Mothering a City: The Work of the Chicago Woman’s Club in Opening Spaces for Women and Protecting the Children of America’s Second City

Abstract

The Chicago Woman's Club served as a middle- and upper-class woman's club in northern Chicago that sought to bring the middle-class values of the home and motherhood to the streets of Chicago. They aimed to aid in the increase of educational opportunities for uneducated women and delinquent and dependent children who flooded the city. The Chicago Woman's Club used the powerful notions of motherhood to merge their middle-class private sphere with the public sphere of their male counterparts in attempting to change the social structure of the city at the turn of the nineteenth-century. Their strong belief in a solid educational foundation furthered the social reform measures taken by the club as they entered schools, jails, and hospitals in order to solidify the importance of motherly figures and a deeper connection between individuals of the female sex. This research aims to enhance the current conversations surrounding "mainstream" organizations and movements that have aided in advances towards gender equality and the enlightenment surrounding courageous and motivated women who stood behind the ardent and radical leaders that have taken over the current historical narrative.