

**Making the Invisible Visible: Lewis Hine's Social Photography as a Turning
Point in the Fight Against Child Labor**

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Process Paper: 500 Words

Process Paper

In eighth grade, we learned about the struggles and horrible conditions of child workers during the American Industrial Revolution. But today, child labor is an issue that disproportionately affects migrants and children in developing nations. This made us wonder how America mitigated its child labor crisis and whether or not that same solution could be used to solve present day child labor crises around the globe. After searching through general information about child labor in the early 1900s, Divya found a striking photograph of child laborers that was taken by Lewis Hine. After viewing other photographs he had taken, we decided to research further. Later, we would realize that we had just decided to research a figure who used a camera to create a turning point in history by reshaping American values, attitudes, and laws forever.

At first, we searched mainly for primary sources on credible databases. We used ABC-CLIO, law databases, the Library of Congress, numerous newspaper archives, the University of Maryland databases, and many more. These yielded many valuable sources that we analyzed within the wider context of child labor. Our research wove together multiple perspectives from children, senators, the Supreme Court, impoverished families, progressive activists, the general public, and our three interviewees: a political scientist, a lawyer, and an author. After our thesis fell into place, we read biographies and academic papers about Hine and found that they supported our historical argument. As we started writing our script, we would frequently return to credible databases, like the Library of Congress, which we manually sorted through, analyzing thousands of documents. After our regional contest, we improved on our historical context and found more newspapers and photographs to prove Hine's influence on the American public. Finally, we recorded the voiceover and assembled our documentary.

Our historical argument is as follows: Lewis Wickes Hine, a pioneer of social documentary photography, transformed the movement for child labor reform in the early 20th century. Through his groundbreaking “photo story” technique, he exposed the harsh working conditions that child laborers faced, altering public opinion and gaining widespread support for reform. This marked a turning point in history in the fight against child labor, prompting legislators to address the child labor crisis with the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, a federal law that ended child labor in the United States. The success of Hine’s photographs also set a precedent, solidifying the use of photography as an instrument for social change.

Lewis Hine’s role in enshrining the rights of children on a federal level was astronomically important. After decades under horrid working conditions, Hine gave children a voice, broke them free from the Industrial Revolution’s shackles of exploitation, and provided them the gift of a fulfilling childhood and education. This newfound equality improved the lives of children across the nation and continues to do so today. In addition, Lewis Hine’s innovative methodology has inspired and will continue to inspire activists to use photography to initiate conversations, deliver ultimatums, and make the invisible visible.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Archives

“About this Collection | National Child Labor Committee Collection | Digital Collections.” *Library of Congress*,
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/national-child-labor-committee/about-this-collection/#>.
Accessed 12 February 2024.

This collection contains about five thousand items related to the operations of the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). It comprises many photos taken by Lewis Hine, pamphlets he made, as well as newspaper articles. We used many of these sources in our documentary to show the power of photography in Lewis Hine’s mission to end child labor.

Digital Collection

“Lewis Hine Collection,” Spring 2007,
<https://contentdm.ad.umbc.edu/digital/collection/hinecoll/id/997/>. Accessed 1 January 2024.

This source is a digital collection hosting many of Lewis Hine’s photographs of child laborers. This source was valuable because we found many photographs portraying both the hardships endured by young laborers and the mundane aspects of their daily existence. These photographs were used in our documentary to shed light on the working conditions faced by children during the industrial age.

Rezaei, Alieh, and Walter Rosenblum. "They Fight With Cameras: Walter Rosenblum in World War II From D-Day to Dachau – Albin O. Kuhn Library Gallery." *Albin O. Kuhn Library Gallery*, 26 August 2015, <https://librarygallery.umbc.edu/they-fight-with-cameras-walter-rosenblum-in-world-war-i-from-d-day-to-dachau/>. Accessed 20 February 2024.

This photo collection from the University of Maryland showcases Rosenblum's heart-wrenching photos from World War II. This source helped us to understand how Hine's work directly influenced photographers like Walter Rosenblum, who is known for his photos from World War II.

"Lisa Kristine." *Lisa Kristine*,

<https://lisakristine.com/portfolio-items/freedom-ghana/?portfolioCats=108>. Accessed 11 March 2024.

This source is a collection of photographs by Lisa Kristine, who photographed the lives of marginalized and exploited individuals subjected to hazardous working conditions worldwide. We used these photographs to show how photography still plays a crucial role, even today, in igniting social change and raising awareness for child labor violations.

Digital Library

Bliss, H. L. March 1905, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1817545?seq=2>. Accessed 13 January 2024.

This source is the official U.S. census on child labor that also tracks the working population and accounts for various other factors. This source displayed the state of economic dependence on child labor and showed a tremendous spike in the

employment of children at the dawn of the 19th century. We used this document in our documentary to provide context to help the audience understand the tremendous problem Lewis Hine set out to solve.

Lovejoy, Owen, January 1907,

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1010415.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Ad89cd077cd35f8c7370cb4d83aac6c9a&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1. Accessed 7 February 2024.

This source from the digital library was a report written by the assistant secretary of the National Child Labor Committee. We showed a page from this report in our documentary to illustrate how earlier reports made by the National Child Labor Committee before hiring Lewis Hine mainly used statistical data about child employment, which yielded unsatisfactory results.

Documents

“Keating-Owen Child Labor Act (1916) | National Archives.” *National Archives* |, 8 February 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/keating-owen-child-labor-act>. Accessed 3 February 2024.

This document from the National Archives is the original record of the Keating Owen Act, an attempt to halt child labor nationwide. This document helped us to understand how this act aimed to regulate working hours for children and prohibit the interstate sale of goods produced by child labor. In the documentary, we included a page from this document to illustrate the significance of the legislation.

“Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938.” *Records of Rights*,

<http://recordsofrights.org/records/110/fair-labor-standards-act>. Accessed 2 February 2024.

This is a document containing the official text of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA). It helped us better understand what protections the legislation granted and what aspects of labor the FLSA attempted to regulate, which were similar to the policies that Hine advocated for. We used this source in our documentary to help viewers visualize the bill itself.

Day, William Rufus, and Supreme Court Of The United States. U.S. Reports: Hammer v.

Dagenhart, 247 U.S. 251. 1917. Periodical. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/usrep247251/>.

This source is a majority opinion written for the Supreme Court case Hammer v. Dagenhart. This document helped us to understand how the constitutionality of the Keating-Owen Act was questioned by Roland H Dagenhart. We used this source in our documentary to show that while the Keating Owen Act ultimately failed, Lewis Hine’s impact on society allowed future efforts to succeed.

Government Record

“Federal Register.” *Unblock.federalregister.gov*,

www.ecfr.gov/current/title-29/subtitle-B/chapter-V/subchapter-A/part-553. Accessed 30 Oct. 2023.

This source is a digitized version of the entire Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 from the federal register. This source helped us in gaining a better understanding of the FLSA, particularly its provisions concerning child labor.

Multimedia

Child Labor in the Industrial Revolution. 2010. *Child Labor in the Industrial Revolution*,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2M9i1Wy6IU>. Accessed 6 January 2024.

This source shows numerous videos of child labor in various harsh work settings.

One video shows children working in a spinning mill with dangerous, exposed machinery operating at full speed. We used this in our documentary to show viewers the dangerous and monotonous nature of the work children usually performed, providing the context explaining why Hine's changes were necessary.

“Watch The Fight to End Child Labor Clip | HISTORY Channel.” *The HISTORY Channel*,

<https://www.history.com/videos/the-fight-to-end-child-labor>. Accessed 6 March 2024.

This source is a video detailing general facts about child labor in the early 1900s.

This source provided valuable footage of child labor being performed from the time period, allowing viewers to understand the dangerous and monotonous nature of the jobs that children performed.

Newspapers

The Wilmington morning star. (Wilmington, NC) 4 Feb. 1941, p. 1. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/sn78002169/1941-02-04/ed-1/.

This source from Chronicling America is a newspaper article that recorded the United States v. Darby Lumber Co. decision, which affirmed the government's 1938 decision to pass the Fair Labor Standards Act, and overturned the 1918 Hammer v. Dagenhart decision. We used this article in our documentary to show that the new ruling was a monumental victory for those who fought against

exploitative child labor, showing the impact of Lewis Hine's photography on the public's opinions and ultimately the nation's laws.

Photographs

Labor Leaders, <https://motherjones175.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/childlabor960.jpg>.

Accessed 2 February 2024.

This source is a photo of children beginning to protest and resist their horrible working conditions and lack of education. We used this photo in our documentary to prove that the prevailing sentiment was resoundingly against child labor, showing how public opinion was changed through Hine's photographs.

Shafer, Ronald G. "Frances Perkins, first female Cabinet secretary, managed FDR's first 100 days and New Deal." *The Washington Post*, 14 March 2021,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/03/14/frances-perkins-fdr-100-days-new-deal/>. Accessed 1 March 2024.

This source is a photo of President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the Fair Labor Standards Act. We included this source in our documentary to show the culmination of Lewis Hine's efforts, as his shaping of societal norms eventually led to long-standing federal change.

Hine, Lewis W. *Lewis Hine Self Portrait*. <https://iphf.org/inductees/lewis-hine/>. Accessed 19 January 2024.

This source is a self portrait of Lewis Hine. We use this source in our documentary to help viewers visualize who Lewis Hine was and connect with him, honing in on the fact that one man was able to make a resounding impact on the nation.

Legends of America, 9 November 2021, <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/20th-lewishine/>.

Accessed 2 January 2024.

This source is a photograph of Lewis Hine posing with his camera. We included this photo in our documentary to show viewers how deeply Hine's fame was intertwined with his pictures that shook the American people to their core, a fitting way to end our documentary.

Hine, Lewis. "Lewis Hines - Book, Child Labor & Facts." *Biography (Bio.)*, 2 April 2014, <https://www.biography.com/artist/lewis-hine>. Accessed 8 January 2024.

This source is a photo of Lewis Hine. It helped us visualize a man who often gained the spotlight behind the camera; it attached a face to the famous photographer, aiding our audience in visualizing Hine's face throughout our documentary.

Rosenblum, Walter A. "Walter Rosenblum Self Portrait." *Rosenblum Photography Collection*, 3 June 2009, <https://www.rosenblumphoto.org/about>. Accessed 10 February 2024

This source is a photograph of Walter Rosenblum, known for his heart-wrenching photos from World War II. We showed this photograph in our documentary to help audience members visualize Rosenblum.

"Dorthea Lange." *International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum*, <https://iphf.org/inductees/dorothea-lange/%20Dorothea%20lange%20photo>. Accessed 11 March 2024.

This source is a photograph of Dorthea Lange, a prominent photographer during the Great Depression. We used this photograph in our documentary to show

audience members the woman behind iconic, quintessential depression-era photos, who was heavily influenced by Lewis Hine.

Lange, Dorothea, photographer. Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California. March. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2017762891/>.

This unforgettable, poignant photograph commonly referred to as “Migrant Mother”, was shot by Dorothea Lange, a prominent photographer who worked for the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression. This image helped us understand how other photographers inherited the core tenets of Hine’s method of photography. We included this picture in our documentary to show how Hine’s work in social documentary photography influenced photographers like Dorothea Lange.

Posters

Hine, Lewis Wickes, 1913, https://inquiryunlimited.org/ss_1900s/1913_child_labor/accidents.jpg. Accessed 21 January 2024.

This source is one of Hine’s most powerful posters that shows young children who have suffered horrific injuries during their jobs. This poster was crucial toward our research and documentary because it enlightened us about Hine’s methods of drawing out emotion from his audience through his photographs and messages. We included this poster in our documentary to show how Hine designed posters and published his findings to make an appeal to the general public to stop child labor.

Hine, Lewis Wickes, 1913

https://inquiryunlimited.org/ss_1900s/1913_child_labor/making_human_junk.jpg.

Accessed 21 January 2024.

This source is one of Hine's most famous posters, showing two cycles: a cycle of education and success or continued ignorance and factory labor. This source helped us understand how Hine illustrated the cyclical effects of child labor, showing ordinary citizens that excessive child labor could become a significant impediment to success later in life. We included this poster in our documentary to show how Hine created posters like these to truly turn the tide against child labor.

“0032379 - CARTOON: CHILD LABOR, 1918. 'The Boss: Now, children, all together, three cheers for the Supreme Court!' Cartoon by Art Young on the Supreme Court's decision to declare the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act of the Wilson administration ...” *Granger - Historical Picture Archive*, *The Liberator*, 1918,

<https://www.granger.com/results.asp?image=0032379>. Accessed 10 April 2024.

This source is a political cartoon from a socialist magazine called *The Liberator*. This cartoon shows children cheering for the result of the Supreme Court case *Hammer v. Dagenhart*, which overturned the Keating Owen Act, sending many children back to work across the nation. We used this in our documentary to show the Supreme Court's decision, marking a major regression in the struggle that progressive activists had fought so hard for.

Secondary Sources:

Articles

“The Photographer Who Fought to End Child Labor.” *www.getty.edu*,

www.getty.edu/news/the-photographer-who-fought-to-end-child-labor/.

This source was very helpful in understanding how Lewis Hine’s photos helped to end child labor. This article served as a source to solidify our initial thesis.

Books

Freedman, Russell, 1929-2018. Kids at Work : Lewis Hine and the Crusade against Child Labor. New York :Clarion Books, 1994.

This source is a book on Lewis Hine that showed many of his photographs and also contained a news article detailing the public’s shocked reactions to his photographs. Particularly, this book confirmed our initial thesis by describing a paradigm shift in the societal attitude toward child labor.

Sampsell-Willmann, Kate. *Lewis Hine as Social Critic*. University Press of Mississippi, 2009.

This book revealed important aspects of Hine’s life through his articles, private written exchanges, and the ideas and values behind every single photograph he took. This source really helped us that each of Hine’s photos was a “conversation” that put children as the focal point of these exchanges.

Government Records

Terrell, Ellen. “Research Guides: This Month in Business History: Fair Labor Standards

Act Signed.” *Guides.loc.gov*, Feb. 2021,

[guides.loc.gov/this-month-in-business-history/june/fair-labor-standards-act-si](https://guides.loc.gov/this-month-in-business-history/june/fair-labor-standards-act-signed)

gned.

This source is about the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which was signed in 1938 by President Roosevelt. This source helped us better understand the FLSA and its provisions related to child labor.

Interviews

Fliter, John. Personal interview. 19 January 2024.

During our interview with Dr. John A. Fliter, a political scientist at Kansas State University, we learned about the motivations of the more wealthy factory owners in hiring children, who believed children could not unionize or revolt and were thus easy to control. We used a clip of Dr. Fliter in our documentary, which provided the context for why over 2 million children were employed during the early 1900s.

Rachleff, Peter. Personal interview. 15 January 2024.

Dr. Rachleff, a retired history professor who formerly taught at Macalester College emphasized the importance of Hine’s work as a breakthrough in making exploitative child labor visible to the general public. Dr. Rachleff talked about perception and the inability to sympathize with invisible sufferers and helped to

clearly and concisely articulate the angle we had decided to take with our documentary: to make “the invisible visible.”

Sampsell, Kate. Personal interview. 1 February 2024.

During our interview with Dr. Sampsell, author of the book "Lewis Hine as a Social Critic," we gained insight into the efficacy of Lewis Hine's famous pamphlet called "Making Human Junk," where he appealed to society to stop child labor. Dr. Sampsell also provided insight into how Hine used photography to turn the tide against child labor.

Journal Papers

Jessop, Miranda. “Focusing on “The Human Document”: Lewis Hine and the Role of Photography in Child Labor Reform in Early Twentieth-Century America.” *BYU ScholarsArchive*, 2018,
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=thetean>.
Accessed 9 January 2024.

This journal paper from Brigham Young University analyzes different aspects of Lewis Hine’s works and their ultimate effect on labor legislation. This source analyzed the effects of his advocacy on the passage of the Keating-Owen Act, which solidified a major part of our thesis.

Legal Summaries

“Congress can't kid around with child labor law (Hammer v. Dagenhart).” *American Bar*

Association,

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/law_students/resources/on-demand/quimbee-hammer-v-dagenhart/. Accessed 14 April 2024.

This source is a summary of the reasoning behind the Supreme Court decision *Hammer v. Dagenhart*. This provided the legal reasoning behind the overturning of the Keating Owen act, which was a short term setback in the fight against child labor. This schism influenced our script as it allowed us to incorporate multiple perspectives and provide the justification for the overturning of the Keating Owen act.

Multimedia

Rosenblum, Nina, director. *America and Lewis Hine*. 1984, [https://tubitv.com/movies/668523/america-and-lewis-hine - movie](https://tubitv.com/movies/668523/america-and-lewis-hine-movie).

This source is a video detailing Hine's photographs that he took across the nation. This source was valuable because it contained an interview with Walter Rosenblum, an American photographer best known for his photographs of World War II.

Music

Pixabay, <https://pixabay.com/sound-effects/search/music%20background/>. Accessed 10 April 2024.

Pixabay offers a diverse selection of royalty-free tracks suitable for enhancing multimedia projects, providing users with quality and versatility without

copyright restrictions. We used this source for background music in our documentary.

Video Editing Software

“CapCut | All-in-One Video Editor.” CapCut. <http://capcut.com>.

Capcut is a specialized video editor designed specifically for the web. We used this software to edit our documentary, add special effects, and background music.