**Child Labor in the Industrial Revolution: Lewis Hine Assignment**

*Find the Lewis Hine photography link on the website. It should be highlighted in Red.*

*Read this background first. Then complete the worksheet using the photographs on the website.*

Background:

Armed with a thesis -“child labor harms children and my job is to expose it for the purpose of ending it” – Lewis Hine traveled extensively on assignment to see what conditions were like in different types of work. He praised when he saw no exploitation, and he documented where it was rife.

An important question to think of when looking at these photographs, is “Where was the photographer standing?” Often, Hine could not obtain permission to photograph inside factories, so many of his child labor images are of a group of variously aged individuals standing in front of a mill building. When he did get inside, we need to ask how and why? As Hine became better known and the NCLC more effective in publicizing the evils of child labor, he often employed subterfuge to gain access. For example, he would claim to be an insurance or postcard photographer and would ask to photograph a machine with its operator (a child) in the frame — supposedly to gauge the size of the machine — in order to capture children at work and to disprove the oft-repeated excuse that children were “just visiting” their parents.

Another interesting question is how he managed to take photographs without flash photography. Hine needed strong natural light, with a very long exposure (on a tripod), or lit with some source of artificial light. Hine became an expert at a very tricky (and attention-getting) light source, magnesium flares. Candid photography was not possible inside dim factories or mines. Because he needed light, his photos were not candid – they were carefully and strategically posed and staged. Does this make the topic and the power of his photographs any less real?

Perhaps one of the most important things to consider about Lewis Hine’s photography, therefore, is exactly what in the image, and what has been left out? Hine usually printed his images full frame. He used glass plates to develop each image. They were tricky and cumbersome to use. Hine had one shot to get it right. Even after he started using celluloid film, his negatives were large, single sheet, and carefully crafted. Again, Hine’s images were rarely candid; most of them were posed. Everything that is in one of his photographs is in there because Hine wanted it, and everything that is missing is absent because Hine left it out.

One question many ask about Hine’s pictures of working children is: Why do the children often seem to be happy or, at least, stoical? Because of the similar way he treated immigrants and refugees on other assignments, it is clear that Hine’s emphasis was almost always on the positive in any situation. And in any case, if the children were already beyond help, then there would little incentive for philanthropists and/or Congress to step in to aid them. Hine depicted resilient boys and girls in conditions that, if went unchecked, would eventually destroy their chances for productive and fulfilling lives.

Hine’s large camera allowed him to photograph at child height, but he did so even when the child was so extremely small that he had to kneel to focus at eye level. He wanted the viewer to see the children as he did; as individual human beings with sweet, developing personalities in need of protection and not as propaganda objects. It is at this juncture that Hine’s ability to infuse his images with his own ideas about society becomes important for the student of history. He became famous because his pictures were forceful tools in a political fight. They were so useful because they revealed the humanity of the children. Hine did not look down at people, especially children. His philosophical perspective led to a visual choice: he was on his knees, and eye-to-eye, even with the littlest child.

Perhaps the thorniest issue surrounding analysis of Hine images is the matter of captioning. *Did Hine write a particular title, or did an editor?* Since much of Hine’s work was done for one or another reform organization, he did not control the reproduction of his images. Yet, he did claim his images constituted what we today would call intellectual property, long before photographers routinely received credit in bylines. Most of Hine’s extant writings can be found in two archival areas: correspondence and notes on photographs, including original captions. In recent years, the collections that house Hine images have done a very good job of uploading Hine’s original notes on his images, often written in his hand on the back or in a corresponding list. Most of Hine’s published images, except those in *Men at Work*, his only published book, carry the caption of an editor (usually from *The Survey*) or art historian and publicist Elizabeth McCausland, who assisted Hine in preparing his 1938 retrospective for the Brooklyn Museum (then the Riverside Museum). A little research can tell you which captions were from Hine’s own notes. Armed with the correct caption, the photograph can yield more information about the subject and Hine’s original intent in making the image.

Hine’s photographs were widely circulated in magazines, newspapers and journals by the National Child Labor Committee, his employer. The Progressives would have been very much aware of them, the educated general public somewhat less aware, and the rest of the general public mostly unaware. But mill owners and politicians would have taken notice right away. Although there were many organizations and activists working to get child labor laws passed at the time, Hine’s photographs are generally recognized as the most important reason why states began to strengthen child labor laws, and why Congress passed the Owen-Keating Child Labor Act in 1916. Unfortunately, the law was ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in 1918, because it appeared to overstep the authority of Congress in regulating interstate commerce.