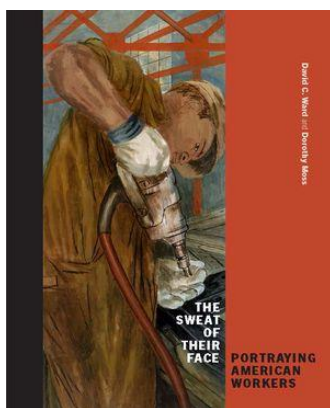


3rd Annual Safety and Cultural Heritage Summit
Preserving Our Heritage and Protecting Our Health



The Sweat of Their Face: Portraying American Workers, by David C. Ward and Dorothy Moss

- Approximately 75 objects (portraits, sculptures, and videos) were exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery 3 Nov 2017 – 3 Sep 2018.
- An accompanying book was produced (shown above)
- Famous artists included Winslow Homer, Dorothea Lange, Elizabeth Catlett and Lewis Hine.
- Workers vary from child and slave laborers to miners, railway and steel workers.
- Objects came from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The J. Paul Getty Museum, The Phillips Collection, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and other collections.
- The objects can be viewed from an artistic perspective, from a social perspective and from an occupational safety and health perspective.
- Photographer Lewis Hine was able to combine the artistic, social and occupational safety and health perspectives in his photographs. His photographs of children helped abolish and enforce child labor laws. (See also Washington Post article about Lewis Hine, available on the next page and online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/09/02/the-incredible-photos-that-inspired-the-end-of-child-labor-in-america/?utm_term=.2d586614eeba)
- What I found fascinating about this exhibit is the power of art, showing workers at work, to get public attention to improve workplace safety and health conditions.

Provided by:
Joy Erdman, MS, CIH, CSP
Joy Solutions, LLC
Office: (703) 241-7794
Mobile: (703) 598-7529

The Searing Photos that Helped End Child Labor in America

By [Jessica Contrera](#)

September 3, 2018



A young spinner in a North Carolina cotton manufacturing company poses for Lewis Hine, the documentary photographer who inspired the creation of laws to ban child labor. (Library of Congress)

He arrived at the coal mines, textile mills and industrial factories dressed in a three-piece suit. He wooed those in charge, asking to be let in. He was just a humble Bible salesman, he claimed, who wanted to spread the good word to the laborers inside.

What Lewis Hine actually wanted was to take photos of those laborers — and show the world what it looked like when children were put to work.

In the early 1900s, Hine traveled across the United States to photograph preteen boys descending into dangerous mines, shoeless 7-year-olds selling newspapers on the street and 4-year-olds toiling on tobacco farms. Though the country had unions to protect laborers at that time — and Labor Day, a federal holiday to honor them — child labor was widespread and widely accepted. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that around the turn of the century, at least 18 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 15 were employed.

Hine's searing images of those children remade the public perception of child labor and inspired the laws to ban it. Today, the Library of Congress maintains a collection of more than 5,000 of Hine's photographs, including the thousands he took for the National Child Labor Committee, known as the NCLC.

"It was Lewis Hine who made sure that millions of children are not working today," said Jeffrey Newman, a former president of the New York-based committee.



Maud Daly, age 5 and Grade Daly, age 3, photographed by Hine in 1911. Hine wrote that each girl picked a pot of a shrimp a day for a Mississippi oyster company. "The youngest said to be the fastest worker," Hine noted. (Library of Congress)



The “breaker boys” at a Pennsylvania coal mine, photographed by Hine in 1911. (Library of Congress)



In 1916, Hine took this photo of Harold Walker, a 5-year-old picking cotton in Oklahoma. (Library of Congress)

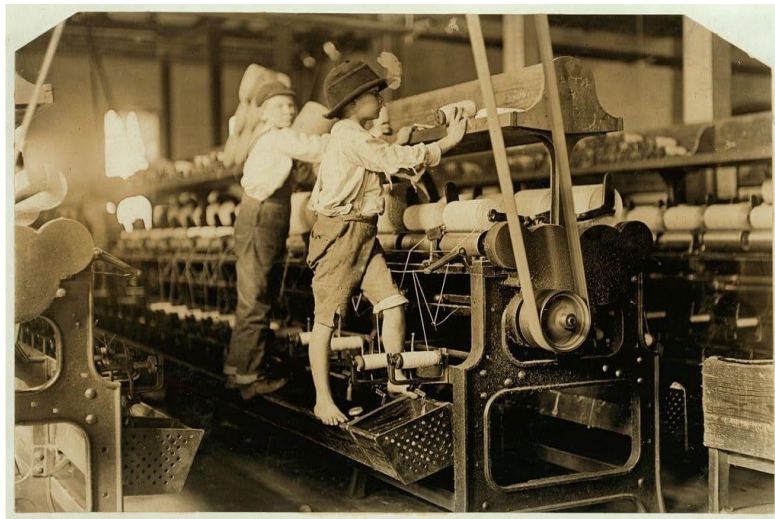
The organization’s mission wasn’t about showing the public that children were being used for financial gain — that was already a well-known fact. At the time, many believed the practice had substantial benefits. Youths could learn the value of hard work. Businesses could increase their productivity and decrease the

hourly pay. Parents could depend on their children to support the family, meaning the adults could work less or not at all.

As one mother [remarked](#) to the NCLC in 1907: “I am really tired of seeing so many big children ten years old playing in the streets.”

Hine’s photos showed the price: unsafe working conditions, dangerous machinery and business owners who refused to educate the children or limit their working hours.

Though there had been investigations that attempted to expose these circumstances in the past, “The industry simply dismissed those reports as — the term they would use today is — ‘fake news,’ ” said Hugh Hindman, a historian of child labor. “When Hine comes along and supplements the investigations with pictures, it creates a set of facts that can’t be denied anymore.”



Hine strove to show that working conditions for children were unsafe. At a Georgia textile mill in 1909, he found boys so small they had to climb on the machinery to mend broken threads. (Library of Congress)

Taken with a heavy Graflex camera, Hine’s photos were paired with captions and stories from his interviews with the children, who would tell him their ages, backgrounds and working conditions.

If they didn’t know their own age, Hine would estimate it by measuring them. As a Bible salesman or in one of his other disguises — he posed as a postcard salesman and a machinery photographer, Hine could hardly be seen whipping out a measuring tape. That’s why he wore a three-piece suit. He could measure the children against the buttons on his vest.

Hine's affinity for telling the stories of the downtrodden probably came from his own start in life. At 18, he began working at a Wisconsin furniture factory after the death of his father. It was up to Hine to keep his family financially afloat.

According to the [International Photography Hall of Fame](#), Hine worked 13 hours a day, six days a week, until he could move on to a seemingly better job — as a janitor in a bank. He began taking college courses on the side to become a teacher.

One of Hine's mentors encouraged him to move to Manhattan and begin his teaching career in one of the city's private schools. It was there that Hine picked up photography. In the hope of teaching his students to respect the new wave of immigrants coming into the city, he began visiting Ellis Island and [photographing the new arrivals](#).

Hine's work attracted the attention of the NCLC, which had been founded in 1904 with the mission of ending child labor. The organization had a particular project in mind for Hine.

Today, the use of photography as a tool to expose wrongdoing is hardly revolutionary. But in Hine's time, when newspapers were just beginning to incorporate photos into their daily product, it was nearly unheard of. Hine is credited with inventing the term "photo story" and for popularizing a style of portraiture in which the subject looks straight into the camera.

His images demand that the viewers look into the children's eyes. In many, the children are looking right back.



Hine photographed this 10-year-old boy on a tobacco farm in Connecticut in 1917. (Library of Congress)

The National Child Labor Committee published Hine's photos in its publicity material, trying to influence lawmakers and power players to address the injustice being done. Exhibits, newspapers and progressive media outlets picked up his outrage-inspiring work, ensuring it was seen across the country.

But there was no such thing as going viral in the early 1900s. The spread of Hine's photos and the reform that they inspired was extremely slow.

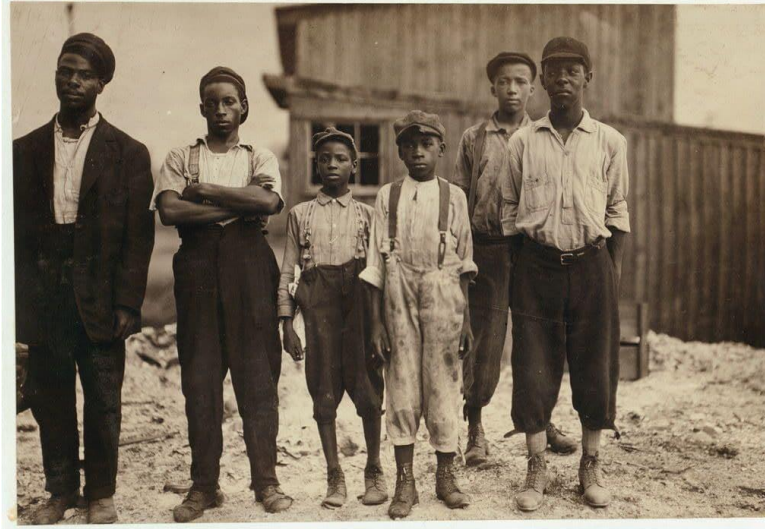
The Fair Labor Standards Act, the federal law that would prohibit most employment of minors, wasn't passed until 1938. Hine died two years later — long before his work would be recognized for the impact it had.

Now Hine's photos appear in museum exhibitions, are sold at auctions for upward of \$5,000 apiece and are credited with influencing generations of documentary photographers.

"If Hine were working today, he'd be traveling the world, photographing kids still working 14 or 15 hours a day with no serious pay and no health benefits," said photo historian Daile Kaplan.



Hine took dozens of photos of newsboys on the streets of Washington. Here, he photographed 6-year-old Earle Holt in Southwest Washington. (Library of Congress)



In 1911, Hine met these young workers at in a glass factory in Alexandria, Va. Hine rarely took photos of black children, who were typically not allowed to work alongside the white children he photographed. (Library of Congress)



Frank, a 14-year-old coal miner in West Virginia, had his legs cut off by a motor car inside a mine. Hine photographed him in 1910. (Library of Congress)

But the effort that funded and published Hine's work, the NCLC, is no longer continuing his legacy. The organization spent more than a century investigating labor issues in fields, sweatshops and well-known corporations, including Burger King. But in 2017, it shut down without announcing its closure. Its website disappeared. Its phone number still rings, but no one answers.

Newman, the former NCLC president, said the organization simply ran out of money and had trouble paying its debts. In its final years, the threat of child labor didn't have the fundraising power it once did. In a rare instance in which an organization dedicated to a social ill had worked itself out of a job, the NCLC board decided to "declare victory and just move out," Newman said.

"There may well come a time when the NCLC may need to be reinvented and started up again," he predicted.

Without the NCLC, there remains one organization still bearing Hine's name: a fellowship for Duke University graduates who want to become documentarians.

The young fellows chronicle lives inside food pantries, foster homes and struggling neighborhoods. Their work is in the spirit of Hine's legacy — but looks incredibly different. Along with still photos, they employ video, audio and even virtual reality to show the injustices of the world. None, as of yet, has had to impersonate a Bible salesman to get the job done.

You can explore the archive of Hine's photos on [the Library of Congress digital archive](#).