations as they carried on several traditions of the Progressive-Era female reformers such as Jane Addams and Mary McDowell in protecting public health, but also moved into the sphere of public activism that would characterise the environmental justice movement in the decades that followed.

The strategies of interracial collaboration, educational programs and public relations campaigns would be evident in the work of Hazel Johnson and People for Community

[78] 'We Fight Blight' was the title of an insert in the 1954 Annual Report.
[79] Strickland, *History of the Chicago Urban League*, p.89.

Recovery, which was located in Altgeld Gardens, a public housing project. These public housing projects were part of the process of urban renewal in Chicago initiated by the Chicago Housing Authority. African American residents who lived in designated slum clearance areas were relocated to these new neighbourhoods which were viewed as the best solution to blighted areas. However, communities such as Altgeld Gardens were built in areas surrounded by manufacturing industries and waste dumps which perpetuated exposure to environmental hazards. The activism of grassroots community organisations would be crucial in challenging those who polluted their communities.

Chapter Five - People for Community Recovery: Grassroots organising in 'the Toxic Doughnut'.

The Far South Side of Chicago still has today one of the highest concentrations of landfills containing toxic waste in the United States. Before the federally subsidised housing project of Altgeld Gardens was built in 1945, the area was used as a dump for human and industrial waste from the Pullman factory from 1881 to 1930.[1] The African American residents of Altgeld Gardens were disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards because of segregated public housing policies that dated back to the 1930s and because their homes were built in an industrial area, on top of this dump. A struggle to improve the situation of those living in Altgeld Gardens was led by one its African American residents, Hazel Johnson.

The campaigns against polluting industries, led by Hazel Johnson and People for Community Recovery (PCR), the organisation she founded, is a significant case study that warrants an in-depth examination to explore how gender, race, and class intersected in the fight for environmental justice in the 1980s and 1990s and how these characteristics were used by internal and external parties to advance specific aims. This chapter will further demonstrate how Johnson, and other women in community-based organisations, were still subjected to gendered stereotypes dating back to the Victorian Era to show how women who engaged in public activism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were linked across class and racial divides. This was not only in their fight against environmental inequalities, but also in how they subverted their roles as housewives and mothers to claim power in a world dominated by evidence, facts, and scientific expertise.

[1] Craig E. Colten, 'Industrial Wastes in the Calumet Area, 1869-1970: An Historical Geography' (Hazardous Waste Research and Information Center, Illinois Dept. of Energy and Natural Resources, 1985), pp. 5-6. Deborah Nelson, 'Waste Pits Poisoning Air, Water – Far South Side: Our Toxic Trap', *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1 June 1987, p. 1.

The emerging environmental justice movement of the early 1980s had its foundations in community-based organisations across America and the majority of these organisations were led by women from a range of different racial groups and classes: African American, Native American, Latino, and white, middle and working class. The urban environmental reform work of Jane Addams and Mary McDowell in Chicago had paved the way for these later organisations, and this further built upon community-based organising initiated by the Chicago Woman's Club in 1901 and the Chicago Urban League in the 1920s. Examining the writings of these women reveals complex identities predicated on their roles in their homes and their communities, which environmental historian Robert Gottlieb characterises as a movement identity and activist Penny Newman referred to in an interview with Gottlieb, as a 'movement of housewives'.[2] This perception from Newman highlights how women activists reclaimed a pejorative term usually used by male public officials and executives of companies that were polluting communities, and used it to galvanise women across the United Sates by creating a shared identity. Much like the women who engaged in activism against environmental inequalities in the Progressive Era, women such as Hazel Johnson framed their activism within their personal experiences and those of their communities. Johnson had no formal training in the effects of pollution and hazardous waste on public health, but she was motivated by the loss of her husband John. He died in 1969 from lung cancer despite having no risk factors associated with the disease and doctors could not explain his case. This loss served as a catalyst for Hazel Johnson as she discovered that her neighbours were experiencing respiratory diseases like lung cancer and asthma. Her own children were also affected by skin and lung illnesses which started after they moved to Altgeld Gardens, including her daughter Cheryl, who worked alongside her mother at PCR. Johnson was impelled to act because she felt that no one else would.

---

[2] Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993), p.277.

A significant criticism of the environmental justice movement that has been articulated by historian Martin Melosi is that this movement was, and is, limited by 'its stance on the issue of race versus class; its underestimation of its friends and its own exclusivity'. Melosi further questions whether the issue is in fact environmental racism or rather poverty.[3] For the residents of Altgeld Gardens, it was clearly both. The argument that the movement was exclusive suggests that these organisations did not work with, or admit, people who did not fit their demographic, which in the instance of the PCR would mean they were African American and poor. However, the activities and records of Johnson and the PCR refute this claim. On the issue of race versus class, it would suggest that like other criticism of the movement, race was seen as the central issue by organisations fighting for environmental justice. The 'friends' could be other grassroots organisations, mainstream environmental groups or city officials – Melosi does not make this clear – but again this was not the case.

This chapter will argue that both race and class are linked in the perpetuation of environmental inequality, in that the residents of Altgeld Gardens were disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards. Key reasons for this are because they lived in public housing, subsidised by the federal government and state of Illinois. Where they lived was determined by both race and the limited economic resources they had, so race and class cannot be separated into distinct categories as a determiner in who was most affected by environmental hazards. Max Weber's three-tier model of class stratification is applied in this chapter to emphasise how this community were of a lower class because they lacked economic power and respect, or status, from wider society. These factors, along with racial and gendered perceptions would be barriers that Hazel Johnson would have to overcome.

[3] Martin V. Melosi, 'Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History', *Environmental History Review*, 19:3 (1995) 1-16 (p.10).

This chapter will further argue that grassroots organisations such as PCR did not perceive their aims and activism as exclusive as there is evidence of inter-racial collaboration with other grassroots organisations including the sharing of practice with Lois Gibbs who was white and founded the Love Canal Homeowners Association (LCHA), located in New York State. Analysis of the organisational records of PCR and the personal papers of Hazel Johnson and the PCR also demonstrate collaboration with international environmental organisations including Greenpeace.

The history of Altgeld Gardens reveals a pattern of discriminatory practices, and links can be made between these practices and the negative perceptions of this geographical space and its residents. Grassroots organisations such as PCR faced further obstacles because of their race and they had to find ways to address these, such as forming multi-racial coalitions, expanding the narrative to show that it was not just a 'black' issue and maintaining a sustained public campaign that involved local and national publications. The strategies employed by Johnson and PCR will be examined in order to argue that there existed a mutually beneficial relationship between grassroots organisations and mainstream environmental organisations, specifically Greenpeace, despite the public criticism levelled at such groups. It is also clear that there existed a strong network of women-led community organisations that viewed gender as equally important as race and class. This can be seen in the rhetoric they employed in their public discourse.

Hazel Johnson described living in Altgeld Gardens, located on the southeast side of Chicago, as a 'toxic doughnut'.[4] This evocative term that Johnson employed in interviews with local and national publications, describes the Lake Calumet area which has historically been home to extensive manufacturing industries and large-scale hazardous waste disposal.

[4] Chicago, Chicago Public Library Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, MS People for Community Recovery Archives, 'Living in Chicago's Toxic Doughnut' 1990 in box 1, folder 2.

Like the residents of the Back of the Yards neighbourhood, the community of Altgeld Gardens, from its inception in 1945, was disproportionately affected by exposure to a degraded environment that included contamination from arsenic, lead, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) which can cause cancer. This community suffered the subsequent health problems associated with prolonged contact with hazardous materials with increased rates of cancer and respiratory diseases. In tackling these problems, Hazel Johnson became the voice of her community and her activism and achievements led to her receiving the title of 'Mother of the Environmental justice movement' at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in October 1991.[5]

The Modern Environmental Justice Movement

The work of Hazel Johnson was born out of concern for her immediate environment and the health of her community, but this work eventually became part of a national movement for environmental justice. This chapter primarily focusses on her individual efforts in order to demonstrate how she negotiated the barriers of race, class, and gender, in a similar manner to other women who challenged environmental inequality in Chicago dating back to 1876. However, it is necessary to recognise the foundations of the national movement in order to understand the significance of Johnson's contribution and why her work should be more visible in the discourse on environmental justice.

Robert Bullard, Professor of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy, and the 'Father of environmental justice' has extensively chronicled the origins of this movement and determines that there is a clear link between civil rights and environmental justice as there are examples of activism that took place before the first Earth Day in 1970. He gives examples

[5] Robert Bullard, 'Environmental justice movement Loses Southside Chicago Icon Hazel Johnson', *OpEdNews.com*, (January 14, 2011) <https://www.opednews.com/articles/Environmental-Justice-Move-by-Robert-Bullard-110114-323.html> [Accessed 14 April 2020]

including in 1967 when a group of African American students who protested about an eight-year-old African American girl drowning at a garbage dump. These protests centred on the fact that the dump was located in an African American neighbourhood and posed a direct threat to its inhabitants. He makes further links to civil rights as in 1968, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Memphis to campaign for better working conditions for striking African American garbage workers.[6] Although these two examples did not garner wider public attention, the latter overshadowed by the assassination of King, they were tied to social and economic justice issues which Luke Cole and Sheila Foster explain were rooted in various social reform efforts spanning decades. These social and economic justice issues had been at the heart of clubwomen's activities in the Progressive Era, including settlement workers and the women of the Chicago Urban League. Cole and Foster expand the narrative of the origins of the movement, explaining that a precise event or date that initiated activism on a national scale is impossible to define as the movement grew organically out of hundreds of local struggles.[7] These struggles, including that of Hazel Johnson and PCR, were often a result of an imbalance in power between the affected communities and corporate interests, complicated by the action and inaction of state and federal government.

This power dynamic was evident in the case of Warren County, a predominantly African American area in North Carolina. Environmental justice scholars, including Bullard, Cole, Foster and Dorceta Taylor term this a defining moment in the movement and a series of events that changed its course.[8] Warren County was a well-publicised case that started in 1978 and culminated in 1982 with images of Black protestors on television and in newspapers lying in the road, blocking the route of trucks containing soil contaminated with

---

[6] Robert D. Bullard, 'Environmental Justice for All', in *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice & Communities of Color*, ed. by Robert D. Bullard (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994), pp.3-23 (p.3).
[7] Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p.19.
[8] Dorceta E. Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), p.13. Robert D. Bullard, 'Environmental Justice for All', p.5.

PCBs. They were protesting the proposed construction of a toxic waste landfill in their community, which had been authorised by the state government and promoted by Governor James Hunt and the federal Environmental Protection Agency as a public good. This support from state and federal authorities illustrates how grassroots organisations were engaged in fights within political structures in which they occupied far less powerful positions than the organisations they were campaigning against. For Hazel Johnson and PCR, their position was also in opposition to business interests.

Although the Warren County protests were unsuccessful in halting the building of the landfill, their protests and campaigns served two important purposes as outlined by Taylor. Firstly, they raised the question of whether minority communities were deliberately targeted in the construction of hazardous waste sites and, secondly, they led to the commissioning of a national report that examined the relationship between race, class, and patterns of hazardous facility locations.[9] This 1987 report title *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* was the first of its kind to make links between the location of hazardous waste sites and the racial and socio-economic characteristics where these sites was situated. This report explicitly stated that 'race is a major factor in relation to the presence of hazardous waste sites in residential communities throughout the United States'.[10] The publication of this report acted as a catalyst for a national movement and provided a framework for grassroots organisations to work within. This would be instrumental in the work of Hazel Johnson because she and the residents of Altgeld Gardens were not only subjected to proposed hazardous waste facilities in their communities, but their homes were also built in a heavily industrialised area on the site of a former sewage farm. The commissioning of the report meant that her activism on a localised level was recognised as part of a wider set of issues on a national scale.

---

[9] Taylor, *Toxic Communities*, p.19.
[10] United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, '*Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*, (1987), p.x.

Segregated Spaces and Public Housing

Urban planning in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s involved a range of programmes and policies that were inherently discriminatory, particularly for African Americans and seriously limited their housing options. One such practice was that of redlining carried out by the Home Owners' Loan Corportation (HOLC) which received federal support in 1934, when the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was established. This policy was part of an initiative to develop the first underwriting criteria for mortgages and involved categorising areas according to risk associated with mortgage lending. Areas that were category D were outlined in red and considered the highest risk and the majority of African American, urban neighbourhoods fell into this category. As part of their surveys, the HOLC produced a series of maps of major cities indicating the redlined areas which showed that approximately 95% of Black households were redlined.[11] Although the FHA and HOLC did not segregate African American communities, the practice of redlining exacerbated the problem because it meant that these residents were unlikely to be approved for mortgages which severely restricted their options to move to better housing. As well as redlining, public housing policy was also a key factor in perpetuating segregation and confining poor and working-class African Americans to physically degraded environments.

The history of the Altgeld Gardens public housing development needs to be examined in order to understand of the pattern of unequal exposure to environmental hazards for different Chicago residents as a result of deliberate racist policies about where to locate public housing and tenant allocation, and historic waste disposal practices. Public housing in Chicago had been segregated in the 1930s and this led to precedents which were difficult to

[11] Steve Maas, '*Searching for the Origins of Redlining of Black Neighborhoods'*, National Bureau of Economic Research, *The Digest*, February, 2021. Available at https://www.nber.org/digest-202102/searching-origins-redlining-black-neighborhoods [Accessed 18 April, 2022]

overcome in the post war period, when civil rights, especially for African Americans, became an increasingly pressing issue. Altgeld Gardens was specifically built for low-income African Americans, in a remote location that was primarily occupied by manufacturing industries, and all of these factors would lead to Hazel Johnson organising PCR.

Overseeing all public housing in Chicago was the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA). The CHA was created as a non-profit public housing agency in 1937 to assume management of three projects that had been built in Chicago by the federal Public Works Administration (PWA). This was part of a raft of New Deal programmes instigated by Franklin D. Roosevelt and, in 1935, it funded the Jane Addams Houses, Julia C. Lathrop Homes, and Trumbull Park Homes.[12] The CHA, with support from the CUL also built the Ida B. Wells homes in 1939, in the heart of the Black Belt, for African Americans. The Lathrop and Trumbull Homes were located in white areas of the city and excluded African American tenants as a result of the 'neighborhood composition rule'. Conceived by Harold Ickes, a former settlement house resident, native Chicagoan, and head of the housing division of the PWA, this rule prevented government programmes from altering the racial composition of a neighbourhood, and the occupancy of these developments reflected the racial composition of the selected locations.[13] This rule would shape CHA policy in the ensuing years and limited the options for mobility of residents of projects including Altgeld Gardens. This policy was evident in the decision to situate Altgeld Gardens in a remote area and in the racial make-up of its residents. Although vacant land was sparse in Chicago, locating this African American public housing project in an industrial area would probably have met with resistance if the occupants were white. As a

[12] Devereux Bowly Jr., *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing in Chicago,* 2nd ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), p.16.
[13] Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.14; Alexander Polikoff, *Waiting for Gautreaux: A Story of Segregation, Housing, and the Black Ghetto,* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), p.27.

result of this policy, from the outset residents were exposed to environmental hazards because they were poor and black.

The dual remit of the CHA was to provide affordable and sanitary housing to poor families and individuals, and to clear slum areas. These slums consisted of large areas of the Black Belt previously discussed in chapter 4. These details become significant when analysing the demographics of public housing projects in Chicago and the tenant selection process which reveals a deliberate decision by the CHA to segregate these communities. This policy was exposed and upheld in the landmark *Gautreaux vs. Chicago Housing Authority* class action lawsuit initiated in 1966. For the purposes of this chapter, the salient details of the case include the charge that the CHA intentionally chose sites for family public housing and adopted tenant assignment procedures for the purpose of maintaining existing patterns of residential separation.[14] Alexander Polikoff, volunteer attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), worked with three other lawyers to bring the case on behalf of the tenants of public housing projects in Chicago, including Dorothy Gautreaux, a resident of Altgeld Gardens. He argued that the CHA demonstrated the intent to segregate African Americans because it 'wished to avoid placing them in white neighborhoods'.[15] What strengthened this argument was testimony from the supervisor of tenant selection at the CHA, Tamaara Tabb, which detailed a coding system for applicants for public housing. She testified that when applicants registered with the CHA, they were assigned a code based on their priority status, whether they were a veteran and their race – A for white applicants and B for black families. Location preferences were then recorded, with CHA interviewers instructed to 'guide' B applicants to projects where they would be housed more quickly and not mentioning other locations. These other locations consisted of white projects where only

[14] *Gautreaux v. Chicago Housing Authority*, 296 F.Supp. 907 (N.D. Ill, 1969).
[15] Polikoff, *Waiting for Gautreaux*, p.48.

the A applicants were to be housed.[16] This revelation from a CHA employee illustrates how the residents of Altgeld Gardens were intentionally segregated in an environment that was detrimental to their health because of their race and class. They were given limited options on where they could live because of the CHA tenant assignment policies and their social mobility was constrained by their low incomes. Combined with the area where Altgeld Gardens was constructed, which was surrounded by manufacturing industries and built on contaminated land, it is evident that these people were victims of environmental racism because of the history of segregated housing in Chicago.

Polluted Spaces: Altgeld Gardens

The Altgeld Gardens development was built in 1945 primarily as temporary accommodation for African Americans who had migrated from the South to work in the factories of the industrialised Calumet area during World War II but was later financed as a permanent development of 1500 houses. The development is located at 130th Street and Ellis Avenue and is bordered by the Little Calumet River and, as Devereux Bowly Jr. noted in his comprehensive examination of the history of public housing in Chicago, the site chosen was remote and 'built on the edge of the city, far away from any substantial residential areas.'[17] This remoteness coupled with the close proximity of existing industries which produced harmful emissions and waste meant that, from its inception, the community of Altgeld Gardens and the health of its residents would be adversely impacted. As Bowly argues it also 'reinforced and extended the precedent…of government action to segregate Chicago's black population, in this case in an isolated location' further perpetuating discriminatory waste disposal practices in later decades. [18]

[16] Polikoff, *Waiting for Gautreaux,* p.54.
[17] Bowly Jr., *The Poorhouse*, pp. 38-39.
[18] Bowly Jr., *The Poorhouse* p. 40.

As well as being located in a heavily industrialised area, part of Altgeld Gardens was built on land that was once home to the Pullman sewage farm. This environmentally hazardous location was developed as part of industrialist George Pullman's factory and 'Town of Pullman' district in the 1880s, although the sewage farm was located two miles to the south of the town so it would not impact the residents of this purpose-built town. A report commissioned by the Illinois Hazardous Waste Research and Information Center in 1985 into historical industrial waste disposal found that in 1890, approximately 1.8 million gallons of human and industrial waste was spread over the fields out in the open air. The author of the report, Craig Colten, has noted that 'it is uncertain what dangers juxtaposing a modern housing complex and an old sewage farm presents' as samples from this site were never taken by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, but the report did rank the threats posed by the disposal sites in the study area and found that 'the greatest risk is for residences built directly on top of old dumps'.[19] The decision to build part of a public housing development on a hazardous landfill is one that demonstrates the practice of segregating communities in areas away from the white population and this location was one where they were exposed to a greater health risks. In the case of Altgeld Gardens this took the form of the land the houses were built on as well as the industries surrounding the community. The location of the Pullman sewage farm outside of the residential area in the 1880s is indicative of the 'not in my back yard' principle that was also identified by Mary McDowell in 1914 in relation to the stockyards and location of garbage dumps when she remarked that 'put it on the edge of the city' was a phrase heard when deciding where to locate these waste disposal sites.[20] The edge of the city was the location chosen to build Altgeld Gardens and, because it

[19] Colten, 'Industrial Wastes in the Calumet Area', p. 24, p.71, p.79.
[20] Chicago, Chicago Historical Society, MS Mary McDowell Settlement Records, 'Standard of Living: Civic Frontiersman' 1914 in box 2, folder 13.

was already home to landfills, external agencies saw no reason to not continue dumping their waste there.

Hazel Johnson named this area a 'toxic doughnut', with this moniker appearing in national and local newspapers and as an image on the newsletter published by PCR called 'Fighting Against a Toxic Environment' (F.A.T.E).[21] The idea of a doughnut was apt because Altgeld Gardens was surrounded by landfills, sewage treatment plants, chemical companies, paint and other manufacturing factories and steel mills as well as contaminated lagoons and the polluted Little Calumet River.[22] The area was also targeted for the siting of another landfill by Waste Management in 1987. Waste Management, Inc. was the largest waste industry in the United States, part of a global conglomerate with receipts of $2 billion in 1986.[23] It was the subject of many campaigns of environmental justice groups including in Louisiana where one of its subsidiaries was caught storing toxic waste in a self-storage unit, and Kettleman City in California where a proposed toxic waste incinerator was to be located in an area that was 95% Latino. A further indictment of the company's practices was that it paid over $50 million in fines and settlements for matters including environmental crimes.[24] Like these others areas, Altgeld Gardens was a victim of environmental inequality and as Hazel Johnson wrote, alluding to the founding of Chicago in 1833, 'our area has been a dumping ground for 163 years'.[25] This assertion demonstrates how communities have been historically affected by environmental hazards and also how this is a cycle that continues because companies do not see the harm in putting another facility in an area that is already home to landfills.

[21] MS PCR Archives, 'Clippings' 1986-1990 box 1, folder 19 & box 4, folder 3.
[22] MS PCR Archives, 'Living in Chicago's Toxic Doughnut' 1990 box 1, folder 2
[23] Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, 3rd ed. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p.60.
[24] Cole & Foster, *From the Ground Up*, p. 5.
[25] MS PCR Archives, 'Living in Chicago's Toxic Doughnut'

The history of Altgeld Gardens is significant because it provides an insight into the pattern of discrimination that People for Community Recovery fought against. This space had a long history of pollution and the area surrounding these residences was already zoned for industrial use. As Sylvia Hood Washington contends, it was longer-lasting race-based legal decisions and public policies that created these environmentally marginalised spaces.[26] This is a justified argument because this particular polluted space was the result of decisions made decades earlier by the PWA and CHA on where to locate public housing projects and policies assigning tenants based on their race. The continuation of racially marginalised spaces is evident in the demographic information on Altgeld Gardens published in the early 1990s. At this time, its population was 97% African American, the area was classed as low income with 98% of the 10,000 on fixed income from the state and federal entitlement programs.[27] Sociologist and activist David Pellow, who also volunteered for PCR and published articles and essays for the organisation's newsletter, wrote that for most people 'just knowing that this was a housing project on the South Side of Chicago would be enough to draw several conclusions about what kind of place it is.'[28] This area was part of the Black Belt of Chicago which had developed during the Great Migration beginning in 1910 and was described as an area of ghettos and slums by historian Thomas Philpott. With the rise of segregated public housing in this district of Chicago, which was a part of the purpose of the CHA to clear the slums, the conclusions drawn were of communities with low paying or no employment or people living on welfare due to the requirements of the CHA in allocating subsidised housing units.

---

[26] Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2017), p. 2.
[27] MS PCR Archives, 'Biography of Hazel Johnson, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of People for Community Recovery' 1992 in box 1, folder 2.
[28] David Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), p. 67.

These perceptions were pervasive in all sectors of society, which is one of the reasons why this community was engaged in a constant battle to clean up their environment and protect their homes and families from further proposed environmental hazards. Altgeld Gardens was a place that most assumed would have high crime rates, unemployment and poverty, which Pellow describes as 'sadly not being too far off the mark,'[29] and is evidenced by the proportion of residents receiving state and federal support. It is clear to see that why this grassroots organisation faced more barriers than their Progressive-Era predecessors based on their class, race, and gender status, particularly because Altgeld Gardens was a public housing development. It is also significant that much of the negative comment about Hazel Johnson was because she was seen as unemployed. However, her extensive public outreach and education activities and leading PCR was more than a full-time job.

Hazel Johnson and People for Community Recovery

The records of PCR provide evidence of how Johnson viewed her activism in the context of being an African American woman and a mother, as well as providing explanations of motivations and aims of the organisation. Hazel Johnson moved to Altgeld Gardens in 1962 with her husband John and worked in a variety of roles between 1965 and 1969 including as a mail sorter for the United States Postal Service and providing clerical support at an organisation called Parents and Friends of Retarded Children.[30] As well as her employment, she regularly volunteered for the local school and took children on field trips in the summer. She was also the mother of seven children who she raised by herself after her husband died of lung cancer in 1969.[31] Johnson's community-based ethos was evident before she founded PCR and her roles supporting children speaks to the notion of civic motherhood which was

[29] Pellow, *Garbage Wars*, p.67.
[30] Biographical Note: Hazel M. Johnson available at <https://www.chipublib.org/fa-people-for-community-recovery-archives/> [Accessed 30 April 2020]
[31] MS PCR Archives, 'Living in Chicago's Toxic Doughnut' 1990 box 1, folder 2.

espoused by African American clubwomen in the Progressive Era. In a 1988 interview, Johnson detailed how PCR was established in 1979 in response to failings of the Altgeld Local Advisory Council, (LAC), including the request for a survey into asbestos levels in residential units. LACs were community-based and composed of members whom fellow residents voted into office. Their purpose was, and remains, to improve the quality of life and empower residents to create a positive living environment. The LACs also served as a conduit for tenant issues to be conveyed to the CHA.[32] Johnson felt that the Altgeld LAC was not working for the community and was aligned with the CHA, stating 'I felt it was really and truly not representing the people like it should.'[33] In a similar manner to the women's clubs that were excluded from decision-making processes in previous decades, Johnson formed her own organisation to deal with issues that affected the community she lived in and that she felt were being ignored by the city bureaucrats.

The organisation's first meetings were held in the Methodist church in 1979 with around ten members and were primarily concerned with asbestos removal from their homes and ensuring that the CHA undertook urgent repairs.[34] The CHA was responsible for the maintenance of rented units in Altgeld Gardens although as Hazel Johnson and PCR discovered, it did not always take this responsibility seriously. A prime example was that residents only learned that asbestos was present in their homes when they saw an advert in a newspaper, placed by the CHA, for bids to remove asbestos from the CHA manager's office located in Altgeld Gardens. They had previously been told that asbestos in their attics was just fibreglass.[35] Despite raising concerns with the LAC, the residents of Altgeld Gardens were told that their units had already been tested and no asbestos was found. The testing and

[32] Resident Councils available at <https://thecha.org/residents/services/resident-council-leadership> [Accessed 30 April 2021]
[33] MS PCR Archives, 'Interview with Hazel by Virginia Mullery' 1988 in box 1, folder 19.
[34] MS PCR Archives, 'History of People for Community Recovery' 1991 in box 1, folder 1.
[35] Chinita Strausberg, 'Altgeld residents seek meeting with mayor on asbestos', *Chicago Defender*, 5 June 1986, p.3.

removal of asbestos was an early victory for Johnson and PCR and indicative of how other community-led organisations were formed as seen with the block clubs organised by the Chicago Urban League from 1917. These communities experienced a public health issue and when they were faced with inaction or negligence from the city, they took action themselves.

Johnson began to suspect that other public health issues that affected Altgeld Gardens were also a result of environmental factors. It was only when Johnson heard on a TV news broadcast that her area had one of the highest rates of cancer in city that she made connections between cancer-related deaths and the polluted environment that surrounded Altgeld Gardens. As she noted in a 1988 interview, 'I started thinking about that because my husband had died of lung cancer. I didn't know anything about the environment, but I began to make telephone calls and to read. I was the first black in the Midwest to work on pollution problems.'[36] PCR was incorporated on 25th October 1982, becoming the only public housing environmental justice organisation in the country.[37] Johnson's concern for the health of her community and the impetus to research a field she had no prior knowledge of is similar to the practices of leaders of other grassroots organisations from the same period, such as the Love Canal Homeowners Association (LCHA) founded by Lois Gibbs. However, Johnson and PCR had the added barrier of negative, racialised perceptions of their community – such as high crime rates, poverty and unemployment – to overcome in gaining support for their activism. A further barrier was that Johnson was a black woman who was unemployed and lived in subsidised public housing.

[36] MS PCR Archives, 'Interview with Hazel Johnson by Virginia Mullery' 1988
[37] Washington, *Packing Them In*, p. 222.

PCR Programmes and Strategies

For Hazel Johnson and PCR, it was not just about 'cleaning up' but holding those responsible accountable as well as educating the local community and the wider population about the issues they faced, forging networks to empower other organisations. These aims are articulated in documents charting the history of the organisation since 1982 and claim that:

> 'PCR is emerging as a voice for African Americans and other communities of colour. PCR has taken on the task of educating communities of colour about the outcomes of environmental degradation and injustice. PCR is a non-sectarian, non-ideological, multiracial not-for-profit organization dedicated to striving for solutions to environmental and economic injustice.'[38]

This mission statement reiterates Johnson's claim that her local advisory council, which had been formed by the CHA and was more aligned to their interests, were not adequately representing the residents of Altgeld Gardens and it also highlights the issue that PCR and many grassroots campaigners articulated, namely that mainstream environmental organisations were 'dismissing or marginalising' environmental matters that particularly affected African Americans.[39] As with the experiences of Mary McDowell in the Back of the Yards neighbourhood, Johnson founded PCR to directly address the environmental degradation that she experienced first-hand and felt was being ignored by those that did not share this experience. These early foundations are indicative of the pattern of organising which begins with the immediate community and then evolves into a coalition with other community-based groups in the local area, and perhaps beyond.

PCR also had an outreach strand to their activities which included visiting schools, community organisations and churches to publicise their environmental work. They created workshops for students as a means of 'dramatizing ecological relationships to show what happens to locally produced waste'. This was with the aim of sustaining the movement as

[38] MS PCR Archives, 'History of People for Community Recovery' 1991 in box 1, folder 1.
[39] MS PCR Archives, 'History of People for Community Recovery' 1991

well as encouraging young people to pursue an interest in science.[40] Through this practice of sharing resources and publicising their activism, as well as educational programmes, Hazel Johnson and PCR sought to share their experiences with multiple external audiences which implies that they did not view themselves as an exclusive organisation. This is further supported by the statement that PCR was founded as a multiracial and non-sectarian organisation which demonstrates a strategy of inclusivity and even though they recognise that as African Americans they have been disproportionately affected by environmental hazards, by defining the organisation in this way could lead to a wider awareness and support from non-African American communities. There is evidence of this strategy of publicising their desire for multi-racial coalitions in Cheryl Johnson's statement that;

> 'What I like about this movement is that it crosses class and racial lines. We work with people who have money and people who don't have money. We respect one another because we share a common need for the air, the water, and the land. Pollution has no boundaries and it doesn't settle in one place'.[41]

Hazel Johnson expanded on this in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* in 1993 when she stated, 'we all breathe the same air, so if the air is lousy where I live, sooner or later it's gonna get to your home too'. She was referring to the white neighbourhoods to the east of Altgeld Gardens and the article noted that she was 'stubbornly refusing to let race become a dividing issue'.[42] However Hazel Johnson was using race strategically, not as an oppositional argument but as a way of saying that one day it would affect white communities too in a similar way that Cheryl Johnson did. This public declaration demonstrates how PCR and Hazel Johnson recognised the need to raise public awareness, including that of white communities, and that these problems were not just confined to African American communities. This directly contradicts Melosi's claim that the environmental justice

---

[40] MS PCR Archives, 'Environmental Racism: A Personal Point of View' by Cheryl Johnson 1993 in box 1, folder 31.
[41] MS PCR Archives, 'Environmental Racism'.
[42] Josh Getlin, 'Fighting Her Good Fight: Hazel Johnson battles those who want to turn her Chicago housing project into a toxic dump', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 February 1993, section E2

movement was limited by its own exclusivity. Melosi also suggests that the movement was a homogenous group when, in reality, the organisations that formed it crossed class and race lines, as noted by Cheryl Johnson, and actively sought collaboration with a wide range of external partners.

Collaboration with External Organisations

A core strategy employed by PCR was to engage with those outside of the community and one of the ways they achieved this was to work with Greenpeace, one of the 'Big Ten' environmental groups that also included the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth. Greenpeace was a transnational organisation whose activities included regular media campaigns and supporting organisations with strategies for protests and obstructive direct action against particular companies.[43] Common assertions made by critics of these national environmental organisations as well as members of the environmental justice movement as a whole were that they were elitist and the reserve of white, middle-class, male conservationists and preservationists, a claim that was supported by Charlie Cray, an activist with Greenpeace, in a National Public Radio interview in 1993. He acknowledged that the 'big groups' such as Greenpeace had mainly white, affluent members and that working with groups such as PCR would add diversity which would benefit a movement 'that sometimes looks too homogenous'.[44] He agreed that the 'people-of-colour' movement had strengths that Greenpeace did not possess, supporting the idea that PCR and Greenpeace had a mutually beneficial relationship. PCR were able to link up with a group with resources well beyond their own and Greenpeace were seen to be shaking off the image of an elite, white middle-class organisation. The relationship between PCR and Greenpeace was evident in July of

[43] Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, p.193.
[44] MS PCR Archives, 'NPR interview transcript – Environmental Racism Charged by Minority Groups' 1993 in box 1, folder 19

1987 following Waste Management's decision to build another landfill near the Thomas J. O'Brien Lock in Chicago, located on a site that already had four facilities. PCR, along with Greenpeace and other environmental and health groups conducted a major protest at the site involving around 500 people. They successfully turned away fifty-seven dump trucks.[45] Not only did Greenpeace join the protest but they also taught members of PCR certain tactics they could use, including chaining themselves to the underside of trucks that were obstructing the entrances to waste incineration sites. This partnership evidences how community-based organisations used resources outside of their local area and were seen as adding diversity to mainstream environmental organisations. It could also be argued that they were explicitly utilising these relationships to further their own goals which they may not have been able to achieve otherwise. Greenpeace also supported PCR with monitoring hazardous substances and in 1988 held a rally at Skippers Marina, on the Little Calumet River which borders Altgeld Gardens to the south. Greenpeace's Beluga ship also tested the drainpipes from the Calumet Industrial Development which fed directly into the Little Calumet River and found excessively high levels of carcinogenic and toxic chemicals.[46] Again, this showed how the resources of an international organisation could benefit a community grassroots organisation. So, although tensions existed, PCR and Greenpeace worked together in a way that provided both organisations access to a wider audience that they may not have had if they continued to act independently.

It was not only international mainstream environmental groups that PCR worked with. Hazel Johnson very publicly claimed that she did not view environmental justice as a divisive movement when she stated 'this is not just black and white. We all have the same interests, and we have a good working relationship like we have known each other for years'.[47] This

[45] MS PCR Archives, 'History of People for Community Recovery' 1988 in box 14, folder 10.
[46] MS PCR Archives, 'History of People for Community Recovery'
[47] MS PCR Archives, 'Interview with Hazel Johnson by Virginia Mullery' 1988 in box 1, folder 19

justifies the contention that PCR saw race and class as being intertwined rather than an issue of one versus the other and that they did not perceive their activism as exclusive to their African American neighbourhood. By articulating this relationship with white communities Johnson was speaking to a wider audience and encouraging this audience to consider the wider implications of these environmental concerns. Hazel Johnson had links with Lois Gibbs and the LCHA, a white working-class organisation and she even visited Love Canal in New York to meet with Gibbs. She described how since founding PCR 'I have met so many beautiful people all across the United States, I have been to Love Canal and I have been to many conferences,'[48] which connects to the aims of multiracial collaboration expressed in the PCR mission statement. Gibbs also communicated with Hazel Johnson to garner support for a national grassroots campaign to stop dioxin exposure and Johnson published an article written by Gibbs in the organisation's newsletter.[49] So although PCR initially started as an organisation that was primarily concerned with issues that affected their African-American community, Hazel Johnson saw the value and perhaps necessity in learning from, and collaborating with, diverse organisations as well as using a public rhetoric that was collaborative with white organisations and communities. This further demonstrates how classifying the environmental justice movement as exclusive is too narrow a focus and neglects the significant inter-racial collaboration that occurred. It also neglects to consider how gender shaped the activities of Hazel Johnson and the importance of the networks that were being built by women including Johnson and Gibbs. These networks crossed class and race lines and meant that gender was equally as significant as class and race in how these grassroots, environmental justice groups sought to achieve environmental equity.

[48] MS PCR Archives, 'Interview with Hazel Johnson by Virginia Mullery'
[49] MS PCR Archives, 'Correspondence from Lois Gibbs' 1995 in box 4, folder 19

Public Relations and Public Perceptions

An important strand of the PCR strategy was public relations. Because Johnson often faced criticism for her activities because of her class, race and gender, she engaged with local and national media, with interviews appearing in publications including the *Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, Los Angeles Times* and *USA Weekend*. In each interview she highlighted the environmental hazards that residents of Altgeld Gardens were exposed to, as well as the high rates of cancer deaths and other respiratory illnesses that had been discovered when health surveys were conducted. A three-month investigation was carried out by *Chicago Sun-Times* in 1987 and a six-part series was published under the title *Far South Side Our Toxic Trap*. One of the ways that Hazel Johnson ensured that public awareness was raised was not just talking about the problems but also showing them to a wide range of people, including legislators such as Democratic State Senators Emil Jones and Howard Brookins, Republican State Representative Samuel Panayotovich, and the media. She organised 'Toxic Tours' of the neighbourhood with a detailed itinerary that listed all of the polluting industries along the way.[50] According to an article published as part of the reaction to the *Toxic Trap* series in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, 'a state legislative committee came away 'wide-eyed' from a bus tour of the Far South Side'[51] The joint committee took the tour as part of an investigation into the environmental problems in the area and it was reported that they passed 'abandoned toxic dumps, fields of sewage sludge and factories emitting thick, orange smoke'.[52] The Toxic Tours were publicised by letters to State Senators and Representatives as well as via leaflet drops to their offices. Representatives from State and Federal agencies were also directly contacted (a copy of the Toxic Tours itinerary and description in the PCR records contains a handwritten address for Aaron Taylor at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For

[50] MS PCR Archives, 'People for Community Recovery, Inc. Toxic Tour' n.d. in box 14, folder 21
[51] Deborah Nelson, 'Dump site an eye-opener for legislators – Our Toxic Trap Reaction', *Chicago Sun-Times,* 11 September 1987, p. 36
[52] Nelson, 'Dump site an eye-opener for legislators, p.36.

Hazel Johnson, this was an excellent result as the wider Chicago population would get a sense of the degraded environment she lived in, told from the perspective of state legislators, furthering her agenda of engaging with as wide an audience as possible. Extending an invitation to lawmakers and other people in positions of power, to visit these sites, and see and smell for themselves ensured that Johnson could maximise the impact of the work that PCR was doing through outreach and educational activities, and also ensured that her name was well-known. The impact of this outreach activity was that a joint committee was set up to investigate the pollution problems in these neighbourhoods and to work collaboratively with the communities as well as environmentalists to clean up the waste dumps and reduce pollution.[53] This was a positive step as it had elevated the community concerns to the state level, as well as providing political action to clean up the hazards.

As a consequence of her activities there was also a backlash against what she was doing. This was sometimes racialised, predicated on the negative connotations of being an African American woman living in a public housing development. A striking example of this can be seen a letter that was sent to the PCR offices and was kept as part of the organisation records, responding to an article in *USA Weekend* published in 1992. There is no date or a signature on the typed letter and the ethnicity and gender of the writer are not stated explicitly, although they said they were seventy-seven years old. The letter offered some advice to Hazel Johnson on actions she could take to 'increase the likelihood that she would succeed in her efforts' including 'losing around 100lbs and getting a job'. Basing success on appearance indicates that the writer felt that being an overweight, African American woman inhibited Johnson and the comment of getting job implies that the writer viewed Johnson as lazy. In the writer's opinion, she was unlikely to get much sympathy from the general public for several reasons;

[53] Deborah Nelson, 'Panel to probe toxic dumps on South Side – Our Toxic Trap Reaction', *Chicago Sun-Times,* 9 August 1989, p. 26.

> 'People just naturally link complaints like this to Blacks who seem to be always complaining about something… As soon as the public sees a Black that is considerably overweight, they say those people aren't dying from diseases associated with toxic waste, they're just dying from obesity… Obesity can be corrected by getting off your butt and getting a job… When anyone goes by one of those housing projects, the only thing they see is people sitting on the porch and eating…Get off the Public Assistance Program'.[54]

These long held, racist views play into the stereotypes that all Black people in public housing are lazy and reliant on welfare. These negative assessments classify Johnson and her neighbours according to their race and class status and they further demonstrate the additional barriers that women like Johnson had to overcome. The view that what Hazel Johnson was doing was not a job indicates a level of ignorance about her activities but also echoes David Pellow's statement that most would draw conclusions about the people and the place because of its location and the fact that it was a public housing project. It is also indicative of the public perception that Johnson, and other women in a similar position, were viewed as housewives with no expertise in environmental issues and demonstrates a lack of understanding about the structure and activities of organisations such as PCR. Perhaps inadvertently the writer has linked the pollution problems in Altgeld Gardens to environmental racism when they say 'people just naturally link complaints like this to Blacks' however the contents of this letter emphasise how race, class and gender are intrinsically linked. As Hazel Johnson explained, she started PCR when she lost her job, but she was a widowed, single mother raising seven children, so her employment options were limited.[55] This also demonstrates how women, and mothers, faced barriers because of their maternal roles.

A further example of the barrier of public perceptions of Hazel Johnson and PCR can be found in a letter to the editor, published in the PCR newsletter in 1993. The writer, who identified themselves as a 'professional African American woman' explained that they could

[54] MS PCR Archives, undated letter in response to article in USA Weekend, in box 4, folder 15.
[55] MS PCR Archives, 'Interview with Hazel Johnson by Virginia Mullery' 1988 in box 1, folder 19.

not see themselves, 'associating with an organization based in a public housing project'.[56] This attitude demonstrates how class-based perceptions amongst African Americans were still pervasive in the 1990s in a similar manner to the Progressive Era and in the attitudes of the women of the Chicago Urban League with their racial uplift programmes. The author went on to say that they were ashamed of their stance because it was Hazel Johnson who was raising awareness and fighting inequality, and they believed she was 'someone with minimal education,' and therefore very different from them, a professional, presumably college educated, African American.[57] They also explained how their conversations with other 'successful' African American women concerning environmental issues were superficial because these issues did not immediately affect them. These two examples illustrate how negative external perceptions of class and race could be considered as barriers to activism. However, the strategies of publicising multiracial collaboration as well as the partnership with Greenpeace employed by Hazel Johnson and PCR demonstrate how they directly addressed these issues.

Hazel Johnson also did not let lack of a college education stand in her way. As with other women who were non-experts, Johnson educated herself by researching the history of the area and enlisted the aid of experts such as doctors, toxicologists and chemists because, as she acknowledged, 'I know I am not a professional so I wouldn't know what was going on anyway'.[58] Although she could not claim an education in chemistry or medicine, Hazel Johnson was an expert in her community and recognising patterns of ill-health. As we have seen, this self-education and experiential knowledge is a common theme in the narrative of women-led grassroots organisations and is used alongside maternal rhetoric to justify their activism.

---

[56] MS PCR Archives, 'Letters to the Editor, Fighting Against a Toxic Environment Newsletter' Spring 1993 in box 4, folder 5.
[57] MS PCR Archives, 'Letters to the Editor, F.A.T.E. Newsletter, 1993.
[58] MS PCR Archives, 'Living in Chicago's Toxic Doughnut' 1990 box 1, folder 2.

A Movement of Hysterical Housewives

It is necessary to situate PCR and Hazel Johnson in the wider context of other women-led grassroots organisations to explore the characterisation that they were a 'movement of housewives', a term they used to refer to themselves and which was used by external agencies to denote them as 'hysterical housewives'.[59] The public discourse of housewives and home makers was reminiscent of the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping that was one of the defining characteristics of white, middle-class clubwomen who were active between 1890 and 1915 and was also promoted by African American organisations including the National Association of Colored Women and the Chicago Urban League. The categorisation of 'housewife' was perceived in opposing ways by the members of grassroots organisations and their counterparts in the public agencies that they were addressing. Both of these groups strategically used a rhetoric based on women's social roles including as mothers, housewives and members of the community to advance their aims, whether that was women organisers challenging those in positions of power or the government agencies defending their own inaction. As Sara Hayden suggests, feminist scholars have called for an understanding that 'a variety of factors including race, class, and historical time frame affect the social roles a woman assumes as well as her relationship to an understanding of dominant feminine norms'.[60] This framework can be used to analyse how women including Hazel Johnson, Cora Tucker and Lois Gibbs viewed their activism and their roles as women and how they shared similar perceptions and criticisms of their work with other women-led organisations dating back to the 1890s. These perceptions were based on gender and the notion that these women were to be excluded from public activism because of their non-expert position and because

[59] Robin Lee Zeff, Marsha Love, and Karen Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves: Women and Toxics Organizing* (Arlington, VA.: Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, 1989), p.5.
[60] Sara Hayden, 'Negotiating femininity and power in the early twentieth century west: Domestic ideology and feminine style in Jeanette Rankin's suffrage rhetoric', *Communication Studies*, 50:2 (1999), 83-102 (p.84).

they were characterised as housewives. This was a characterisation shared by Progressive-Era white and African American women in the form of housekeepers and both terms imply the place that these women should occupy was the domestic sphere. Hazel Johnson and Cora Tucker subverted these expectations by placing their activism in the context of caring for their wider communities as well as using their experiences as mothers.

Hazel Johnson's concerns arose directly from experiencing the health issues that her community suffered from. As she later explained, the majority of the 62 members of PCR were women and this was significant because 'I think women care more than men about the community. As a mother you always want something better for your child'.[61] She was referencing women's roles as mothers as the difference between how men and women viewed issues in their community. This maternalistic rhetoric demonstrates how Johnson viewed her activism as part of her identity as a black woman and as a mother. The concept of community mothering was also prevalent in African American women's clubs in the Progressive Era as well as in the Chicago Urban League up to 1940. Johnson deliberately used her status as a mother in interviews with local and national media in order to underline the validity of her activism, which re-enforces the view that women's participation in activism, in the context of urban environmental problems, is not just a question of race versus class but rather that race, class and gender are intrinsically linked because of the experiences they faced.

The use of this feminine rhetoric is evident in other organisations led by women and this pattern of employing language concerning motherhood, family and the community has been articulated by environmental historians and communication studies scholars as a method of enforcing women's legitimacy in the public sphere of environmental justice. Nancy Unger argues that the domain of environmental activism was 'an arena in which their prescribed

[61] MS PCR Archives, 'Interview with Hazel Johnson by Virginia Mullery'.

gender role as altruistic caregivers was a credential rather than a handicap'.[62] She was referring to Progressive-Era female reformers, however this also pertains to women in organisations in the late 1970s and after. This is supported by communication studies scholars Jennifer Peeples and Kevin De Luca in their analysis of *Empowering Ourselves*, a publication from the Center for Health, Environment & Justice which includes transcripts from the 1987 Women in Toxic Organizing conference held in Arlington, Virginia. They assert that 'today community activists use what appears to be a liability, their gender-especially their roles as mothers and housewives-as potent rhetorical resources'.[63] This perception that the role of mother and community member authenticated participation in public activism was shared by other female leaders, including Cora Tucker.

Tucker was an African American activist in Halifax County, Virginia, leading Citizens for a Better America, founded in the late 1970s. It was multi-issue organisation like PCR was. She got involved in environmental issues in the early 1980s when she fought to stop a uranium mine and, later, a proposed high-level nuclear waste repository in Halifax County.[64] Tucker, like Johnson, used the rhetoric of motherhood in her public discourse as seen in her opening remarks at the 1987 Women in Toxic Organizing conference;

> 'I think women bring so much more to an organization because we go at it… from the point of view of how it affects our children. We've seen the effects on our children more than anybody else in the community'.[65]

This experiential position of mother and member of the community espoused by Cora Tucker is a rhetorical device that is prevalent throughout the narrative of environmental justice and serves to negate the external perception that these women did not have sufficient expertise to

---

[62] Nancy Unger, 'The Role of Gender in Environmental Justice', *Environmental Justice*, 1:3 (2008), 115-120 (p.6). < https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2008.0523> [accessed 15 December 2020]
[63] Jennifer A. Peeples & Kevin M. DeLuca, 'The Truth of the Matter: Motherhood, Community and Environmental Justice', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 29:1 (2006), 59-87 (p.61).
[64] Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, p.208.
[65] Cora Tucker gave the opening remarks at the conference which had 43 participants from organisations across the country. Zeff, Love, and Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves*, p.6.
.

make a case, a common criticism levelled at grassroots organisations. Women such as Hazel Johnson and Cora Tucker argued that their experiences and observations of the effects of environmental hazards on their families and communities were valid forms of evidence, perhaps more valid than education and academic learning because they were experienced first-hand, but they were consistently met with demands for empirical proof of their claims. Even when this proof was provided, in the form of historical evidence of hazardous waste disposal practices and current health surveys, it was often initially dismissed.

External agents including the companies accused of environmental degradation and city and state authorities subverted the roles of these women as mothers and community members to defend their practices and their lack of action to address them. Johnson regularly campaigned against Waste Management Inc., which was responsible for many of the landfills located around her community of Altgeld Gardens, but they viewed her claims, based on her experiences and observations, as invalid and accused her of relying on 'malicious gossip instead of scientific facts' to support her accusations. A spokeswoman for the company was quoted as saying 'I listen to Hazel talk at community meetings about babies who died from horrible birth defects… I say Hazel, where are your facts? Where is your proof? And she doesn't provide any. She just keeps telling the same old stories'.[66] This idea of spreading gossip and telling stories speaks to how these external parties used these supposed female traits in a negative manner as gossip and stories evokes images of women talking over a fence or round a kitchen table and gossip is typically defined as containing elements that are unsubstantiated or just untrue. By characterising Hazel Johnson in this way Waste Management was strategically denouncing her evidence based on her gender. This example is more covert than some of the other publicised comments made by business leaders and city officials, that related to evidence presented by women, but the explicit examples employ

[66] Getlin, 'Fighting Her Good Fight',

similar language with negative undertones. During a protest against landfills at the Sanitary District headquarters in 1987 which was led by PCR and Johnson, for example, Commissioner Thomas Fuller referred to Johnson as 'that big-mouth woman'.[67] This censure from a male political leader for speaking out in a public forum bears a striking resemblance to the comments made about gossip and telling stories and implies that when a woman spoke about matters in the public domain, she was not telling the truth or was being outspoken when she should not be. This demonstrates the constraints women activists in the latter decades of the twentieth century continued to encounter based on the misogynistic perceptions of those they were challenging in the public arena.

Lois Gibbs also encountered this when she presented evidence collected as part of a study examining abnormal pregnancies between January 1979 and February 1980 in Love Canal, with the state health authorities referring to it as 'useless housewife data' despite a cancer research scientist, Dr Beverly Paigen, being involved in the data collection.[68] This overt denunciation of women's concerns used their gendered role as housewives as a justification for refuting their claims. These organisations took women's claims that they had knowledge and understanding of the environmental problems through their positions as mothers, homemakers and workers, and used these claims against them. Similarly, Cora Tucker documented how the designation of her as a housewife was used in a derogatory fashion when she went to the Virginia General Assembly, the legislative body of the State of Virginia in the mid-1980s. She was there to highlight issues of toxic and nuclear waste, and a man (she did not clarify who he was) stood up and stated 'we have a whole room full of hysterical housewives today, so men, we need to get prepared'.[69] Portrayals of women as

[67] Bob Olmstead, 'San. Dist. pledges to probe pollution – Our Toxic Trap Reaction', *Chicago Sun-Times,* 12 June 1987, p. 3
[68] Lois Gibbs, 'Love Canal: The Start of a Movement', *Lesson from Love Canal: A Public Health Resource* (1997) < https://www.bu.edu/lovecanal/canal/> [accessed 12 January 2021]
[69] Zeff, Love, and Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves,* p.5.

hyper-emotional have long been used to suggest that they are unable to participate in public life and the use of the word 'hysterical' denotes a perception that women such as Cora Tucker, Lois Gibbs and Hazel Johnson were governed by extreme emotions rather than rational thinking supported by facts, as comments like this implied that men did.

Women such as Johnson, Gibbs and Tucker used precisely these attitudes to their advantage in a similar manner to the ways municipal housekeeping became an accepted form of activism for the women of the Chicago Woman's Club and settlement house workers Jane Addams and Mary McDowell in the Progressive Era. Tucker countered this negative designation by retorting 'You're exactly right. We're hysterical and when it comes to matters of life and death, I get hysterical. If men don't get hysterical, there's something wrong with them'.[70] Rather than deny their emotions, she specifically used it as a way to differentiate male and female characteristics, and she called out those men who saw this as a limitation, implying that they were the ones who were deficient in some way for not caring. She also recognised that her gender would be used against her in an effort to denounce her activism and that referring to her and her co-organisers as 'hysterical housewives' was a way for men to assert their dominance she 'learned that's a tactic men use to keep us in our place'.[71] Much like Hazel Johnson being an outspoken woman, women in similar positions, no matter their race or class, were consistently faced with pre-conceived notions of how they should behave, presumably in a quiet, deferential manner, because of their gender. They consistently pushed back against this, often subverting it in creative ways.

Even self-perceptions were complicated by these women's understanding of 'dominant female norms' although it did not stop them entering into public discourse. Cora Tucker refers to her mother's generation as informing her ideas of what roles a woman should undertake. In her opening address at the 1987 Women in Toxic Organizing conference

[70] Zeff, Love, and Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves*, p.5.
[71] Zeff, Love, and Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves*, p.5.

to forty three other women she stated 'most of your mommas would never have gotten up at a board meeting and say anything about toxic waste because they were trained that ladies didn't act that way, Ladies don't take on an issue'.[72] These comments reflect a persistence of the idea of appropriate activities for men and women, that was dominant in the Progressive Era, and demonstrates how female activists in the 1980s and 1990s had to negotiate entrenched beliefs about acceptable behaviour for women not just from outside parties. This view from within their own communities may have made it more difficult to garner support, but women leaders built networks with other organisations from across the country, as evidenced by this conference, and used their common experiences of the hostile reception they often received to offer strategies for action and validation to other women.

Conclusion

The connections between women in these different groups – whether this involved major initiatives such as holding conferences to bring together organisations campaigning on related issues or Hazel Johnson visiting Lois Gibbs in Love Canal – serves to underline that the environmental justice movement, particularly the female-led organisations that originated in localised communities, was a multiracial, inclusive coalition. This contends with historian Martin Melosi's claim that the limitations of the movement included an exclusive perspective and that it viewed race as the most important factor. Instead, women in these organisations built coalitions across gender, race and class divides to effect change. As Cora Tucker stated, gender was a central issue that transcended other divides:

> 'Everything is a woman's issue because every child that's born, some woman had it. But the way the people cut the issue sometimes does not allow us to become sisters in the fight for whatever it is we're fighting for'.[73]

[72] Zeff, Love, and Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves*, p.5.
[73] Zeff, Love, and Stults, eds., *Empowering Ourselves*, p.6.

In making such assertions, she was directly addressing critics who claimed the sole focus of Environmental Justice advocates was environmental racism in order to diminish the work and the power these groups had. This comment from Tucker also reveals that women's environmental activism in the latter decades of the twentieth century was still shaped by notions of gender because of the view that this was not a woman's issue. Therefore, it was neither appropriate nor acceptable for them to engage with these issues, which was a theme evident in the work of women-led organisations including the Chicago Women's Club from 1876 onwards, the National Association of Colored Women from 1896, and the Chicago Urban League from 1917. Individual women such as Jane Addams and Mary McDowel also experienced a lack of recognition and support for their activism because they were women. The evidence from the women directly involved as well as the public perception of their work, outlined in this chapter, clearly identifies the inherent links between race, gender and class, and how these factors shaped the aims of community organisations as well as larger networks of Environmental Justice organisations such as the Center for Health, Environment and Justice.

Hazel Johnson's unwillingness to 'watch her mouth' as her father used to caution her,[74] has left a lasting legacy in Altgeld Gardens where her daughter Cheryl Johnson now serves as Executive Director of PCR as well as on a national level where she is recognised as the 'Mother of the Environmental justice movement'. Before her death on 12th January 2011, Hazel Johnson was instrumental in bringing her community's struggles into the national consciousness. Her legacy included notable achievements for an individual who was often perceived in negative ways because of where she lived and her lack of formal education. She testified before Congress, lectured at universities, served on the EPA's first National Environmental Justice Advisory Council and was a witness when President Bill Clinton

[74] Getlin, 'Fighting Her Good Fight'.

signed the Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898 in 1994.[75] Hazel Johnson left a legacy of grassroots activism on the South Side of Chicago as well as internationally and her work is being continued today in the areas of environmental justice, affordable housing, and economic equity.

[75] Bullard, 'Environmental justice movement Loses Southside Chicago Icon Hazel Johnson'

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how women's organisations fought environmental inequalities in Chicago between 1890 and 1990 and how the themes of gender, race, and class intersected with their purpose and aims. There were numerous reform initiatives that were led by women, throughout the Progressive Era and beyond, but matters concerning the environment in an urban and industrial city were not viewed as a natural avenue for women to pursue. This was particularly the case because the pollution and public health impacts were mainly caused by the manufacturing processes of a male-dominated world. It was also viewed as not appropriate for women because of a perceived lack of technical expertise, as has been highlighted in each chapter. This study provided an in-depth exploration of how the purpose for their activism and the strategies they employed were shaped by their own internalised perceptions of gender, race, and class which affected how they perceived themselves as well as the communities they were engaged with. A further dimension for analysis was how these characteristics were used by external agents, including city officials, business leaders, and the press to support or contest their campaigns. This demonstrated that from the outset of their activism in 1876, and throughout the twentieth century, women were subjected to notions of gender that demanded they were passive, domestic, and submissive and there was a clear distinction between what was suitable and appropriate work for women. This thesis aimed to explore how African American women and white women, who were active in Chicago, subverted these gendered expectations through their identities as municipal housekeepers and how this ideology was much broader than just cleaning the city in the same manner as they would their homes.

An expanded study of the concept of municipal housekeeping was essential in order to demonstrate that these women were strategic in their rhetoric and actions as existing

literature does not devote significant attention to this fact. This was utilised by all of the women discussed in this thesis as a way to legitimise their activism to multiple audiences and was further used to create their own form of power as they were not formally trained in the area of environmental hazards such as pollution and the associated public health consequences. This made their achievements all the more remarkable. Beginning with the Chicago Woman's Club in 1876, efforts to combat the harmful effects of pollution and waste would be characterised by notions of gender and it was the unifying theme underpinning all women's activism. This thesis has highlighted how the women of the CWC, Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, Alva Maxey, and Hazel Johnson used their gender characteristics to their advantage and to further challenge and critique existing structures of power, including male-dominated municipal government and industry. It has expanded the discourse on women's involvement in environmental history to show how their gender identities were complex constructions based on internal and external factors that cannot be simplified to a single label. Women today are still characterised, by some sectors of society, by outdated and narrow definitions of femininity and so amplifying the challenges and achievements of women who disrupted these definitions is crucial.

The case studies selected for analysis involved African American and white women, not to exclude women from other ethnic groups, but to facilitate a richer comparison between their activities and to demonstrate that gender was a unifying theme across class and racial lines. This considered selection enabled links to be made between different groups and individuals to demonstrate how the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping was employed and developed by different organisations depending on their contextual circumstances. On a more practical level, the records available for the chosen studies were more extensive and detailed, which demonstrates that these women's organisations were operating within a well-defined

structure of specific committees. It further speaks to the value they placed on documenting their activities for subsequent leaders of their departments, as well as for publicity purposes.

Class and race were also evaluated as factors that either helped these women achieve their aims or impeded them in their efforts. For the women of the CWC and national organisations such as the National Association of Colored Women, social class was viewed as a mechanism by which they could impart their education and values to those who they viewed as being of a lower class than themselves and therefore less fortunate. They also viewed it as their moral obligation because of the privileged position they occupied in the social hierarchy. This was in direct contrast to Hazel Johnson, who lived in a public housing project. For her, her lower socio-economic status and lack of education was viewed by external parties in a negative, racialised manner. She had this in common with the immigrant and African American communities of Progressive-Era Chicago who were similarly viewed as outsiders with inappropriate behaviours and customs. For the African American communities of the Black Belt, their lives were defined by segregation and racial prejudice. The African American women's organisations who worked with these groups had to reconcile their own notions of race and racial uplift with prevailing racist stereotypes and there was an evident tension between helping those of a lower social class and projecting a positive image to white society. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, African American women of the NACW and Chicago Urban League made an important contribution to fighting environmental inequalities in an extremely difficult context and laid the foundations for future organisations to continue their work.

In order to establish the specific strategies that women's organisations employed to fight environmental inequalities it was essential to examine their records as this provided a detailed account of how these organisations were structured as well as what their purpose

was. Contained within these records was also an in-depth description of the activities they undertook which enabled their different methods to be examined. These methods included public outreach programmes, public relations campaigns, and carrying out thorough investigations into areas of environmental concern. The minutes and reports of the CWC, NACW, CUL, and PCR all revealed similar themes in in their campaigns including how they petitioned city officials and collaborated with external agencies such as other women's organisations and public health experts. The writings of Mary McDowell and Jane Addams likewise contained these strategies, which is evidence of how women of a different class and racial group, and from a broad time period, can be linked by how they recognised that they had to work with, and in opposition to, multiple audiences.

Complementing these original records were articles published in local and national newspapers and magazines, which also included those written by the women themselves. The news articles offered an interesting perspective of these women's activities, which varied from complimentary to offensive. Francis Hackett's decision to publish the description of settlement house workers and their activities as 'young ladies with weak eyes[…] and a womanly effort to pave the hell of poverty with the very prettiest of intentions' is a particularly negative view, as well as a denigration of the important role that women such as Addams and McDowell played in contesting environmental inequalities.[1] This thesis has clearly shown that a common charge levied against women who entered the public sphere of reform was that they were ill-equipped both in character, and in their purpose and aims. In order to counter these types of reviews, there was a concerted effort by all of the women discussed to collaborate with the press by providing their own articles, thus proving that they were intuitive and had a clear and effective way of bringing wider public attention to their work.

[1] Francis Hackett, 'The Permanent War: Review of Lillian Wald, *House on Henry Street*', *The New Republic*, 8 January 1916, p.255.

The comprehensive records of PCR have not been explored in sufficient depth in existing studies on environmental justice and this thesis has sought to rectify this. Hazel Johnson achieved remarkable successes for the community of Altgeld Gardens, despite considerable obstacles. The PCR documents contained evidence of collaboration with the international organisation Greenpeace, long before this became a common action, and they further revealed how Johnson and PCR, located in a low-income, African American public housing neighbourhood built a strong network with other environmental justice organisations across the United States. The inclusion of this case study demonstrated how an African American woman and the organisation she founded, shared similar obstacles to those who came one hundred years before her. It showed how the grassroots PCR built upon the methods of other community-based groups such as the block clubs and how these residents became a powerful force that had a significant, long-term impact, substantiated by the fact that they are still in existence today.

Each chapter in this thesis focussed on specific women-led clubs and organisations within a particular time period in a chronological order. This was an appropriate structure that allowed common themes to be established. Chapter one dealt with the early period of establishment from 1876 and profiled the CWC and Ladies Health Protective Association in New York. It was decided to compare these two clubs because they were operating long before it was accepted that women's clubs would play an integral role in reform activities and because they both engaged in fighting environmental inequalities in their respective cities. It was important to establish the structure of these city clubs to examine how they undertook their activities. It also facilitated an analysis of the concept of municipal housekeeping which could then be developed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter two examined the work of the NACW as a way of illustrating how race intersected with class and gender in the work of women's associations which was

fundamental in determining similar themes of how they were viewed by outside parties, and their own internalised perceptions of gender, race, and class. They were impacted by different circumstances than white women's clubs, namely segregation and racial prejudice so had to adapt their methodology and rhetoric accordingly. This chapter showed how these women actively engaged in improving conditions for African Americans whilst negotiating complex circumstances, and how their work was so important for the women of the CUL in the 1920s and 1940s.

Chapter three analysed the activism of Mary McDowell and Jane Addams as a means of showing the evolution of women-led organisations into those that explicitly challenged male political structures in the city through the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping, and in Addams's case by actively campaigning for a political position. Considering both these women were constrained by not being permitted to vote and were not professionally trained in sanitary systems or public health, they both achieved notable successes in ameliorating environmental hazards in their neighbourhoods. They made the conscious decision to live in some of the most degraded environments in Chicago and worked with their communities in a collaborative manner which is the epitome of modern environmental justice groups.

Chapter four documented the work of the women-led departments of the African American CUL and their crucial involvement in the formal organisation of block clubs. This chapter established the transition from the Progressive-Era to the latter decades of the twentieth century and focussed on key activities in the 1920s and 1940s. What it highlighted, was that the Community Organisation Department, led by Alva Maxey, facilitated a move towards residents of affected communities being empowered to fight for issues that directly affected them. The analysis of how block clubs worked further showed how these people worked together to solve these issues and inspired a movement across the whole of Chicago.

The last case study examined in chapter five was that of Hazel Johnson and PCR from 1980 onwards. This section confirmed that women were still subjected to stereotypes associated with gender and lack of technical expertise, and that Johnson employed similar methods to the women who had come before her. It extended the discourse on environmental justice by detailing PCRs activities and strategies, illustrating collaboration with multi-racial organisations that contested notions that environmental justice groups are limited by a sense of exclusivity. It was important to include this case study to demonstrate how African American women of a lower socio-economic position than those of the NACW and CUL still achieved success by utilising similar methods to these organisations. It showed how the history of housing, industrial practices, and environmental inequalities in Chicago led to the circumstances that Hazel Johnson had to fight against and why this made her achievements all the more notable because she was operating in a situation that had been worsened over the course of more than one hundred years.

This thesis ends in the 1990s, yet since this time several key advancements have been made that underscore how important the contributions of different women were in fighting environmental inequality. This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the Warren County protests against PCB dumps in their backyard in 1982, which served as a catalyst for the modern environmental justice movement to gain nation-wide momentum. It is also thirty years since the first piece of significant environmental justice legislation was proposed. Bill S.2806, sponsored by Senator Al Gore, was introduced in March 1992. This bill intended to establish a list of the one hundred most polluted areas in the United States. These areas would be eligible for grants to obtain technical assistance relating to inspections, reviews, and studies. The bill would also require the Secretary of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct a report identifying the extent of severe and persistent impacts on public health in these areas compared to other counties. For the first time, the Federal Government

was acknowledging the tireless work of environmental justice groups and committing to proving financial support. Although this bill was not passed by Congress, it did lead to further amendments being made and was eventually issued in 1994, by President Clinton, as Executive Order 12898.[2] Hazel Johnson played an instrumental role in both her community's fight against environmental inequality and in the issuing of Executive Order 12898 by the administration of President Bill Clinton in 1994, so much so, that she was invited to the signing. The particulars of this order mandated that federal agencies, including the EPA;

> Identify and address the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations, develop a strategy for implementing environmental justice, and promote nondiscrimination in federal programs that affect human health and the environment, as well as provide minority and low-income communities access to public information and public participation.[3]

This significant acknowledgement that race and class status determines exposure to environmental hazards demonstrates how the work of the women explored in this thesis was so important, and also ground-breaking because in each instance these women were the first to take substantial action to address environmental inequality in their respective neighbourhood in Chicago.

The women documented in this thesis further exemplified how experiential knowledge could be used as a valid form of expertise and this has continued to be essential in environmental justice groups into the twenty-first century. This form of community-based knowledge is now recognised as integral by the Federal Government and the EPA as evidenced in the publication of the Equity Action Plan in March 2022. Two of the six priority

---

[2] United States Congress, 'S.2806 - Environmental Justice Act of 1992', 102nd Congress (1991-1992) < https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/senate-bill/2806?r=15> [Accessed 9th April 2022]

[3] United States Environmental Protection Agency, 'Summary of Executive Order 12898 - Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations', 59 FR 7629; February 16, 1994. < https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-executive-order-12898-federal-actions-address-environmental-justice> [Accessed 5th April 2022]

areas in this Plan discuss how the EPA will incorporate community research and science into its research and programme implementation, and how it will develop the capacity for underserved communities to provide their experiences to the EPA.[4] This acknowledgement vindicates the assertion of Johnson, McDowell, Addams, and members of block clubs that they were the best-suited to offer evidence and solutions to environmental degradation because they were experiencing it first-hand. This high-level recognition of community-based knowledge and experience is vital because polluting industries are still using the non-expert claim to dismiss the findings of grassroots groups.

This tactic by major polluting companies can be seen in the case study of Cancer Alley, named by local residents and environmental advocates and located along an 85-mile-long area between Baton Rouge and New Orleans in Louisiana. This highly polluted industrial corridor is also home to the Concerned Citizens of St. John, an organisation formed in response to the assessment of the EPA that residents of the parish were at higher risks of cancer than anywhere else in the country due to air pollution 800 times the national average.[5] The EPA has recently instigated investigations to assess whether permits granted by the Louisiana state environment department to companies such as Denka, which manufactures neoprene and emits the likely human carcinogen chloroprene, violate African American civil rights. The important detail of this case in relation to this thesis and the pronouncement from the EPA on community research findings is that a Denka spokesman was reported as stating that 'environmental activist groups manipulate data and collect and analyse it in non-scientific ways'.[6] This example highlights how the perception of expertise, in some instances,

[4] EPA, 'Equity Action Plan', 28 March, 2022 available at < https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/equity-action-plan> [accessed 10th April, 2022]
[5] Concerned Citizens of St. John, 'Our Mission and Our Work in Action'. Available at <https://www.ccosj.com> [accessed 12th April 2022]
[6] Spokesman for Denka, Jim Harris quoted in *The Guardian*, Oliver Laughland, 'EPA opens civil rights investigations over pollution in Cancer Alley', 14th April 2022. Available at < https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/14/cancer-alley-louisiana-civil-rights-investigations-epa-pollution> [accessed 14th April 2022]

has not evolved from Progressive Era attitudes particularly from the position of those who are causing the pollution in the first place. The methods employed by Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, and Hazel Johnson are just individual examples, part of a larger narrative, that set a precedent for practical knowledge and experience to be valued and recognised.

The continuing discourse on environmental justice will also be shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and already research has emerged showing the disproportionate impact of the virus on communities that experience environmental inequality. Harriet Washington, ethicist and author of several texts on environmental racism, explicitly links environmental racism and higher rates of illness and death from COVID-19. As well as academic studies, grassroots environmental justice organisations are making links in their communities between environmental racism and increased risk factors from the virus. PCR, now led by Cheryl Johnson (Hazel's daughter) has mobilised to address their community's health concerns and instigated health education programmes and provided personal protective equipment.[7] Future research needs to focus on these community stories as well as health data to give a broader picture of how class and race intersect with the disproportionate effects of the pandemic.

As well as the stories of Progressive Era female reformers, the contributions of the people they were helping are a rich source of information from the immigrant perspective. Shana Bernstein highlights this in her work on how immigrant communities participated in public health activism and how this crossed class and ethnic lines.[8] Her work serves as an excellent starting point for further research into how immigrant communities fought environmental inequality. An examination of the papers of Polish immigrant and activist

[7] Cheryl Johnson, 'Health, Recovery, and Mutual Aid', 2022. Available at < https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/our-work/priority-programs#current-programs> [accessed 16th April 2022]

[8] Shana Bernstein, 'Health Activism from the Bottom Up: Progressive Era Immigrant Chicagoans' Views on Germ Theory, Environmental Health, and Class Inequality', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 17:2, (2018), 317-344 < https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781417000858>

Hilda Satt Polacheck, which are housed at the University of Illinois at Chicago, would enhance this analysis as she was active in campaigns for civil rights and woman's suffrage. Her book *I Came a Stranger* would be a valuable source for not only her activities, but also to explore how immigrant women's experiences were shaped by their gender, ethnicity and class.[9]

Continuing the Legacy

Chicago continues to be home to several of the organisations discussed in this thesis including the CWC, the Chicago Urban League and PCR. Part of the original structure of Hull House is now the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum and is designated as national historic landmark. The CUL is continuing the work started in 1917 with the mission to achieve equity for Black families and communities through social and economic empowerment,[10] demonstrating the resilience of this organisation as well as the importance of contributions from women such as Maude Lawrence and Alva Maxey. The block clubs have endured and are now in a partnership with the Chicago Police Department's Community Policing Group. This partnership acts as a deterrent to gang activity and promotes the sharing of information, identifying concerns and taking collective action to address them.[11] Block clubs are located throughout the city and continue to be led by residents making improvements to their immediate environments. This would not have been possible without the work of the African American women of the CUL and their actions to formally organise block clubs. Their collaboration empowered individual groups to effect change and improve their environments.

---

[9] Hilda Satt Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger*: *The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, ed. by Dena J. Polacheck Epstein, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991)

[10] Chicago Urban League, 'Our Mission'. Available at <https://chiul.org> [accessed 16th April 2022]

[11] About Block Clubs', *Chicago Police Department*, <https://home.chicagopolice.org/community-policing-group/block-clubs/about-block-clubs/> [accessed 20 February 2022]

The CWC was re-established in 2021, inspired by its predecessor that formed in 1876. Their mission statement articulates similar goals to that of the original, in that they seek to drive progressive reform for women in Chicago and by extension, their communities to achieve equity in work, family, and quality of life. They have a number of clubs that have direct links to the committees of the CWC in 1876. These include clubs to reform institutions that they view as instruments of oppression such as prisons, schools, and immigration, and a club to increase access to resources, structures and facilities which includes childcare, transportation, education and health, regardless of income or location.[12] Although this is a fairly recent organisation, it is interesting that this iteration is focussing on similar efforts to the Progressive Era club in that it seeks to promote women's contributions to everyday life in the city. It will be interesting to see how this club develops and what strategies they employ to achieve their mission.

PCR continues to work for the residents of Altgeld Gardens, led by Cheryl Johnson. They still offer 'toxic tours', in person and virtually, as a means of offering education on environmental justice and highlighting the issues that affect this community. They are also part of the Chicago Environmental Justice Network (CEJN) which is a coalition of multi-racial grassroots organisations that support each other through campaigns, protests, sharing strategies and developing city policy.[13] Cheryl Johnson has continued her mother's work and was involved in drafting the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act that was signed into state law in September 2021. This legislation prioritises jobs in sustainable energy such as solar and wind for people of colour and the phasing out of coal and natural gas extraction in what she describes as EJ (environmental justice) communities.[14] This significant legislation

[12] The Chicago Woman's Club, 'About the CWC'. Available at <https://www.chicagowomans.club/aboutcwc> [accessed 16th April 2022]
[13] Chicago Environmental Justice Network, 'About Us'. Available at <https://www.chicagoejn.org/about> [accessed 16th April 2022]
[14] PCR, 'Past Programs + Impact', 2022. Available at < https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/our-work/priority-programs#past-programs> [accessed 16th April 2002]

demonstrates how environmental justice organisations have evolved into actively combatting climate change as well as their influence in creating new policies. Hazel Johnson lived in a low-income public housing project, had no technical expertise, and faced numerous obstacles because of her gender, race, and class, but despite these barriers, she initiated a powerful organisation that has achieved many successes and PCR still uses her strategies to this day.

There is a visible legacy in Chicago of the pioneering women detailed in this thesis. Their work continues in various organisations pursuing social, economic, and environmental justice and these contemporary groups would not exist in the form they do, without the work of the CWC, Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, and Hazel Johnson. These women should be recognised for how they challenged what was appropriate work for a woman and subverted notions of a domestic sphere, becoming much more than municipal housekeepers.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archival Records

Chicago, Chicago Historical Society, MS Chicago Woman's Club Records.

Chicago, Chicago Historical Society, MS Mary McDowell Settlement records.

Chicago, Chicago Historical Society, MS Woman's City Club of Chicago Records.

Chicago, Chicago Public Library, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature MS People for Community Recovery Archives.

Chicago Urban League Records, Adam Matthew Marlborough, African American Communities <http://0www.aac.amdigitial.co.uk.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/Documents/Details/UIC_CULR_02_0221_2182> [accessed 29 July 2020].

New York, New York Historical Society, Ladie's Health Protective Association club records.

Washington, Library of Congress, MS Mary Church Terrell papers.

Newspapers and Magazines

Addams, Jane, 'Municipal Housekeeping', *Indianapolis Home Magazine*, 22 July 1906.

'Fight Dump to Save Babies', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 October 1909.

Bullard, Robert, 'Environmental Justice Movement Loses Southside Chicago Icon Hazel Johnson', *OpEdNews.com*, 14 January 2011.

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/Environmental-Justice-Move-by-Robert-Bullard-110114-323.html> [accessed 14 April 2020]

Getlin, Josh, 'Fighting Her Good Fight: Hazel Johnson battles those who want to turn her Chicago housing project into a toxic dump', *Los Angeles Times,* 18 February 1993, section E2.

Hackett, Francis, 'The Permanent War: Review of Lillian Wald. House on Henry Street', *The New Republic,* 8 January 1916.

Hall, George C., 'The Health or the Sanitary Condition of the Negro in Chicago', *Broad Ax,* 31 December 1904.

'The Larger Opportunity', *The Outlook,* 12 August 1893.

Laughland, Oliver, 'EPA opens civil rights investigations over pollution in Cancer Alley', *Guardian,* 14 April 2022. < https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/14/cancer-alley-louisiana-civil-rights-investigations-epa-pollution> [accessed 14 April 2022].

Nelson, Deborah, 'Dump site an eye-opener for legislators – Our Toxic Trap Reaction' *Chicago Sun-Times*, 11 September 1987.
Nelson, Deborah, 'Waste Pits Poisoning Air, Water – Far South Side: Our Toxic Trap' *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1 June 1987.

Nelson, Deborah, 'Panel to probe toxic dumps on South Side – Our Toxic Trap Reaction' *Chicago Sun-Times*, 9 August 1989.

New-York Tribune articles, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers Library of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1900-02-16/ed-1/seq-7/>

Nicholes, Anna E., 'How Women Can Help in the Administration of a City', *The Women Citizen's Library,* 1913.

Olmstead, Bob, ‘San. Dist. pledges to probe pollution – Our Toxic Trap Reaction’ *Chicago Sun-Times*, 12 June 1987.

Sandburg, Carl, ‘Chicago’, Poetry Magazine of Verse, ed. Harriet Monroe (Chicago 1914) <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/issue/70335/march-1914> [accessed 14 January 2019]

Silone-Yates, Josephine, ‘The National Association of Colored Women’ *The Voice of the Negro*, Vol 1 (1904)

St. Pierre Ruffin, Josephine and Florida R. Ridley Eds. ‘A Charge to be Refuted’ *The Woman’s Era*, Vol II. No. 3., Emory Women Writers Resource Project, <http://womenwriters.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/advocacy/content.php?level=div&id=era2_03.14&document=era2> [accessed 10 November 2017]

St. Pierre Ruffin, Josephine and Florida R. Ridley eds. ‘Address of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin’, *The Woman’s Era*, Vol II. No. 5, Emory Women Writers Resource Project, <http://womenwriters.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/advocacy/content.php?level=div&id=era2_03.14&document=era2> [accessed 10 November 2017]

Strausberg, Chinita, ‘Altgeld residents seek meeting with mayor on asbestos’. *Chicago Defender*, 5 June 1986.

Williams, Fannie Barrier, ‘The Club Movement Among Colored Women’ *The Voice of the Negro*, Vol 1 (1904), < https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100334974> [accessed 20 September 2017]

Other Primary Sources

Addams, Jane ‘Problems of Municipal Administration’, *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 10, No. 4 (1905), 425-465.

Bushnell, Charles J., ‘Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter I. Industry at the Chicago Stock Yards’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 7:2 (1901), 145-170.

Bushnell, Charles J., ‘Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter II. The Stock Yard Community at Chicago’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 7:3 (1901) 289-330.

Bushnell, Charles J., ‘Some Social Aspects of the Chicago Stock Yards. Chapter III. The Relation of the Chicago Stock Yards to the Local Community’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 7:4 (1902), 433-474.

Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922)

Civics Committee of the Chicago Woman’s Club, *Tenement Housing Conditions in Twentieth Ward Chicago*, (1912)

Colten, Craig E., ‘Industrial Wastes in the Calumet Area 1869-1970: An Historical Geography’, Hazardous Waste Research and Information Center, Illinois Dept. of Energy and Natural Resources, 1985

Frank, Henriette Greenebaum and Amalie Hofer Jerome, *Annals of the Chicago Woman’s Club for the First Forty Years of Its Organisation:1876-1916* (Chicago Woman’s Club Chicago, 1916)

Hunter, Robert *Tenement Conditions in Chicago: Report by the Investigating Committee of the Chicago Homes Associatio*n, (Chicago, 1901)

Jamieson, Egbert and Francis Adams, *Municipal code of Chicago: comprising the laws of Illinois relating to the city of Chicago and the ordinances of the City council*, (Chicago: Beach, Barnard & co. printers, 1881)

Maxey, Alva B., ‘The Block Club Movement in Chicago’, The Phylon Quarterly, Vol. 18 No 2 (1957), 124- 131.

Neighborhood Center Committee of the Chicago Woman's Club, *Neighborhood Improvement in and about Chicago*, (Chicago: Chicago Women's Club,1909)

Scribner, Mrs John H., 'The Relationship Between Woman's Health Protective Associations and the Public Health', (Concord: The Rumford Press, 1897)

United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*, (1987)

Secondary Sources

Addams, Jane, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1902)

Addams, Jane, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911)

Bernstein, Shana, 'Health Activism from the Bottom Up: Progressive Era Immigrant Chicagoans' Views on Germ Theory, Environmental Health and Class Inequality' *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*,17:2 (2018), 317-344 < https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781417000858>

Blum, Elizabeth D., *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism*, (Lawrence, Kans.:University Press of Kansas, 2008)

Bowly Jr., Devereux, *The Poorhouse: Subsidized Housing in Chicago*,2nd edn (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012)

Brogan, Hugh, *The Penguin History of the USA* (London: Penguin Books, 2001)

Bryant, Bunyan, ed., *Environmental Justice: Issues, Policies, and Solutions and Solutions* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1995)

Bullard, Robert D, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, 3rd edn (Westview Press: Colorado, 2000)
Carle, Susan D., *Defining the Struggle: National Racial Justice Organizing, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Cash, Floris Barnett, *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press 2001)

Cayton, Horace R. and St. Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946)

Chafe, William H. 'Women's History and Political History: Some Thoughts on Progressivism and the New Deal', in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. by Nancy M. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 101-118.

Cole, Luke W. and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001)

Cronon, William, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991)

Davis, Allen F., *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967)

Davis, Angela, *Women Race and Class* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1981)

Davis, Elizabeth Lindsey, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs: 1900-1922* (Chicago, 1922)

Downey, Liam 'Assessing Environmental Inequality: How the Conclusions We Draw Vary According to the Definitions We Employ', *National Institute of Health Social Spectr* 25.3 (2011)

Dye, Nancy S. 'Introduction', in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* Noralee Frankel & Nancy S. Dye eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), pp. pp. 1-10.

Evans, Sara M. 'Women's History and Political Theory: Toward a Feminist Approach to Public Life', in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. by Nancy M. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 119-39.

Flanagan, Maureen, *Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City 1871-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002)

Flanagan, Maureen, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivism 1890s-1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Fisher, Colin, *Urban Green: Nature, Recreation, and the Working Class in Industrial Chicago*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015)

Foner, Philip S. and Ronald L. Lewis 'The Migration and Northern Race Riots', in *The Black Worker from 1900 to 1919,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), pp.283-366.

Fowler, Bertram B., *Men, Meat, and Miracles* (New York: Julian Messner Inc., 1952)

Gaines, Kevin, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012)

Gaines, Kevin K., 'Racial Uplift Ideology in the Era of the 'Negro Problem' *Freedom's Story Essays National Humanities Center*
< http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/racialuplift.htm> [accessed 14 April 2022]

Gibbs, Lois, *Love Canal: The Start of a Movement' Lesson from Love Canal: A Public Health Resource* (1997)

Gottlieb, *Robert, Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993)

Gottlieb, Robert, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, rev.edn. (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2005)

Grossman, James R., *Land of Hope: Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989)

Harley, Sharon, 'Mary Church Terrell: Genteel Militant', in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. By Leon Litwack and August Meier (Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1991), pp.330-342.

Hayden, Sara, 'Negotiating femininity and power in the early twentieth century west: Domestic ideology and feminine style in Jeanette Rankin's suffrage rhetoric' *Communication Studies*, 50:2 (1999), pp. 83-102.

Hendricks, Wanda, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race* (Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 2013)

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1994)

Hirsch, Arnold R., *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1998)

Hoy, Suellen, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Hurst, Charles E., *Social Inequality: Forms, Causes, and Consequences*, 6th edn. (Boston: Allyn and Beacon, 2007)

Jablonsky, Thomas J., *Pride in the Jungle: Community and Everyday Life in Back of the Yards, Chicago* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993)

Josephson, Matthew, *The Robber Barons* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1934)

Knupfer, Anne Meis, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York: New York University Press, 1996)

Lerner, Gerda, 'Early Community Work of Black Club Women', *The Journal of Negro History*, 59:2 (1974) pp.163-164.
Lerner, Gerda, ed., *Black Women in White America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972)

Leslie, LaVonne ed., *The History of the National Association of Women's Clubs Inc.: A Legacy of Service* (Xlibris, 2012)

Logan, Rayford W., *The Betrayal of the Negro: from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier Books, 1954)

Maas, Steve, 'Searching for the Origins of Redlining of Black Neighborhoods', *National Bureau of Economic Research, The Digest,* (2021) <https://www.nber.org/digest-202102/searching-origins-redlining-black-neighborhoods> [accessed 18 April 2022]

Mary Jo Deegan, 'Fannie Barrier Williams and Her Life as a New Woman of Colour in Chicago 1893-1918', in *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams 1893-1918,* ed. by Mary Jo Deegan (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press 2002), pp. xiii-lx.

Melosi, Martin V., 'Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History', *Environmental History Review,* 19:3 (1995), pp. 1-16.

Melosi, Martin V., *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005)

Mumford, Lewis, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938)

Oakley, Ann, *Women, Peace, and Welfare: A Suppressed History of Social Reform, 1880-1920* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018)
Pacyga Dominic A., *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009)

Peeples, Jennifer A. & Kevin M. DeLuca, 'The Truth of the Matter: Motherhood Community and Environmental Justice', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 29:1 (2006), 59-87.

Pellow, David, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004)

Philpott, Thomas L., The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants Blacks and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930 (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991)

Platt, Harold L., 'Jane Addams and the Ward Boss Revisited: Class, Politics, and Public Health in Chicago 1890-1930', *Environmental History*, Vol.5 No.2 (2000), 194-222.

Polacheck, Hilda Satt, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, ed. by Dena J. Polacheck Epstein, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991)

Polikoff, Alexander, *Waiting for Gautreaux: A Story of Segregation, Housing, and the Black Ghetto* (Northwestern University Press: Illinois, 2006)

Rosenberg, Rosalind, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982)

Schulte, Terrianne K., 'Citizen Experts: The League of Women Voters and Environmental Conservation', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 30 (2009), 1-29.

Seidel, Richard, 'Introduction', in *The Selected Papers of Jane Addams: Vol. 3: Creating Hull-House and an International Presence, 1889-1900*, ed. by Mary Lynn McCree Bryan

Maree De Angury and Ellen Skerrett (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2019), pp. 3-13.

Sicherman, Barbara, 'Working it Out: Gender, Profession, and Reform in the Career of Alice Hamilton', in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. by Noralee Frankel & Nancy S. Dye, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), pp. 127- 147.

Strickland, Arvarh E., *History of the Chicago Urban League* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966)

Taylor, Dorceta E., *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York: New York University Press, 2014)

Taylor, Graham, 'Mary E. McDowell-Citizen' *in Mary McDowell and Municipal Housekeeping: A Symposium,* ed. by Victor Yarros, Mrs. George C. Sikes, and Mrs. W.W. Ramsey (Chicago: Millar Publishing Company, 1937)

Tims, Margaret, *Jane Addams of Hull House 1860-1935: A Centenary Study* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1961)

Tolman, W.H, *Municipal Reform Movements in the United States* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895)

Unger, Nancy C., *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)

Unger, Nancy C., 'The Role of Gender in Environmental Justice', *Environmental Justice*, 1:3 (2008), 115-120. < https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2008.0523> [accessed 15 December 2020]

Wade, Louise Carroll, 'Mary McDowell', *in Women Building Chicago 1790-1990: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. by Rima Lunin Schultz and Adele Hast (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. pp. 563-565.

Wade, Louise Carroll, *Chicago's Pride: The Stockyards, Packingtown and Environs in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003)

Wade, Richard 'Foreword', in Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967)

Washington, Sylvia Hood, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2017)

Weber, Max, 'Class, Status, Party', in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946)

Welter, Barbara, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860', *American Quarterly*, 18:2 (1966), pp.151-174.

Williams, Fannie Barrier, 'A Northern Negro's Autobiography', in *The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams 1893-1918*, ed. by Mary Jo Deegan (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002)

Williams, Fannie Barrier, 'The Frederick Douglass Centre: A Question of Social Betterment and Not of Social Equality', in *The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams 1893-1918*, ed. by Mary Jo Deegan (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002)

Wright, Richard, 'Introduction', in *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, by Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946) xix.

Zeff, Robin Lee, Marsha Love, and Karen Stults eds., *Empowering Ourselves: Women and Toxics Organizing* (Arlington VA.: Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes 1989)

Online Sources

Black Metropolis Research Consortium, *Alva B. Maxey Biographical Note* <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/bmrc/view.php?eadid=BMRC.HARSH.MAXEYBOYD#idp147880616> [accessed 10 January 2021]

Cheryl Johnson, *Health Recovery and Mutual Aid* (2022), <https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/our-work/priority-programs#current-programs> [accessed 14 April 2022]

Chicago Environmental Justice Network, *About Us* (2021), <https://www.chicagoejn.org/about> [accessed 16 April 2022]

Chicago Housing Authority, *Resident Councils* (2019), <https://thecha.org/residents/services/resident-council-leadership> [accessed 30 April 2021]

Chicago Police Department, *About Block Clubs* (2020), <https://home.chicagopolice.org/community-policing-group/block-clubs/about-block-clubs/> [accessed 20 February 2022]

Chicago Public Library, *Biographical Note: Hazel M. Johnson* (2011), <https://www.chipublib.org/fa-people-for-community-recovery-archives/> [accessed 30 April 2020]

Chicago Urban League Our *Mission* (2020) <https://chiul.org> [accessed 16th April 2022]

The Chicago Woman's Club, *About the CWC* (2021), <https://www.chicagowomans.club/aboutcwc> [accessed 16 April 2022]

Concerned Citizens of St. John, *Our Mission and Our Work in Action* (2018), <https://www.ccosj.com> [accessed 12 April 2022]

Department of Commerce, U.S Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of The United States 1920: State Compendium Illinois from 1840-1920,* <https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/06229686v8-13ch5.pdf> [accessed 10 January 2022] (p.8)

People for Community Recovery, 'Past Programs + Impact' (2022),

< https://www.peopleforcommunityrecovery.org/our-work/priority-programs#past-programs> [accessed 16 April 2002]

United States Congress, *S.2806 - Environmental Justice Act of 1992*, 102nd Congress (1991-1992), < https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/senate-bill/2806?r=15> [accessed 9 April 2022]

United States Environmental Protection Agency, *Environmental Justice* (2019), <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice> [accessed 13 March 2022]
United States Environmental Protection Agency, *Equity Action Plan* (2022), <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/equity-action-plan> [accessed 10th April 2022]

United States Environmental Protection Agency, *Summary of Executive Order 12898 - Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populatio*ns, (1994), < https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-executive-order-12898-federal-actions-address-environmental-justice> [accessed 5th April 2022]