

Breaking the Barrier of Child Labor: Lewis Hine's Photography

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Introduction

“There is work that profits children, and there is work that brings profit only to employers. The object of employing children is not to train them, but to get higher profit from their work.” -Lewis Hine

The Second Industrial Revolution, occurring between the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was a time when manufacturing processes slowly shifted from domestic workspaces to factories in America. By the conclusion of the 1800s, the United States had obtained the position of the leading industrial country in the world (Industrial Revolution, 1). The Industrial Revolution provided many factory-based employment positions, catering to the attention of the youth and parents of America.

Lewis Hine was an American photographer who captured images of children at work throughout the Industrial Revolution. Hine was a crucial factor to not only the breaking of the barrier between children and unfair employment, but also using photography as propaganda to end unfair child labor practices.

Child Labor

Youth have been working since the beginning of time, caring for livestock and tending to crops for the benefit of their family (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 2). A popular Puritan belief is work should be center in a moral life (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 3). Although, children had been working for centuries but it was not until the 1500s that the idea of providing public money to employ children emerged (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 2). Youth were ideal to employ because younger workers were less likely to object to

their working conditions or salaries. Possessing minimal job skills and requiring minimal payment, child laborers became a popular option for industrial work.

Children were considered property, belonging to their father (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 17). Because guardians owned their children, they also had the right to possess a child's earnings and still have this right today. Though children are no longer viewed as "property," parents still ultimately have complete control over the economic affairs of a child (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 18).

A judge involving the case of deceased child at work added his opinion in 1922 upon the matter, "This cold-blooded calculating measure of human life... Awarding pecuniary damages to the next of kin of a child six years of age is merely making a business commodity out of the child and subjecting the loss of that child's life to a dollars and cents argument."

The youthful citizens began to be seen as more of a financial proposition with only economic value rather than a living creature, because of their contribution towards wealth (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 19). The concept of being a business commodity shows greatly within the scenario of the child who was found dead after an accident at work. A life of being subjected to the gain of wealth for others, especially one's parents, is truly formidable.

Wealth of Americans decreased during the influx of European immigration from the 1840s through the 1880s (Child Labor, 2). The poor financial circumstances for the newcomers advocated child labor. Children's salaries were necessary in order to provide to the needs of their immigrant family members. Educationally undemanding jobs in factories furnished low paying salaries to immigrants. With low salaries, it was common for parents to not be able to

afford the needs of a full family without the financial assistance of their children working.

During the early twentieth century, households in Philadelphia had children contribute between 28 to 33% of their wages (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 18).

Children working rather than attending school was the new normal. It was a common concept accepted by the vast majority of the American populace. A southern cotton mill owner who employed children to work 12 hours a day, six days a week once stated, “No time to spend in idleness or vicious amusements,” in reference to children working. Many citizens believed the younger generations should learn the value of hard work. They were in favor of child labor, explaining businesses could profit by employing the youth. This continued to the point to which adults were relying on their children entirely to support the family (The Searing Photos that Helped End Child Labor in America, 2). “I am really tired of seeing so many big children ten years old playing on the streets,” expressed an anonymous woman.

Eighteen percent of all employed Americans in 1900 were below the young age of 16 (Child Labor, 2). With millions of children working rather than attending school, the United States was on a fast track to poverty. Child labor encouraged poverty, though financially beneficial to the families of working children, these laboring children were not able to become successful later in life because of their lack of education; having little to no schooling was a danger to the U.S. economy, creating a never ending cycle of poor employment conditions for the youthful populace.

The state of affairs was far from improvement in the revolution. At the age of three, children could be found in the fields picking berries for hours (History of Child Labor in the

United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 15). Workplaces for children towards the eastern coast of the United States consisted mainly of mines, farms, cotton mills, factories, streets to sell newspapers, and canneries.

Many children working in industrial settings began to develop consequential health problems. Much of the working youth experienced stunted growth and curvature of the spine due to sitting for such long periods of time as well as being hunched and bending over. Many children were malnourished (Teaching With Documents: Photographs of Lewis Hine: Documentation of Child Labor, 1), also significantly weakening their physical development. One of the most dangerous working conditions were coal mines (for preteen boys). Diseases such as tuberculosis and bronchitis grew within the young men, subsequent to their working environment (Teaching With Documents: Photographs of Lewis Hine: Documentation of Child Labor, 1).

Many boys located in the rural areas worked in very dangerous mining conditions, or were breaker boys for the mines (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 17). Hine was able to photograph some of these conditions, capturing images of preteen boys descending into the dangerous mine shafts (The Searing Photos that Helped End Child Labor in America, 1).

Physically demanding, with low payment, and sizable laboring time periods for children also transpired from southern cotton mills. Children were the prime employee to be hired within a cotton mill because adult-sized fingers would become knotted and gnarled in cotton. Oftentimes, children could earn more than their parents (A South Carolina Textile Mill Owner Explains Child Labor, 1), which created a dependency for children to continue working.

Children had to work excruciating hours, up to seven days per week at a mill. Many families of laboring children were forced to sign contracts instituting a designated amount of work each family had to provide (History of Child Labor in the United States-Part 1: Little Children Working, 12). This further indentured children into harsh conditions of labor, placing more pressure onto the youth by their families.

Pressure to earn wages was equally applied to the laboring youth in factories. Factories were incredibly hazardous to children because of the large machines needing to be operated. One of Hine's photographs taken at the Englehardt & Company Factory in Tampa, Florida, 1909, is a scene of young boys in a cigar factory, both smoking, was captioned "Many small boys and girls were employed. Youngsters all smoke," (See Appendix One). The youth smoking at such a young age was horrible for their health, and only encouraged a pattern of smoking for life. The health problems were set aside because of the significance of profit a child could earn for a company.

The laboring circumstances became even worse within canneries. Children were permitted to work for long periods of time, even at young ages. If children were too young to sit up, they were held on the laps of workers, and continued to work. The workplace conditions for children were heinous; machines children operated possessed unguarded belts, and wheels (Hine, 1). The younger workers were not properly trained to operate such dangerous equipment creating extremely treacherous situations.

Child labor was critical towards the everyday commerce and helped fuel the revolution. Lewis Hine was one of the few adults to notice the poor conditions and made the commitment to

break the barrier between child labor and unfair employment. His use of photography contributed to ending the poor state of affairs for the youthful laboring populace.

Lewis Hine

Lewis Wickes Hine was born on September 26, 1874, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin (Lewis Hine, 1). Hine was born into a poor family. His father died when Hine was 18 years old, leaving him to provide for his family. A job at a Wisconsin furniture factory is one of the first professions Hine pursued. He worked 13 hours a day, six days a week for the company (Lewis Hine, 1). From his experiences within the factory, he knew this field of work was not suitable for him. His following job was as a janitor at a bank. During his time at the bank, Hine attended the Columbia School of Social Work (The Searing Photos the Helped End Child Labor in America, 3). After schooling, Hine taught for the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in New York. During his tenure, Hine came under the influence of Frank Manny, the superintendent of the school (James Estrin, Page 4). Manny was most likely one of the most influential individuals within Hine's life. Manny introduced Hine to photography.

Lewis Hine was originally instructed by Manny to capture and document images of school events. The two later traveled to Ellis Island and photographed immigrants (James Estrin, 4). Manny was the catalyst of Hine's success as a photographer; if it were not for him, Hine would likely have taught all of his life.

After completing a project photographing refugees of World War One throughout Europe, Hine's primary focus was labor. One could infer the motive for Hine's interest in labor was tied back to his childhood, working in poor conditions for hours on end.

Hine was hired by the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) in 1908, initially on a temporary basis and then permanent to carry out investigative work for the NCLC. The NCLC was established in 1904 in attempt to subdue child labor. Congress never had the power to eliminate child labor (Child Labor, 1). This left the responsibility to state governments to control, which was not regulated nor addressed (History of Child Labor in the United States - Part 1: Little Children Working, 19). The use of child laborers continued to grow until Hine became involved.

Hine traveled approximately 50,000 miles a year (James Estrin, 3) throughout the eastern half of the United States for the NCLC (Lewis Hine, 1). During his travels, he visited textile mills, cotton mills, mines, farms, and factories. Once while investigating the laboring conditions in agriculture, Hine photographed and quoted in his annotation, Laura Petty, a six year old berry picker on Jenkin's Farm in Rock Creek Maryland, 1909; in the annotation Hine recited her statement, "I'm just beginnin'. Picked two boxes yesterday," and Lewis Hine went on summarizing her quote to detail the salary of Laura Petty receiving the vague payment of two cents per box (see Appendix Two). In another circumstance of Hine's work within pastoral communities, he discovered a multitude of families living in one room extemporary houses on the farms in which they worked (Hine, 1). A mother of laboring children on a farm once told Hine, "It is bad for the children. They get to know too much," in reference towards children and their living conditions.

Lewis Hine was able to conduct all of his interviews and capture photographs by claiming to be a humble bible salesman in an attempt to spread the word of God to laborers (The Searing Photos that Helped End Child Labor in America, 1). This disguise was necessary for

him to be permitted into these workplaces to photograph children. All of his photographs were captioned and annotated giving short details about what situations were being depicted (National Child Labor Committee Collection, 4). He obtained these notes by covertly recording information inside his coat pocket on family bibles and notepads (Lewis Hine, 2). Hine always dressed in a three piece suit. If a child was unaware of their age, he would measure them according to the buttons on his vest to estimate the children's ages (The Searing Photos that Helped End Child Labor in America, 2). All of the information he collected was included within his annotations.

Hine's photos were utilized by the NCLC and placed into newspapers and other publicity materials in hopes of influential lawmakers seeing such images (The Searing Photos that Helped End Child Labor in America, 3). The NCLC widely used propaganda by dramatizing photographs of children working (Child Labor, 3). To dramatize his photos, Hine created "Photo Story," pictures which popularized a portrait with the subject looking directly at the camera. Hine had the youth look straight towards the camera to increase the effect on his audience, having the viewers look into the children's eyes (The Searing Photos that Helped End Child Labor in America, 3, See Appendix Three). During his work at the NCLC, Hine collected over 5,100 photographic prints and 355 glass negatives. He captured these images between 1908 and 1924 (National Child Labor Committee Collection, 1). Hine was one of the earliest photographers to use photography as propaganda (Lewis W. Hine, 1).

Hine believed labor was an enriching component of life that connects us to Earth. However, he was against child labor as he believed child labor stripped children of their natural innocence and turned them into oxen (Lewis Hine: Photographer, Activist, Character, 5). He

declared that he “wanted to show things that had to be corrected.” This drove Hine to continue his career in pursuit of breaking the barrier between children and their workplaces.

Lewis Wickes Hine was instrumental in exposing the child labor epidemic. Only 0.008% of the population worldwide today are estimated to partake in child labor. In order to prevent this abuse, governments need to accept responsibility and encourage companies to deter child labor. Hine’s images taken throughout the Second Industrial Revolution were crucial to breaking the barrier of children being subjected to dangerous and unfair employment practices.

Appendix

1. “Young cigarmakers in Englehardt & Company factory.”



Tampa, Florida, 1909. Photo by Lewis Hine.

2. "Entire immigrant families worked in fields."



Rock Creek Maryland, July 1909. Photo by Lewis Hine.

3. “A young textile mill worker.”



In this photo, Lewis Hine utilized “Photo Story,” having the child look directly at the camera.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

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This is a primary source because the source has a picture photographed by Lewis Hine, with a corresponding annotation/caption of the image written by Hine. I used this source to provide myself with a direct quote from Lewis Hine, in order to gain understanding of what working conditions were like within a cannery.

BELMONT ON WEALTH: DEFENDS GREAT ESTATES CHILD LABOR DISCUSSED AT CIVIC FEDERATION MEETING JOHN MITCHELL ON INJUNCTIONS DISCUSSION ON CHILD LABOR ATTACKS CHILD LABOR FIGURES. (1906, Dec 13). *New - York Tribune (1900-1910)* Retrieved from

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/571928894?accountid=8657> This is a primary

source because the newspaper was written at the time of the Second Industrial Revolution. I utilized this newspaper to find quotes from significant figures in child labor. The article also gave me further names to research and events occurring at the time relating to child labor.

"Coal Mine "Breaker Boys"." *Discovery Education, IRC, 2005,*

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source is a primary source because it is photo taken by Lewis Hine, as well as briefly

annotated and titled by him. I used this source to gain perspective on the jobs children had to perform during the Second Industrial Revolution. The photo also helped me to receive basic information through inference on some of my background and topic facts.

"Entire immigrant families worked in fields.." *Discovery Education, IRC, 2005,*

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used this source to gain perspective of how bad child labor was. This source gave a direct quote taken from a child by my narrow topic. I was able to incorporate the quote within my paper.

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www.loc.gov/static/collections/national-child-labor-committee/documents/canneries3.pdf

. Accessed 6 Jan. 2020. I obtained this source from my advanced research, a retired man working for the Baltimore Museum of Industry had given me this document written by my narrow topic. The document explains the conditions children and families had to work within the canneries of Maryland. I was able to get many facts about my broad topic and narrow topic from this source to include in my paper.

"Immigrant Women in a Sweatshop, 1908." *Discovery Education, Library of Congress,*

app.discoveryeducation.com/learn/player/fde0ad89-15e7-4234-900c-2b11beec0466. This

is a primary source because it is a picture taken at the time period of my topic. The picture's caption gave me facts I was able to use within my paper. This source also helped me to become aware of the harsh workplaces women had to endure.

Lindsay, Samuel McCune. *Child Labor a National Problem*. 1906. This is a primary source because it is an article that was written by once a secretary of the National Child Labor Committee. I used this source to get statistics and quotes from significant individuals in child labor.

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"Teenage boy worked in factory for two years.." *Discovery Education, IRC, 2005*, app.discoveryeducation.com/learn/player/78299d99-3c32-4369-a644-99e10e39e445. This is a primary source because it is a photograph and annotation taken and written by my narrow topic. The photo has people of the time period in it, allowing me to better understand what life was like for members of my broad topic.

"Young cigarmakers in Englehardt & Company factory.." *Discovery Education, IRC, 2005*, app.discoveryeducation.com/learn/player/37f24e5f-1421-46f9-99e9-9adc1ae36cf6. This is a primary source because the photograph and annotations were written by a witness of my broad topic. The photograph's caption gave me facts about working conditions and quotes from important people of my broad topic.

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photographed as well as annotated by my narrow topic. I used this source to gain direct quotes from my narrow topic.

Secondary Sources

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Accessed 20 Nov. 2019. I used this secondary source to get statistics on my background topic. It gave me information on influential people, including my narrow topic, but also gave me many notes to use in my research paper.

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Estrin, James. "Lewis Hine: Photographer, Activist, Character." *New York Times*. *New York Times*,

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Most of the facts were minimal but gave me further ideas for researching.

Hine, Lewis, and Vicki Goldberg. *Lewis W. Hine - Children at Work*. Munich, Prestel, 1999.

This secondary source gave me many primary sources. The book consisted mainly of pictures and annotations/captions both written and taken by my narrow topic. These pictures are a primary source because they gave direct images and writings by someone who lived during the time period and was a witness.

Interview. Conducted by Jack Burkert, Jan. 2019. I contacted Jack Burkert through email. Our communications led towards an interview over email, I asked three questions and Mr. Burkert was able to answer all of them via email. He also provided me with a primary source written by my narrow topic.

Kaplan, Daile, et al. *Photo Story: Selected Letters and Photographs of Lewis W. Hine*.

Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. This secondary source book had many primary sources in it. Photographs and documents written by my broad topic, along with many organizations to contact. I used the organizations and contacts listed in attempt to further my advanced research.

Karp, David C. "The Pacemaker Crown Graphic 4x5 as a field camera ." *Large Format*

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iphf.org/inductees/lewis-hine/. Accessed 17 Nov. 2019. This secondary source gave

information on my narrow topic's line of work. The source gave in-depth information about Lewis Hine and his photos, where he traveled, and what he did to get his photos.

Lewis W. Hine. Directed by Ken Burns, 2015 WSKG Public Telecommunications Council. This short documentary gave me basic facts on my narrow topic. This source gave me the building blocks of the rest of my research, giving a timeline of Lewis Hine's life.

Manheimer, Ann. *Child Labor and Sweatshops*. Detroit, Greenhaven Press, 2006. This source gave me information on my broad topic today, as well as Hine's impact. The book gave statistics, all of which were lower than the ones during the Industrial Revolution. I used the data in this source to compare to the data from other sources.

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secondary source gave me many facts to incorporate into my paper. I learned more about my narrow topic's line of work, and how he performed it, giving statistics and facts. The text also gave me information about the photographs themselves.

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Tertiary Sources

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Image Quest, "Lewis Hine." Britannica School, Encyclopædia Britannica, 5 Aug. 2019. school.eb.com/levels/high/article/Lewis-Hine/40523. Accessed 11 Nov. 2019. I used this secondary source as one of my first research databases. This source gave me minimal facts about Lewis Hine and a brief timeline of his life. I used this source to get facts like DOB, parents, wife, and where he was from.

History.com. Oct. 2009, www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution/child-labor. Accessed Jan. 2019. This secondary source was one of my first sources used. The facts within this website provided a baseline of information upon my broad/background topic, giving me facts about the time period and setting of my topic. The source also detailed my narrow topic coming to a close and part of the resolution of it.

"Industrial Revolution ." *Ducksters*,

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information on my narrow topic. Not only did it provide details about Hine's childhood but also his death, and personal life. The source gave me a lot of information for my paper.

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