By studying the early leaders of the Settlement Movement who became career activists and reformers, this paper attempts to define the forces that led to long-term commitment to activism. The enduring commitment of the individuals studied here is analyzed in terms of the beliefs and attitudes predominant in their families and factors that continually reinforced their commitment once they had embarked upon careers of activism. A final section briefly compares and contrasts leaders in the student and civil rights movements of the 1960s with the career activists in this study.

The total commitment and even fanaticism of participants in the small religious sect or the leader of the "extremist" movement has long captured the curiosity of sociologists. While most people merely drift along, "the committed" are fully engrossed in and obsessively dedicated to their task—whether it involves conversion of the wayward to the path of righteousness or changing society. The type of commitment that is the focus of this study—that of the career reformer who remains an activist leader throughout his lifetime—is seldom studied, though it is no less unusual than the commitment of the religious fanatic or revolutionary.

Studies of commitment have generally emphasized one of two analytically separate orientations: some focus on "commitment mechanisms" and others stress the importance of life histories and family background. Commitment mechanisms cumulatively work together to sever ties to old lines of action and former peer groups and at the same time bind the individual to new beliefs and new
personal relationships. These include such familiar techniques of reorientation as the sacrifice of something felt to be valuable in order to belong to the group, the investment of psychic or material resources in the organization, the development of affective bonds with group members and the insulation from outside influences, and the surrender of the private domain to a group ethos that supplies both meaning and direction for its participants. In toto, these mechanisms insure that events which disconfirm the beliefs of group members will be neglected or rendered powerless through processes of rationalization and that commitment to the rationally consistent and "meaningful" interpretation of the cosmos propounded by the organization will remain unquestioned. Typically, internal cohesiveness and esprit de corps of organizations such as the religious sect or the radical political party is unusually strong, since participants isolate themselves from the larger community of which they are a part and devote their entire energies to their chosen "cause."

In stressing "how" the committed become committed, this conceptualization generally deemphasizes the issue of "who" the committed actually are. Those studies that focus on the life histories of the committed give priority to this question. For example, in his study of antiwar activists, Keniston investigated the attitudes and beliefs of families as well as family structure in attempting to delineate common features in the backgrounds of those who later became committed activists. This orientation clearly stresses socialization practices and the manner in which beliefs instilled early in life are manifested in adulthood.

In sum, the former mode of analysis is most concerned with "external" forces that act upon an individual in such a manner that he is predisposed, and in some cases constrained, to formulate a commitment to a given group. The latter orientation, on the other hand, searches for forces within an early childhood milieu that account for the development of a personality "internally" driven to seek specified avenues of expression.

The latter type of analysis proved to be more fruitful for understanding the commitment of the career activists I studied—the leaders of the Settlement Movement who remained active reformers throughout their lives. Unlike the member of the religious sect or the radical political party, the career reformer did not isolate himself from his community and interact only with those who supported his beliefs. Rather, he belonged to a number of groups and was frequently exposed to views opposed to his own. Nevertheless, the subjects of this study remained totally committed activists and claimed reform as their sole occupation, in spite of innumerable setbacks. Like Riesman's "inner-directed" man, the career reformer charted his course and pursued his task with single-minded devotion.
The zealous self-righteousness and staunch moral rectitude typical of the reformers studied here is more often found in the activist who is supported in his rigid beliefs by an extremely cohesive group of like-minded devotees to "the cause." Though the lifelong reformers in this study were also knit together in a solidary community in the early stages of their careers as leaders of the Settlement Movement, they, unlike hundreds of others, maintained their commitment to activist reform long after the esprit de corps of the new movement had faded.

In exploring the family backgrounds of these reformers, it became apparent that they were indeed a distinct lot from highly homogeneous families. Moreover, the beliefs and attitudes they learned early in their lives were crucial in guiding them into the Settlement Movement and careers of activism. Before tracing the route to the settlement house and careers of activism, however, it is first necessary to describe briefly the Settlement Movement and the subjects of this study.

The Settlement Movement

The Settlement Movement arose amid an abundance of diverse social movements in the 1880s, all of which attempted to reconstitute a social harmony upset by rapid industrialization and the landing of 9 million unskilled, illiterate immigrants with unusual mannerisms and tongues on American shores between 1880 and 1890. Some who were upset about the resulting social chaos joined socialist, anarchist, or nativist movements; others proclaimed the merits of Henry George's "single tax" or joined the Nationalist Clubs inspired by Edward Bellamy's utopian ideas. Still others joined the burgeoning Social Gospel Movement which urged the church to practice a "religion of humanity," ally itself with all movements for improving the condition of mankind, and apply an activist Christianity to the nation's festering wounds. Only a few founded or joined settlement houses in the overpopulated and rundown immigrant districts of the large northern cities.

The motives of the settlement workers were strongly grounded in their belief that those fortunate enough to have profited from the numerous "advantages" offered by their society had a particular moral responsibility to disperse the "accumulations of civilization to the depressed elements." These motives became directly incorporated into the formal aims of the settlement movement: "What can settlements accomplish? They can bring healing and saving influences
to the depressed section of society otherwise dead ... and bring back the healthy village life ... and bring streams from the higher sources of civilization to refresh and arouse residents.11

Gans defines the Settlement Movement as an “external missionary caretaker” movement:12 the settlement workers were “external” because they represented a culture different from that of their clients; their aims were predominantly “missionary” because the members of the community were expected to adapt themselves to the behavioral and value standards of the settlement worker; and the movement acted as “caretaker” of middle-class norms because aid was offered in exchange for deference to middle-class standards and rewards.

Earlier missionary endeavors were carried out by private welfare and charity organizations and generally involved irregular journeys by their middle-class members into immigrant districts to distribute food, clothing, and other basic necessities. These efforts, the settlement leaders argued, were ineffective because they avoided the causes of poverty and perpetuated a charity relationship that stigmatized the poor. By establishing a permanent residence in the immigrant sections, settlement workers hoped to gain the friendship and trust of their neighbors and eventually influence their behavior in a variety of ways.13 The typical activities of settlement reformers reflected the missionary and caretaker character of the movement. They fell into three categories: educational, civic, and investigatory.14

Attempts to educate the immigrant population involved classes in literature, poetry, art history, theater, dance, and music. Instruction was also offered to women in the more practical arts of housekeeping, cooking, sewing, and dressmaking. In addition, numerous lectures on various education issues were held, as well as Sunday concerts and discussion and debate clubs.

Civic activities included efforts to beautify the physical environment of the neighborhood; secure adequate city sanitary service; provide recreational areas; improve public schools; protest corrupt city politics; safeguard social morality by campaigning against streetwalkers, “notorious houses,” public drunkenness, and dance halls; and aid in the organization of unions and other efforts for better working conditions.

Investigations on unemployment, the conditions of working women, health, eviction cases, the sweatshop system, school truancy, infant mortality, child labor, and tenement housing were carried out to seek improved conditions in these areas. In all these efforts, the settlement workers assumed that a prerequisite for change involved the adaptation of the immigrant culture to the idealized norms of the middle class.

Like most who undertake the unusual, the early leaders of the Settlement Movement were severely criticized—by their religious
leaders, their parents, their peers, the police, and the general public. Although some of the progressive leaders of the churches supported them, the great majority of religious people reacted with cold aloofness or outright opposition and criticized them for overemphasizing the "incidental phases of Christian life to the neglect of its higher, more decisive appeals." While the churches were denouncing the settlement workers for having a "philanthropic picnic in a wilderness of sin," New York policemen were asking for monthly payoffs, and the socialists and anarchists were denouncing their activities as nothing more than "teaching the poor to eat with a fork." Perhaps most important was the attitude of parents and family. While a few parents supported the actions of their sons and daughters, most feared for their safety and were bitterly opposed to their activities. Jane Addams notes the contradiction between this attitude and the values perpetrated in the families of early settlement workers: "They are taught to be self-forgetting and self-sacrificing, to consider the good of the whole before the good of the ego. But when all this information and culture show results, when the daughter comes back from college and begins to recognize her social claim to the 'submerged tenth,' and to evince a disposition to fulfill it, the family claim is strenuously asserted; she is told that she is unjustified, ill-advised in her efforts."

The Sample

In selecting subjects for this study I began by extracting names from the few histories of the Settlement Movement that exist. To assess whether these individuals had indeed held leadership roles in the early Settlement Movement and remained committed long-term reformers, I then checked their books, articles, biographies, and autobiographies, as well as several standard dictionaries of American biographies. My list quickly dropped to sixteen career reformers. Two of these had to be eliminated because only random bits of information on their social backgrounds could be located, though nearly complete information was available on the remaining fourteen. All except two were listed in one of the dictionaries, eight had biographies written of them, and five had written autobiographies. Eleven of the fourteen were founders or cofounders of settlement houses, and nine reformers lived in the settlements, usually as head residents, until the final stages of their lives. Two others were head residents for eight years and returned to the settlements periodically afterward. Three pioneers actually lived in the settlements for only short periods but held leadership positions in settlement activities throughout their
lives. Notably, two of the latter were instructors in sociology at Chicago and Columbia. Eight of the fourteen were women and six were men. While three were thirty-eight or older when they began settlement work, all of the other eleven were thirty-two or under, their average age being twenty-eight.

These fourteen were not only the major early leaders of the Settlement Movement but also the only settlement leaders who became career activists. A continual obsession with the projects of the settlement is apparent throughout their writings, as well as the frenzy and impatience generally found among those who feel a common solidarity in pursuing a cause. By organizing various conferences on settlement work and presenting the major papers at these meetings, the subjects of this study provided direction and inspiration to the movement for decades. A cursory examination of their writings revealed that this group published at least forty-five books and countless articles.

The activist commitment of these settlement pioneers was not limited to work within the immigrant districts alone. In attempting to improve the living conditions of the poor, settlement workers realized that their tasks required political action at the city, state, and national levels. They became leaders in the struggle for work laws for women and children, for a standard tenement housing code, for the abolition of sweatshop labor, and for reform of the city jails and the state prisons. In addition, all took leadership positions in innumerable reform endeavors during the 1890s, the Progressive Era, and later. Most worked actively in the Bryan campaign for president in 1896, and many assumed leadership positions in electoral politics, particularly in the effort to elect Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. With the coming of World War I, these career activists opposed the involvement of the United States and worked actively for disarmament in the American Union against Militarism. The women held leadership positions in the Women's Peace Party and became leading feminists in the women's suffrage movement before and after the war. Moreover, more than any other group of individuals, these settlement leaders established social work as a respectable profession.

The Route to the Settlement House

All early leaders of the Settlement Movement who became career activists were raised in homes in which markedly similar values and beliefs were taught as truth. Without exception, the subjects of this study were from families which valued religious principles as sacred
and taught absolutes of right and wrong as truth. Yet their homes were also political ones in which the social issues of the day were perennial subjects of discussion, approached from liberal, or occasionally radical, perspectives. If either traditional religious or political perspectives had been taught to them exclusively, the career reformers might have become leaders in the churches or joined one of the many political movements of their day. They sought, however, both a religious activism that, unlike the Social Gospel Movement or earlier missionary endeavors, attempted to confront the roots of the social disorder, and politically effective action capable of reaping immediate changes. In effect, they sought a synthesis of the two socialization orientations—the religious and the political—dominant in their homes.

The importance of piety, a stern morality, and religious conduct were stressed in their socialization. All were accustomed to daily family worship, the reading and recitation of Bible stories, and the singing of hymns throughout their youth. Graham Taylor, the founder of Chicago Commons, succinctly stated his uncompromising belief in the rightness of religious moral values typical of the ethical standards of the early settlement leaders: "I have always felt and often publicly insisted that it were [sic] better to have the church, or any other institution, go down with its moral standard flying at high mast than to float on any bottom with lowered ideals."

Religion was clearly much more a discriminating characteristic than class in determining who would take the route to the settlement house: all the prospective career activists came from devoutly religious homes, though some were middle class while others came from wealthy, old, high-status families. Two were the daughters of congressmen, one was the son of the general superintendent of the Chicago Telephone Company, and one was the daughter of a prosperous inventor. Notably, four of the male reformers were sons of clergymen, and the father of one of the women was a missionary. The occupations of the fathers of the remaining three were clearly middle class: a storekeeper, a distributor of optical goods, and a career public servant.

In all cases a strong religious influence was apparent: the well-to-do banker whose daughter became a settlement leader was self-educated and described as devoutly religious and highly principled; the son of the general superintendent of the Chicago Telephone Company was descended from a long line of ministers; the inventor was also a highly religious man, said to have strong principles, and from a family of well-educated ancestors. Similar influences were apparent in the middle-class families: the son of the storekeeper was extremely close to his uncle, a minister, and in boyhood decided to devote his life to helping working people and to deny himself all public entertainment
until it could be afforded by all men; the daughter of the distributor of optical goods was descended from a host of scholars, rabbis, and professionals, and was strongly influenced by her mother, a deeply religious woman; the daughter of the public servant was heavily influenced by her grandfather, a pious and religious man, and her mother, a poet and an intellectual.

Religion, of course, was a prominent aspect in the lives of most middle- and upper-class individuals in the nineteenth century, and children were often taught Christian principles in the most strict and doctrinaire fashion. Yet it was unusual for religious training to emphasize an activist, socially oriented Christianity, as was the case in the homes of the career activists studied here. In all, religious teachings were seen as meaningful only if incorporated into everyday conduct. The high religious ideals espoused by the father of Mary McDowell, the cofounder of Northwestern University Settlement in Evanston, Illinois, led her at age thirteen to rebuke her playmates for square dancing, to teach Sunday school at sixteen, to distribute aid to the needy during the Great Chicago Fire when seventeen, and soon thereafter to become a state organizer for the Young Women's WCTU. For James Reynolds, a head resident at the University Settlement on the Lower East Side, his parents' and ancestors' staunch support of the antislavery cause and the opening of their homes as a shelter for runaway slaves was justified to him as a means of upholding Christian teachings, as were the morning prayers for the freeing of the slaves in the home of Mary Simkhovitch's grandfather.

The stern and oftentimes forbidding brand of religion and the activist interpretation of religious principles that these early settlement leaders were taught in their childhoods would seem to predispose them to search for means of implementing their beliefs in humanitarian endeavors.

The families of these settlement leaders and career reformers were also political families. Their writings and those of their biographers refer continually to their "liberal" or "political homes." Repeatedly, concern over the welfare of the working class, and especially of working women and children, is cited as a common subject of discussion in their families. The parents of several reformers and the ancestors of most were abolitionists, and the childhood homes of several settlement leaders were offered as shelter for runaway slaves. In addition, fathers of most reformers participated in local politics, and mothers were usually active in women's rights and peace campaigns.

Through their actions, the parents of the future leaders of the Settlement Movement instilled a confidence in democratic government in their sons and daughters as well as a conviction that egalitarian principles must be implemented at all levels of their society. In their biographies and autobiographies, the settlement pioneers
often relate childhood impressions of poverty and of children less fortunate than themselves and recall the explanations given by their parents of the reasons why some have fewer advantages than others. Florence Kelley, whose father labored unceasingly in the interests of the poor as a judge and member of Congress, remembered his analysis of the causes for the abject poverty of English coal miners.\textsuperscript{27}

In recalling her father’s belief in equality, Jane Addams described her happiness when, as a young girl, she received a new cloak from him. Shortly thereafter, however, she decided to continue to wear her old coat after her father had advised her that other girls, whose parents could not afford new coats for them, would be envious.\textsuperscript{28} She also remembered her father’s sorrow at the death of Joseph Mazzini, the Italian leader against Hapsburg oppression, and recalled obtaining from her father’s discussion of him “... a sense of the genuine relationship which may exist between men who share large hopes and like desires, even though they differ in nationality, language and cred.”\textsuperscript{29}

These same sentiments of equality appear regularly in the writings of settlement pioneers regarding their decisions to live among the poor. Julia Lathrop, a longtime resident of Hull-House, argued persuasively in “What Settlement Work Stands For” that “the settlement may be regarded as an humble but sincere effort toward a realization of that ideal of social democracy in whose image this country was founded, but adapted and translated into the life of today.”\textsuperscript{30} Robert Woods also noted the affinity of the settlement’s purposes with those of democracy and viewed the settlement as “a struggle to make the idea of the social organism real; that is, of self-government by the people, of the people as rulers...”\textsuperscript{31} Graham Taylor argues that the attempt of the settlement to apply a faith essential to both the religious and political order finds expression in the promotion of a community consciousness to be extended to all mankind.\textsuperscript{32}

The leaders of the Settlement Movement had developed a political orientation at an early age. Yet these reformers were not particularly set apart from many others by the fact that they came from political homes, or because they were taught a strict and forbidding religious devoutness, or by the fact that their parents stressed an activist interpretation of Christian principles. Others learned similar attitudes and beliefs, yet a drastically fewer number were raised in homes in which all three of these orientations were emphasized. When these orientations appeared \textit{in combination}, a distinct group of individuals set apart from the rest of the population became defined. From this pool of potential activists, a few became Settlement Movement leaders.\textsuperscript{33}

Most important in understanding the commitment of career activists is the fact that the early socialization of all those who became
The Commitment to Career Reform

lifelong reformers involved remarkably similar beliefs and attitudes. The spiritual poverty and rampant corruption of bourgeois society contrasted sharply with the absolutes taught to the early settlement leaders. Their activist interpretation of religious principles and their political orientation led them to search for appropriate avenues of action to implement their beliefs.

Yet no extant occupation provided an opportunity for them to knit together both their religious and political orientations. Retreat into conventional religious careers, though perhaps tempting, was nonetheless unsatisfactory to those anxious to confront the social problems of their time. The Social Gospel Movement, though offering an activist interpretation of religious teachings, failed to provide occupational opportunities to those who desired to implement religious beliefs.

The political arena might seem to offer a suitable synthesis for both their religious and political parts, yet those who had been taught to lead the “totally committed life” and to justify their beliefs in terms of absolutes of rights and wrongs were most likely repulsed by the prevalence of compromise as a dominant strategy of politics as well as by the scandalously corrupt machine politics of such notorious characters as “Boss” Tweed and Jay Gould. On the other hand, they were too reformist to be attracted by the inflammatory rhetoric and confrontation tactics of the socialist and anarchist movements of their day.

Nor was that traditional haven from the material culture, the academy, a viable alternative to these young men and women. Though they often expressed appreciation of their education,\textsuperscript{34} all frequently criticized the “cultured way of life” for being “irrelevant” to the social unrest of the 1880s and 1890s. For them, the value of knowledge derived from its “application to life,” and its highest task was to be placed in the service of mankind. After leaving the university and becoming aware of the suffering of the immigrant population, most settlement leaders became decidedly ambivalent over the value of their formal education and questioned whether an important share of their lives had not been wasted. After seeing the poverty and overcrowding in which immigrants lived, Lillian Wald was overcome by a feeling that her entire education had been “so academic, so remote.”\textsuperscript{35} Similarly, Jane Addams describes her distress over the existence of poverty as “mingled with a sense of futility, . . . the belief that the pursuit of cultivation would not in the end bring either solace or relief.”\textsuperscript{36} “Taught to be activists, the cloistered halls of academe and the detached life of the scholar remained anathema.

Though gradually realizing that the beliefs learned from their parents were unsuited to available occupational opportunities,\textsuperscript{37} the prospective lifelong activists continued to search for a career that
would provide unity and purpose to their lives. None had histories of numerous job failures or frustrated ambitions, but many moved from church to church and some joined the Social Gospel Movement or the Society for Christian Socialists for short periods without establishing firm commitments to these groups. Others traveled for prolonged periods in Europe, while many extended their graduate training without at the same time formulating distinct career aims. Still others became involved in various political movements in Europe and the United States. For all, the period of alienation from accepted occupations and the search for a life task was, in varying degrees of severity, one of continual psychic turmoil.

Vida Scudder writes that she was plagued with a sense of the "evasiveness of reality" and an inner misery founded upon her feeling that her knowledge had been gained from books and not from active living, a practice that fostered, she believed, an "imitative life."38 Two years of aimlessness and groping and a "turmoil of religious experiences"39 preceded her founding of University Settlement in Boston.

Charles Stover, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary and Harvard Law School, describes the beginning of a long period of doubt and depression that occurred after completion of a year of study at the Berlin Theological Seminary: "Suddenly and mysteriously, like a thunder-crash in the clear heavens, came the first of a phalanx of terrible doubts, beginning with an attack on the genuineness of my divine calling to the Christian ministry for which I had just finished my theological education. This first doubt, which brought so many other destructive ones in its train, came from without in the reading of pietistic literature, to which I had gone in simplicity for spiritual food. Thus innocently began that assault upon my faith which, after years of agony, led to its total eclipse."40

The internal malaise of Jane Addams was the most prolonged and severe of all the career reformers. For her, the death of her father in 1881 meant the loss of the demanding standards of rectitude by which she had measured the success of her efforts. She suffered from reoccurring nervous exhaustion, paralysis of will, and a sense of failure for the next eight years as she "drifted aimlessly" and traveled twice to Europe, sickened by the "advantages" available to her as a young middle-class woman which removed all of life's difficulties and left her with a sense of profound uselessness. "It required eight years . . . to formulate my convictions even in the least satisfactory manner, much less reduce them to a plan of action. During most of that time I was absolutely at sea so far as any moral purpose was concerned, clinging only to the desire to live in a really living world and refusing to be content with a shadowy intellectual or aesthetic reflection of it."41
The psychic torment endured by the young women who became career activists, the first college-educated generation of their sex, was particularly acute. These women, who rejected the traditional female role as "parasitic," had been prepared by their families to lead active reformist lives and to continue their cultivation of the arts and literature, but to remain aloof from the social unrest of their day. Jane Addams described the lack of function in her society for women "of leisure" such as herself and their feelings of uselessness: "I have seen young girls suffer and grow sensibly lowered in vitality in the first years after they leave school. . . . We succeeded for the most part in making her pitifully miserable. . . . She finds 'life' so different from what she expected it to be . . . and does not understand this apparent waste of herself, this elaborate preparation, if no work is provided for her."42

This feeling of uselessness, though more severe for the women, was also a source of emotional upheaval for the men. For them also, the advantages of higher education, European travel, and "the cultivated life" merely exacerbated the guilt and unease they felt as a result of their own inaction.43

All of the above factors—the teaching of a pious religiosity in the home and an activist interpretation of religious principles, the political orientation of parents of the prospective career activists, the alienation from accepted occupational channels of those raised in such homes, and the period of malaise and search for an appropriate occupation—are crucial for an understanding of the enduring commitment of the career reformers in this study. These factors all existed prior to the prospective career reformer's contact with the Settlement Movement and defined, when in combination, a pool of individuals who were predisposed to found or join settlement houses and become career activists. For most, the actual decision to establish or move into a settlement house was a difficult and dramatic one, particularly for the younger women.

Florence Kelley, an early resident of Hull-House and a crusader for child-labor laws, wrote that her life was entirely immersed in the world of books and divorced from an awareness of the poor until she traveled through the industrial areas of England with her father and visited the Midland counties where she listened to women chain makers describe their desperate plight of long hours and low pay.44 This event was to be decisive in her decision, made after several years of drift and questioning, to seek out Jane Addams and begin residence at Hull-House.

While doing graduate work at Oxford, Vida Scudder experienced an "awakening" from reading the works of Ruskin that led her into a period of intense social radicalism, a "forced recognition of her 'plethora of privilege' " and a "desperate wish to do violence to
myself."45 Several years later, after frustration with her teaching career at Wellesley, she founded University Settlement in Boston and became "totally engrossed" in her work with the poor.

On Jane Addams's second journey to Europe, tours through the industrial districts of East London left her with such a sense of revulsion that she was unable to receive comfort from any source. She found her studies as merely "lumbering our minds with literature that only served to cloud the really vital situation spread before our eyes."46 As she became increasingly convinced that her pursuit of cultivation would not bring either "solace or relief," her desire to act formulated itself into the settlement house idea. Still, only after a "catalytic" experience—the witnessing of a bullfight in Spain—did her "moral situation" become revealed to her. She then decided to visit Toynbee Hall in London and establish her own settlement house in Chicago.

For Lillian Wald, the decision to live in one of the immigrant districts of New York was made soon after her reading of Jacob Riis's book, How the Other Half Lives, and a visit to the home of a slum dweller on the Lower East Side, though this occurred only after a period of six years in which nothing seemed meaningful to her: "A sick woman in a squalid rear tenement, so wretched and so pitiful that, in all the years since, I have not seen anything more appalling, determined me, within half an hour, to live on the East Side."47

The route to the settlement house and into careers of activist reform was not an easy one. The beliefs and attitudes taught in the homes of the prospective career activists were ones that ill-prepared them to adapt to the occupational structure of their times and led them to search for new careers appropriate to their activist political and religious orientations. The settlement house alone appeared to provide an opportunity for these reformers to act.

Long-Term Commitment

From the above examination of the route subjects in this study traveled to the settlement house, it is apparent that attitudes and beliefs instilled early in life were fundamental in directing them not only into settlement work, but also into careers of reform. Having reached the settlement house, a number of factors reinforced the commitment of these leaders.

Perhaps most prominent in the early stages of their careers was the shared feeling that they were engaged in a unique endeavor that both
offered the singular outlet for frustrated aspirations and satisfied the "subjective necessity" of these individuals to alleviate feelings of drift and lend meaning to their lives. The difficulty of the struggle itself and the awareness that suitable alternatives were lacking made settlement work and activist reform all the more appealing. By the time they began their residence in the settlement house, these reformers had committed an immense amount in psychic resources to their new life.

This explanation of commitment may be conceptualized in terms of Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance and Kanter's commitment mechanism of "investment." Festinger's prediction that a decision borne out of malaise and conflict, or one of excessive "cost" to a person, will be judged more "valuable" and adhered to more firmly than one arrived at easily in part accounts for the long-term commitment of the career activists studied here. Similarly, the activists in this study "invested" nearly their entire psychic resources in the Settlement Movement and thereby acquired an immense stake in its continuing existence. The depth of the lifelong activists' "investment" in career reform may be readily understood when it is recalled that settlement work alone offered an opportunity for the unique synthesis of those particular political and religious attitudes learned in their families and deeply rooted in their personality structures.

The strength of commitment of these career activists also may be understood in another manner. The individuals studied here were extremely capable persons. Accustomed to success and recognition, which for most had occurred in the academy, their expectations for themselves were enormously high. Their ability, their brazen self-assurance, and their zeal gradually earned for them the admiration of a wide circle of followers, both inside and outside the Settlement Movement. Consequently, even though their efforts to improve qualitatively the living conditions of the immigrant population were usually frustrated, these leaders nonetheless reaped rewards from their activism in the form of recognition and status. They were able, therefore, to maintain self-definitions as reformers even though they confronted innumerable obstacles.

In spite of the peer-group support and the existence of deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs that predisposed the subjects in this study to establish the Settlement Movement and become career activists, it would have been difficult for them to have maintained their long-term commitment without the settlement house as a base for their multifarious activities. As noted, many of them lived in the settlements throughout their lives, and all returned for psychic sustenance when discouraged and impatient with the slow pace of social change. Amid diverse reform campaigns, the settlement provided
permanency and stability. Moreover, settlements were able to provide their residents with a small living stipend, raised through numerous fund-raising activities and contributions.

Finally, the enduring commitment of these activists is more fully understood by a "character sketch" of them—one which I have largely formulated by attending to the qualitative and subtle aspects of all that I have read about them. This sketch, no doubt, to some extent goes beyond the empirical data available to me and presented thus far, though it attempts to do so in the manner in which Max Weber formulated an "ideal type"—by "accentuating" that which appeared significant to his particular problem. It briefly attempts to demonstrate that the enduring commitment of the career reformers was one that is best understood as a cognitive rather than an affectual commitment.

In studying these career activists, it soon became clear that they were the unquestioned leaders of their peers—brilliant students, valedictorians of their class, and initiators of uncountable groups. Early in their youth they were treated by their parents as mature and capable decision makers. As young girls, the women were in all cases extremely close to a parental figure who treated them without regard to the traditional restrictions on their sex. The self-confidence and ability of all appears immense, and they were accustomed to confronting as well as solving problems in terms of higher purposes and to consciously formulate their goals.

They were, however, thoroughly alone and generally without meaningful attachments to others during the period of malaise prior to induction into settlement work. Yet their isolation appeared to be voluntarily imposed. As their formal education came to an end (or as they could no longer justify prolonging it), all came to doubt, question, and eventually reject the legitimating principles upon which their actions had rested and which had provided direction to their conduct. The recognition of the meaninglessness of old lines of action left a deep chasm in the lives of those previously so assured of the righteousness of their behavior. The psychic torment that resulted led them to devote their entire energies to seek means of alleviating the unaccustomed void in their lives, and they soon realized that they confronted dilemmas foreign to their friends. Social relationships, therefore, became subservient to an overriding concern to reestablish direction and purpose in their lives.

These career activists were not, during this period of psychic unrest, simply seeking a stable, close-knit community within which they could immerse themselves in dedication to a larger collectivity or "cause." This species of commitment is most often found among the prototypical "lonely seeker" who has a history of failure and inadequate social relationships. In becoming committed to a religious sect
or other Gemeinschaft organization, the latter mainly seeks affective ties. Once within such a solitary organization and isolated from “extra-cult affective ties,” any residual doubt regarding the legitimacy of the commitment is generally readily eliminated. Kanter’s “commitment mechanisms” and Lofland and Stark’s “value-added schema of conversion” are possible analytic tools for the understanding of commitment in such cases.

The period of emotional unease and drift of the career activists studied here resulted from the breakdown of deeply rooted legitimating beliefs and principles rather than repeated failure and unsatisfactory social relationships. When those who maintain a commitment over a long period of time do not have histories of isolation and failure, it is most important to comprehend the particular belief systems they employ to justify their behavior. One way in which these may be understood is by an examination of attitudes and beliefs instilled in the socialization process. This study has done so by emphasizing a biographical approach and by tracing the route of career activists into the settlement house.

Speculations on Contemporary Activists

Remarkable parallels exist between the career reformers studied here and recent activists. Any judgment of the likelihood of long-term commitment by the activists of the 1960s will be informed by comparison and contrast with those who were career activists.

The leaders of the protest movements of the 1960s had family backgrounds similar to those of career activists. The “protest-prone” youth described by Keniston and Flacks were raised in professional and intellectual rather than business or working-class families. While some of the fathers of career reformers held clearly middle-class or business occupations, a strong religious or intellectual influence was apparent in these cases. Perhaps more important, the activists of the 1960s, like the settlement pioneers, came from liberal and political homes. Keniston in particular contends that “many activists are concerned with living out expressed but unimplemented parental values,”51 and Demerath, Marwell, and Aiken state that “activists are most often products of liberal rather than conservative homes.”52 Further, career reformers and activists in the 1960s were outstanding students, critical of the remoteness of formal education from the social unrest of their times.

Both career activists and the leaders of the 1960s’ movements experienced periods of general disillusionment, of varying duration and
intensity, prior to involvement in activist endeavors. Demerath et al. cite a “sense of societal malaise” borne out of perceptions that political authorities had betrayed their liberal promises,\(^{53}\) while Keniston notes an impatience with the “slow fulfillment of credal ideals, a fundamental revulsion against the premises of industrial—and now technological—society,” and an emphasis upon spiritual, aesthetic, or expressive fulfillment as opposed to material achievement.\(^{54}\) Flacks also notes student stress upon intellectual, political, and aesthetic ideals and values in spite of the culturally normative emphasis upon material achievement.\(^{55}\)

The establishment of settlements and activism in the 1960s also appeared to satisfy a “subjective necessity”: the desire of an entire stratum of youth to become useful and actively engaged citizens and to thereby alleviate feelings of meaninglessness and drift. Involvement in the civil rights and student movements, as Keniston notes, provided a sense of direction.\(^{56}\) Like the civil rights leaders who viewed their activity as “a crucible in which to find and to forge their identity under stress . . . and as both a challenge and an opportunity,”\(^{57}\) the early settlement leaders, according to Jane Addams, “defined the settlements as an attempt to express the meaning of life in forms of activity.”\(^{58}\)

There were, nonetheless, important differences. The questioning and internal unrest of activists of the 1960s appears to have been much less severe than that experienced by career reformers. The short-term activism of students could occur, and usually did, without a disruption of career plans, and decisions to become involved were generally made with the support of activist peers in university environments of tolerance and liberalism rather than in isolation. Placed in protective institutions separate from their society and able to interact freely with like-minded others, 1960s activists suffered less from the criticisms of them than the settlement leaders.

The most notable difference between the career reformers and the 1960s activists was the importance of religion in the motivation of each group. Investigators of the movements in the 1960s have generally agreed that activists rejected religious doctrine and more often defined themselves as “humanists” with deep moral and ethical convictions. Demerath, Marwell, and Aiken report a bimodal distribution: 32 percent of the civil rights activists interviewed identified themselves as very religious, but most felt that the churches had not acted on the dictates of their religious ethics and were more likely to be nonreligious.\(^{59}\)

The overriding centrality of religion in the lives of settlement reformers and its relative de-emphasis among activists of the 1960s may simply reflect its greater importance in everyday conduct in the nineteenth century. It is interesting to note, however, the finding of
Demerath et al. that religion played a markedly more important role in the lives of the civil rights workers they classified as reformers than among those classified as radicals. Ten of the thirteen reformers in their sample reported that religion was quite influential in their lives and seven of these selected a religious figure as among the “three persons closest to you other than your parents,” while seven of the ten radicals in their study came from homes in which there was comparatively little religious influence.60 If radicals in the 1880s and 1890s were also from relatively nonreligious homes, it is probable that they consciously avoided a movement as oriented to the implementation of Christian principles as the Settlement Movement. The few socialists and anarchists mentioned in the settlement literature stayed in the settlements for only short periods and were thus excluded from this study.

Too frequently, sociologists are inclined to view contemporary movements as unique and unprecedented. In studying participants in the Settlement Movement, it became clear to me that the understanding of more recent social movements is immensely enhanced by the study of similar social movements in the past. A comparative study of participants in “upper-class reform” is sorely needed and might include such diverse movements as the English Settlement Movement in the 1870s and 1880s, the early American abolitionists, and the English antislavery campaign in the 1820s and 1830s.

Notes

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1. I fully concur with Kornhauser’s definition of commitment as becoming “more or less unavailable for alternative lines of action.” It involves “the various relations formed in the process of acting in a certain direction, so that to shift the line of action requires changing these relations” (see William Kornhauser, “Social Bases of Political Commitment,” in Human Behavior and Social Processes, ed. Arnold M. Rose [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962], pp. 322–23).


4. Becker, pp. 34-40; Festinger, pp. 5-32.
7. For the difference between the radical and liberal commitment, see Kornhauser, pp. 322-24.
13. The first settlement house, Neighborhood Guild, was founded in 1886 in the Lower East Side of New York; two more settlements were established in 1889 and three were founded in 1891. These original six were established in New York, Chicago, and Boston. The Settlement Movement spread quickly to every large city in the country with the founding of fifty-seven houses between 1892 and 1896. By 1897, seventy-four houses existed, and 204 had been opened by 1905. For several decades the number of settlements nearly doubled every five years (see Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy, The Settlement Horizon [New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1922], p. 49; and Allen F. Davis, Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement [New York: Oxford University Press, 1967] pp. 10-17). Less than a dozen young adults resided in most settlements, although the major houses usually had twenty or more residents, and around fifty resided in each of the two largest, Hull-House in Chicago and Henry Street in New York. Generally, the men were married while the women were single. Though the men and women shared leadership positions in the first eight major settlements, the vast majority of the later leaders and residents were women.
15. Woods and Kennedy, p. 57.
16. Ibid.
17. Davis, p. 11.
18. Ibid.
19. Addams, p. 119.
21. With the exception of one Jewish woman, all came from traditional liberal Protestant families: six were Congregationalist, two each were Quaker, Presbyterian, and Unitarian, and one was Methodist.
23. Information not available on one.
26. As a more speculative aside, it is interesting to note a defining characteristic of devoutness: when deeply ingrained, it permeates the entire personality and seldom lacks a compelling, or perhaps rigid, component. If, as was the case with the career reformers studied, devoutness is best expressed through the implementation of religious principles in everyday conduct and behavior, then persons taught both these interpretations of Christianity would be inclined to embrace its activist and socially concerned genre.
29. Ibid., p. 21.
33. No attempt will be made here to construct a “value-added” model that accounts for both necessary and sufficient conditions for commitment to careers of activist reform as Lofland and Stark, following Neil J. Smelser, A Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: Free Press, 1963), have done in analyzing conversion to a religious sect. The major disadvantages of such a procedure are two: first, it overemphasizes structure and downplays the importance of process; and second, the logic of such a model dictates the addition of new categories whenever a few “deviant” cases arise. This procedure can be continued indefinitely, with the main result that elaborate and cumbersome typologies are formulated. The aim of this study is less ambitious. I intend only to define the common features in the social backgrounds of those who became committed career activists and to define the route they traversed in becoming lifelong activists.
34. Not least remarkable about these career reformers were their educational attainments. In a period when entering college was rare, especially for women, all of these reformers except one held bachelor's degrees, eight had obtained divinity degrees, three held Ph.D.'s, three had earned degrees in law, and at least five had studied abroad. Their areas of study were uniformly the humanities and theology. Nearly all had attended the best universities, and many had been educated in private secondary schools.
39. Ibid., p. 90.
41. Addams, p. 64.
42. Ibid., p. 118.
43. Several factors appear to underlie the differences in the severity of the internal turmoil suffered by these settlement pioneers during their period of search for an appropriate career. Of the twelve leaders for whom information on this subject was available, six experienced relatively prolonged periods of confusion while the remaining six underwent decidedly less questioning and doubt. Distinctions between these two groups are clear: the more troubled settlement leaders and career activists were younger (average age was 28.3 as opposed to an average age of thirty-seven for the less troubled), female (with the exception of Stover), extremely close to and dependent upon a parental figure, usually the father, and had led inactive and scholarly lives prior to their settlement work. Notably, the only two females who had been active in reformist causes prior to joining the Settlement Movement, Mary McDowell and Mary Simkhovitch, were the only two women who avoided a prolonged period of malaise. The former attributed her independence primarily to her position as the oldest daughter in a large family with an invalid mother, while the latter had been influenced strongly by
Rev. W. D. P. Bliss, a prominent leader of the Social Gospel Movement. All of the men, with the exception of Stover, avoided periods of prolonged psychic tension. The writings of all of the women who endured severe crises before embarking upon settlement work are littered with references to their “protected and sheltered” lives, their bookishness, and parental figures. The underlying theme of the intense turmoil of most of these women was one of a search for an appropriate occupation to live up to the expectations and ideals of the parental figure rather than rebellion or hostility toward this person.

44. Goldmark, pp. 5, 9.
45. Scudder, p. 84.
46. Addams, p. 70.
47. Addams, p. 70.
49. The biographical approach employed here raises questions about the phenomenon of conversion. Conversion is generally defined as the adoption of a new way of life radically disjunctive from a previous one. If only the life-style of settlement leaders is examined before and after induction into the settlement house, it is apparent that conversion by this definition occurred. From the above discussion, however, it is clear that the attitudes and beliefs of settlement leaders and career reformers were formulated early in their childhoods. These attitudes and beliefs not only provided a foundation for the enduring commitment of career activists, but also predisposed them to establish the Settlement Movement. No rupture of beliefs occurred, although there was a drastic change of life-style. Thus, looked at closely and in terms of intrafamily socialization, that which appears to be conversion from the perspective of society in fact may be intergenerational continuity of beliefs and ideas. An examination of family backgrounds and socialization processes in studies of conversion will allow an assessment of the extent to which “conversion” can be said to be biographically as well as societally disjunctive.

50. Aptly described by Lofland and Stark in their study of conversion to a small religious sect.
52. Demerath et al., p. 43.
53. Ibid., p. 344.
55. Flacks, Youth and Social Change, p. 60.
57. Demerath et al., p. 66.
59. Demerath et al., pp. 30, 45, 66.
60. Ibid., p. 178.