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Florence Kelly, Slums of the Great Cities Survey Maps, 1893. *CSISS Classics*

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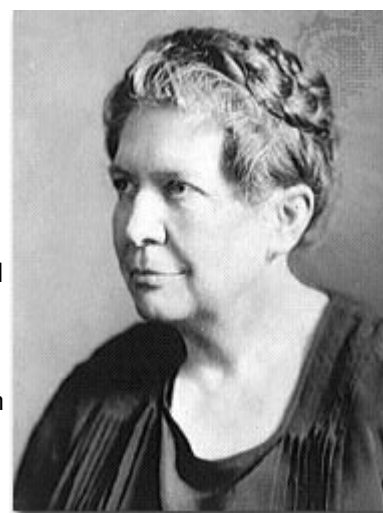


## Florence Kelley: Slums of the Great Cities Survey Maps, 1893 By Nina Brown

### *Background*

Kelley, Florence (1859–1932)

Florence Kelley, the daughter of Congressman William D. Kelley, was one of the most dedicated social activists of the Progressive Era. A graduate of Cornell University and Northwestern University Law School, Florence Kelley was drawn into social activism after studying for a short period at the University of Zurich. In Europe she read the work of Karl Marx (1818–1881) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) and became an ardent socialist. She later translated into English Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in London* (1887) and corresponded with Engels for the remainder of his life. When Kelley returned to the United States she married a socialist labor leader, but the marriage was short lived.



Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

In 1891 Kelley divorced and moved to Chicago, where she became a resident of Hull House, the activist organization led by Jane Addams. In a community filled with impoverished families, many of them recent immigrants from Italy, Poland, Russia, Ireland and the American south, Hull House provided essential education, employment, health and child care services. Hull House was also a base for radical political activities including union organizing, antiwar protests and woman's suffrage. Although she was involved in many of the activities of Hull House, Kelley is best known for her tireless efforts to improve industrial working conditions and to eradicate child labor.

### *Innovation*

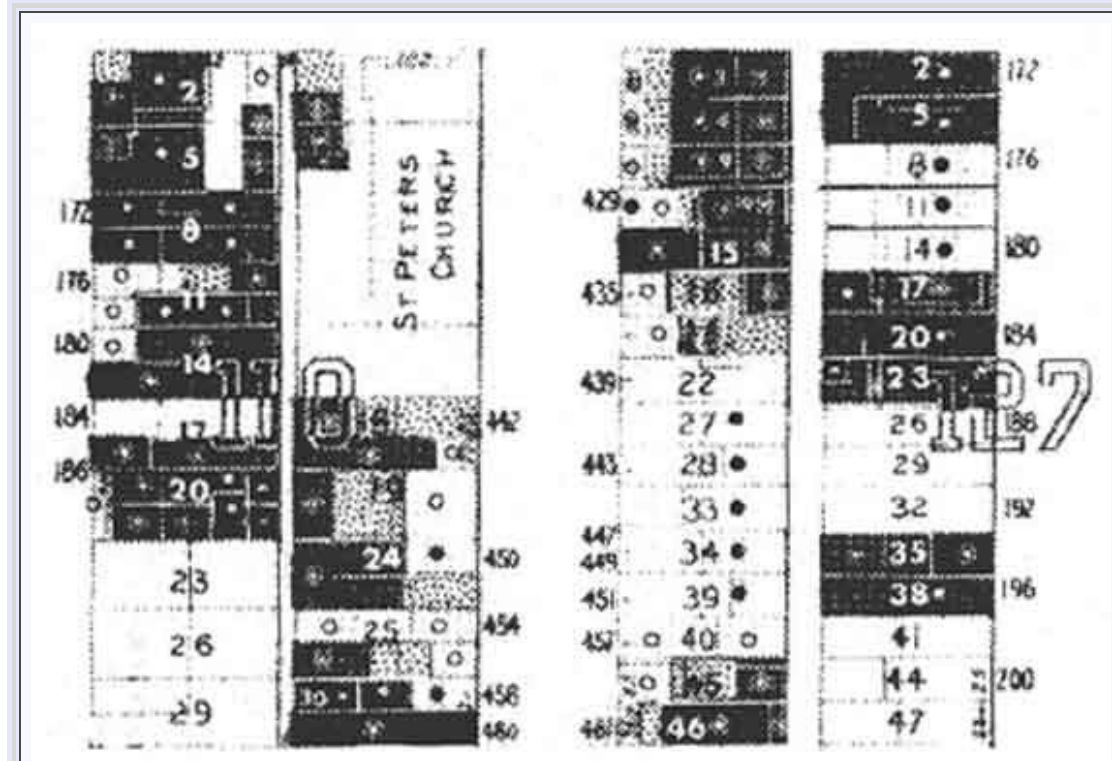
Hull House was a natural launching point for investigations into Chicago's social

problems and many such projects were carried out by the residents between 1892 and 1920. These social survey studies, which typically consisted of door-to-door canvassing of residents and the administration of extensive interview schedules, represented some of the earliest projects in American sociology. The data collected from these efforts were published in numerous reports designed to inform government leaders about the plight of the poor. Kelley, Jane Addams and the other Hull House activists were convinced that once the overwhelming suffering of the poor was publicized, meaningful reforms would be quickly put into place. Although this optimistic assumption turned out to be inaccurate, the residents of Hull House quickly established a reputation as dedicated investigators who were not afraid to venture into some of Chicago's worst neighborhoods. In 1893 the U.S. Congress commissioned a nationwide survey, *A Special Investigation of the Slums of Great Cities*, to assess the extent of poverty in urban areas. Florence Kelley was selected to lead the survey effort in Chicago.

Kelley and the other residents of Hull House saw an opportunity to extend this project, creating for Chicago a series of maps similar to Charles Booth's (1840–1916) maps of poverty in London. They believed these maps would provide the most graphic evidence of the social problems they were trying to eliminate. During the spring and summer of 1893 they administered an extensive survey to every house, tenement and room in the district surrounding Hull House. The completed survey forms were returned to the Commissioner of Labor in Washington D.C., but Hull House residents retained a copy of this information. Later, Kelley and other workers at Hull House transferred the records onto outline maps of Chicago streets, recording the nationality, wages, and employment history of each resident. The resulting maps show each street in the district and each house is colored to reflect the birthplace of the head of the household and the family's wages [see illustration]. In instances where multiple families with different nationalities or wages occupied the same housing unit, the group created cartograms, allocating space on the map in proportion to the number of individuals in each nationality or wage group.

The completed maps were published in 1895 as *Hull-House Maps and Papers*. They provided much greater detail about the demographics of Chicago than the official U.S. government report on the survey. Significantly, the Hull House book offered no explanation for the causes of poverty and social disorder, but sought only to record statistics in as much detail as possible in order to prompt a humanitarian response from the government. In the 1920s this kind of social survey approach to sociology was eclipsed by more theoretically sophisticated techniques that sought to identify the causes as well as the effects of social problems. However, the Chicago maps produced at Hull House represent an important early effort to supplement social research with maps showing the spatial patterns of demographic phenomena. In addition, the Hull House maps

presented a model for social activists in the use of maps as persuasive tools. Today, many activist organizations, including the National Center for Child Poverty and Greenpeace International, make extensive use of maps to present their causes graphically and to convince others to take action.



A section of the Hull House Wage Map of Chicago.

The original maps were published in color and the map key appears below.



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*Hull-House Maps and Papers.* By the residents of Hull-House. New York: Arno Press, 1970 [c1895].

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*Related Works*

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Philpott, Thomas Lee. *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880–1930*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1991.

Sklar, Kathryn Kish. *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830–1900*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

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