Lewis Wickes Hine (1874-1940)

Born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Hine studied sociology at the University of Chicago before moving to New York in 1901 to work at the Ethical Culture School, where he adopted photography to enhance his lessons. By 1904, Hine began to photograph immigrants, people experiencing poverty, and the exploited as a means of studying and describing the social conditions faced by many. These images, along with his pictures of harsh urban conditions published in the Pittsburgh Survey (1907-08), brought his work to the attention of the National Child Labor Committee. He served as its official photographer from 1911 to 1916. He later traveled with the Red Cross, documenting the effects of World War I. After returning to the United States in 1922, he accepted commercial assignments, produced another series on Ellis Island immigrants, worked on Works Progress Administration projects, and photographed the construction of the Empire State Building (1930-31). Hine died impoverished at the age of 66, despite the enduring legacy of his compositions and significant contributions to social reform.

Art has always been a vital force in spurring social change by bringing light to issues. One of the most notable figures in the United States to advocate for social progress through their artistic practice was Lewis Wickes Hine (1874–1940), the father of American documentary photography. This exhibition explores the most enduring topics photographed by Hine during his three-decade career: the immigrant experience, crusade against child labor, the Pittsburgh Survey, and the construction of the Empire State Building. His quest to shine a light on the dark underbelly of society took him all over the United States and Europe, where he often put himself in physical danger to capture abhorrent working and living conditions. Hine later shifted focus to capture the positives of working life in the United States. Motivated by the New Deal and the introduction of social welfare programs, Hine's captivating photos from this period document the country's recovery from the crippling Depression era. Hine's focus on the dignity of the American worker in the light of the Machine Age would last a quarter century, culminating in his magnificent photographs of the construction of the Empire State Building. This exhibition of Hine's work underscores the vital role artists play in documenting their society to raise awareness and advocate for widespread change.

Ellis Island

Between 1900 and 1915, over 15 million immigrants arrived in the United States through Ellis Island from Europe, Syria, Turkey, the Caribbean, and other countries. Just as it is today, immigration was a common topic of public debate. While some viewed it as beneficial for economic growth, others cited potential negative impacts on society, including the fear of immigrants taking jobs from citizens and not assimilating into American culture.

While teaching at New York's Ethical Culture School, Hine realized the power of photography as an educational tool. His initial class excursions were to Ellis Island in 1905, where he taught his students how to use photography to document and understand the world around them. These early experiences provided Hine with the opportunity to refine his artistic approach, emphasizing thoughtful framing and composition. While some of his descriptions are outdated, Hine deviated from his contemporaries by avoiding common, harmful stereotypes of immigrants and by not highlighting his sitters' foreignness. He sought to humanize his subjects and draw parallels between those newly arrived and his middle- and upper-class, white American audience.

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Italian Family Looking for Lost Baggage, 1905

Vintage gelatin print

Candid pictures from the early 20th century are rare because of the limitations of photography equipment at the time. In addition to each photograph requiring several minutes to take, Hine and his assistants dealt with language barriers and the sheer magnitude of people passing through Ellis Island at the time (about 5,000 immigrants per day at its peak). Hine's decisive compositions and posing place the focus on the complicated, human feelings of anxiety, hope, exhaustion, and anticipation, as these men, women, and children stood at the way station between their old world and a new one.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Immigrants Detained at Ellis Island Take Time to be Happy, 1905

Vintage gelatin print

Immigration officials and doctors processed new arrivals quickly, working through checks that assessed their health and paperwork. Any sign of illness required the person to be detained in the sick wards. Officials also detained unescorted women and children, stowaways, anarchists, Bolsheviks, criminals, and those judged to be "immoral." Roughly 20% of immigrants inspected at Ellis Island were temporarily detained.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Immigrants/Happy Hungarian Mother/Joys and Sorrows of Ellis Is[land], 1905

Vintage gelatin print

At the turn of the century, the flow of European immigrants to the United States shifted from western and northern Europe to central and southern Europe. Those who made the arduous journey were lured by the promise of economic opportunities. The country needed cheap labor to maintain and expand its industrial potential, with companies recruiting workers from Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Poland. Most found jobs or employment as unskilled laborers in steel mills, foundries, and coal mines in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, and Illinois.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

A Syrian Arab, 1926

Modern reproduction

The Quota Act of 1921 set temporary monthly quotas that limited admission of each nationality to 3% of its representation in the 1910 Census. This act and other laws were driven by nativist and racist sentiments that sought to restrict immigration from "inferior" regions, including southern and eastern Europe and Asia. The Immigration Act of 1924 established stricter quotas, capping the total number of immigrants from outside the Western Hemisphere at about 358,000 annually. This image captures the face of one of the more than 164,000 arrivals who were processed through Ellis Island in 1926.

New York Public Library, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

An Albanian Woman from Italy, 1905

Vintage gelatin print

At the Ethical Culture School in New York, Hine encouraged his teenage students to observe how other people in their communities lived and brought them to Ellis Island to see arriving immigrants. "At times it looked like a costume ball," he wrote, "with the multicolored, many-styled national costumes." Here, an Albanian woman from Italy is presented in her best clothes, which appear clean and pressed. There is little evidence that she's just experienced a long, arduous journey across an ocean in the unventilated, dirty, and windowless environment of a ship.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Climbing into the Land of Promise, 1905

Vintage gelatin print

Hine carefully curated this powerful image of immigrants waiting for their passports to be checked. Wearing heavy coats, paperwork in hand, they climb a congested staircase in the process of becoming American citizens. Hine juggled a large, awkward camera while manipulating a crude device loaded with flash powder to compose this gripping picture of hope, confusion, and excitement.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Slovak Immigrant Sleeping, 1907

Vintage gelatin print

Hine captioned this image: “Beds, three tiers high, were still not sufficient to accommodate the 5,000 immigrants who arrived daily. Many, like this young woman, were forced to sleep on benches, chairs, or on the floor.”

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

The Madonna of Ellis Island (Russian Family), 1905

Vintage gelatin print

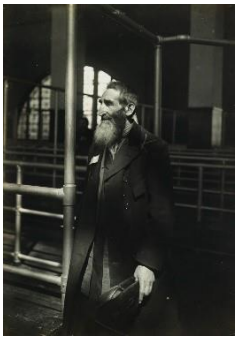
Hine carefully positioned his subjects for this photograph, evoking Italian Renaissance altarpieces featuring the Madonna and Christ child. This photograph condenses a modern reality and a religious story into a single photographic frame. By comparing immigrant mothers to widely known images of the “Madonna” figure, Hine encouraged viewers to feel a powerful, immediate emotional connection and sympathy for the sitters.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Raphael, *Small Cowper Madonna*, c. 1505.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940



Young Russian Jewess, 1905

Hebrew Patriarch, 1905

Vintage gelatin print

From 1880 to 1920, more than three million Jewish people living in the lands ruled by Russia—including Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine—moved en masse to the United States. Instead of accentuating their foreignness, Hine chose to produce a sensitive observation of two tired yet dignified individuals. However, he does not provide the sitters' names. In his Ellis Island photography, Hine rarely included the sitter's name or personal information. His decision to use a broad descriptor in the captions relied on the experience of one individual to represent many.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Picturing Class

Hine spent time in tenements, boarding houses, orphanages, and convalescent homes to reveal the poverty and social injustices that were invisible to his audience. Approximately 2.3 million people lived in tenements in New York City, roughly two-thirds of the city's population. Hine sought to showcase the poor living conditions in these spaces, connecting them to the equally grim working conditions many workers and immigrants faced outside the home. His images revealed the crowded tenements and slum conditions that left many susceptible to becoming unhoused. Hine's empathetic view of the working class sprang from his own blue-collar beginnings in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Before becoming a schoolteacher, he worked at an upholstery factory, a clothing store, a water filter company, and a local bank where (in his words) he rose to the level of "supervising sweeper." While Hine's background made him sympathetic to his subjects, his own trajectory as an educated white man allowed him to stay removed from the more extreme hardships of the immigrants and impoverished children he photographed. Some scholars have noted that Hine's work relies on this separation, presenting audiences in higher social classes with composed and sanitized images of a reality they do not need to face in its entirety.

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Scott's Run, WV. Johnson Family—Father unemployed, 1937

Modern reproduction

The Great Depression, unemployment, poverty, and the effects of the Dust Bowl ravaged the country in the 1930s. Franklin D. Roosevelt established the New Deal to address widespread economic hardship. Hine was hired as a photographer by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), traveling across the country to document the working class in their homes and at their jobs.

National Archives at College Park, Still Pictures Records Section

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Living Quarters of Worker's Family in NY Tenement, 1910

Vintage gelatin print

At the turn of the century, more than half the population of New York City, and most immigrants, lived in tenement houses: narrow, low-rise apartment buildings that were usually grossly overcrowded by their landlords. It was common for a family of 10 to live in a poorly lit, under-ventilated, 325-square-foot apartment. A 1902 report by the Tenement House Departments notes that "tenement conditions are so bad as to be indescribable in print."

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Young Girl Washing Dishes, c. 1910

Tubercular Victim in Bed, c. 1910

Vintage gelatin print

Tuberculosis was one of the leading causes of death in the United States during the 19th century. Due to housing and public health reform efforts, the number of deaths in New York City declined in the 1910s. While wealthier populations could afford to avoid the most disease-ridden areas, crowded older tenements remained high-risk zones for those without the financial means to leave. The development of antibiotics in the 1950s eventually eliminated the threat of disease for those with access to medication.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Tenement Madonna, c. 1915

Vintage gelatin print

Italian Mother, NY Tenement, 1915

Vintage gelatin print

Although his photographs were meant above all to have a social impact, Hine's tenement Madonnas exemplified his artistic ambitions. The careful poses of the mothers and their children take inspiration from works by Italian Renaissance artists.

While some of his images depicted struggling immigrants to inspire pity, here Hine seeks to present his viewers with a relatable, idealized scene of familial closeness.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Hot Day on Lower East Side ("Beane Soup"), New York, c. 1908

Kindling, New York, Italian Quarter, 1910

Guns for Sale at a Pawnbroker's Shop in a Disreputable District of Nashville, 1910

Vintage gelatin print

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Slide, Kelly, Slide! Sand-lot Bush-leaguers in a Newark Playground c. 1910

Vintage gelatin print

Hine captured a group of young boys in a rare moment of play during a neighborhood baseball game. In crowded tenement housing, children played in cramped hallways, on tenement rooftops, or on busy streets. There was rarely a clean, safe place for children to gather and socialize.

While some believe this image depicts a 19-year-old George Herman “Babe” Ruth (second from right) when he was a member of the Baltimore Orioles minor league ball club, the photograph was likely taken in 1910, before Babe joined the Orioles. Hine insisted on keeping his negatives so he could use them as stock for future projects.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

New York Park, c. 1910

Panhandler, c. 1910

Vintage gelatin print

Homelessness became an increasingly visible urban issue in the late 19th century. It stemmed from a confluence of several factors, namely deep-seated urban poverty, mass immigration, and a lack of social safety nets. Like his work in outlawing child labor, Hine aimed to raise public awareness, and images like *Panhandler* contributed to early movements in housing reform.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Study of a Colored Child, a Beneficiary of the Red Cross Drought Relief Work in Mississippi, 1930-1931

Modern reproduction

This image of a young boy with a grapefruit is part of a series documenting the American Red Cross relief efforts during the 1930 Mississippi drought, which was part of the broader Dust Bowl crisis. Coupled with the Great Depression, this drought devastated the agricultural industry. While many in the region were impacted, Black sharecropper families faced greater displacement, land loss, and limited access to aid as resources were frequently administered by local white plantation owners.

Library of Congress, National Child Labor Committee Collection

Lewis Wickes Hine

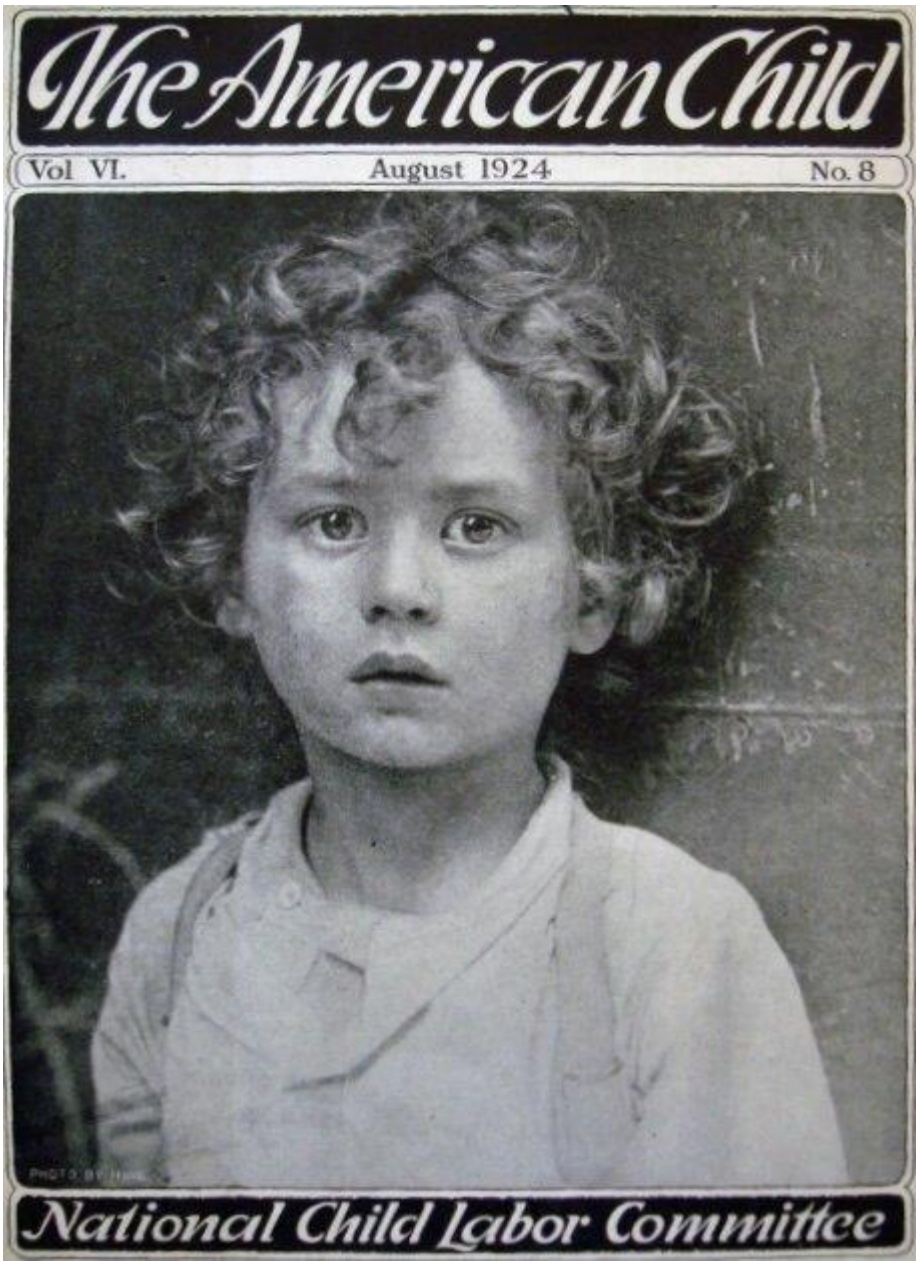
American, 1874–1940

Paris Gamin, c. 1918

Vintage gelatin print

Early photojournalists often circumvented reality in their efforts to create emotionally charged images. This image of an angelic curly-haired boy, purportedly taken in France after World War I, appears on the 1924 cover of *The American Child*. Originally believed to be from Hine's time with the American Red Cross, recent research suggests the sitter was costumed and staged, a fictional construct. While today's photojournalistic ethical standards emphasize factual representation, Hine and his audience would not have considered the image dishonest but instead serving a larger symbolic truth.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg



National Child Labor Committee, *The American Child,* Vol. VI, No. 8, August 1924.

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Family Making Paper Flowers, 1905

Vintage gelatin print

Hine photographed this family as they sat at their kitchen table, making paper flowers by the light of a kerosene lamp. He reported: “Angelica is 3 years old. She pulls apart the petals, inserts the center, and glues it to the stem, making 540 flowers a day for 5 cents.”

Many immigrant families worked at home, mending garments or hand-assembling machinery. They worked similar hours to those working outside the home and would often stay inside for days on end to meet deadlines.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Crusading Against Child Labor

To Hine, labor was a double-edged sword. He felt work could be empowering, instilling pride and a sense of purpose. But in the service of unchecked industrial growth, labor could be physically and emotionally debilitating and dehumanizing, particularly when children were deprived of their childhood. Child workers were unable to attend school and had very little free time to socialize or play. These factors, as well as the dangerous conditions of workplaces, led to severe and lasting impacts on children's physical, mental, social, and economic well-being.

By 1900, more than one in five children between the ages of 10 and 15 were employed. Hine started working for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) in 1908, sneaking his camera into mills, canning companies, glassworks, and other factories to document the exploitation of children. To gain access, Hine disguised himself as a fire inspector, a postcard vendor, a Bible salesman, and even an industrial photographer documenting factory machinery. Over 16 years, Hine took more than 5,000 photos of child laborers across the country. Hine's widely reproduced images of underage labor were the principal tool used by the NCLC to lobby states for child labor laws. Child labor was deeply entrenched in the industries of western Pennsylvania, and local lawmakers lagged the rest of the nation in banning child labor and requiring compulsory education. Pennsylvania passed its most comprehensive child labor act in 1915, which still allowed children to work up to a 9-hour day and a 52-hour week. Congress finally outlawed the practice at the national level in 1938.

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Sadie Pfeifer, a Cotton Mill Spinner, Lancaster, SC, 1908

Vintage gelatin print

This is Hine’s most iconic image of child labor. It depicts nine-year-old Sarah “Sadie” Pfeifer, focused on her work as she patrols the long aisles of monumental machinery. Bright sunlight streams through the windows, illuminating the depressing, austere conditions in which children toil. Sadie worked eleven-hour shifts and was paid 48 cents a day. She worked at the mill her entire life, dying of a stroke at 51 years old.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Carrying-in Boy, Glassworks, Alexandria, VA. Works on Day Shift One Week and Night Shift Next Week, 1911

Vintage gelatin print

Pictured is Rob Kidd, age 12, one of many young boys working in sweltering temperatures at this glass factory. Investigators for the U.S. Commissioners of Labor found that the average indoor temperature on the factory floor over the year varied between 100 and 130 degrees Fahrenheit. The National Weather Service classifies a heat index of 103-124 Fahrenheit as dangerous for long-term exposure, due to the high risk of heat-related illnesses.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

All These Small Boys, 1909

Vintage gelatin print

Hine's full caption for this image reads:
"All these small boys, and more, work in the Chace Cotton Mill, Burlington, Vt. Many of the smallest ones have been there from one to three years. Only a few could speak English. These are the names of some:- Lahule Julian, Walter Walker, Herman Rotte, Arsone Lussier, Addones Oduet, Arthur Oduet, Alder Campbell, Eddie Marcotte, John Lavigne, Jo Bowdeon, Phil Lecryer, Joseph Granger. A small mill. Location: Burlington, Vermont."

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Fanny Breto. Said 9 Years Old. Wareham, MA, 1911

Modern reproduction

Many of the families that worked cranberry bogs were migrants who traveled seasonally for work. Children would work alongside their parents, missing weeks of school. The male head of the household received the whole family's wages. Many migrant families were placed in crowded, dirty shacks near the bogs. Most of Hine's subjects from his time in the Massachusetts bogs were of Portuguese origin, including a large contingent from Portugal's West African island colony of Cape Verde.

Library of Congress, National Child Labor Committee Collection

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Oyster Shuckers at Apalachicola, FL, 1909

Modern reproduction

In coastal regions, young boys were employed during peak seasons to harvest and process oysters. During a three-month tour of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, Hine was shocked to see children as young as three years old employed by seafood canneries. Children worked long hours in physically demanding conditions to assist their families, often contributing to the household's income. The reliance on child labor in these industries illuminates how deeply ingrained the practice was in the United States.

Library of Congress, National Child Labor Committee Collection

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Roland, 11-year-old Negro Newsboy, Newark, N.J., 1924

Modern reproduction

In American towns and cities, one of the most visible forms of child labor was in the so-called "street trades," which included selling newspapers, shining shoes, and acting as messengers. Most urban children worked as newsies for at least a short period. Income was not always guaranteed, as they had to purchase the papers upfront and were often not able to return unsold papers. Newsies were considered “vendors,” which excluded them from major protections, including the landmark Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

Library of Congress, National Child Labor Committee Collection

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

The "Manly Art of Self-Defense" Newsboys' Protective Association. Cincinnati, OH, 1908

Modern reproduction

This event, hosted by the Newsboys' Protective Association, taught newsies how to protect themselves at work. These photos highlighted the dangerous nature of the newspaper trade, which often required small children to be out on the streets unattended, late at night or very early in the morning. These jobs also put children at moral risk, leaving them vulnerable to corruption because of their proximity to drinking and gambling establishments.

Library of Congress, National Child Labor Committee Collection

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Newsies at the Brooklyn Bridge Starting Out at 1AM in a Blizzard on a Sunday, 1908

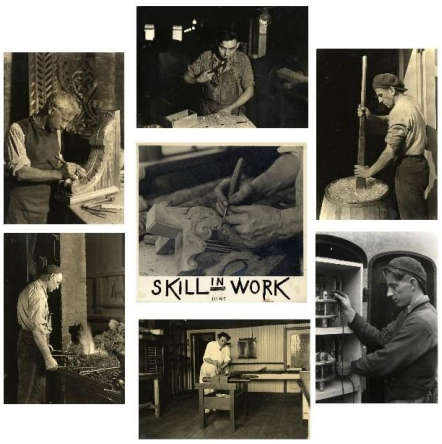
Vintage gelatin print

While documenting the working conditions of children for the National Child Labor Committee, Hine often had to capture photos in dark interiors and at night. He was able to generate a “flash” of light by burning magnesium powder, often in combination with other chemicals. Here, Hine uses flash-light to illuminate a group of young boys, preparing to head out to the streets with their stacks of newspapers. None of the children are dressed for the extreme weather they are about to face.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940



Craftsman in Brass, New York, c. 1920

Furniture Maker, c. 1920

Blacksmith and Skilled Ironworker, 1925

Binding Good Books, with a Press and Plow Machine, c. 1920

Electrician, c. 1920

Skill in Work, c. 1920

Vintage gelatin print

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Group of Dockworkers Enjoying [a] Smoke at Lunch Hour, c. 1938

Vintage gelatin print

This image was taken as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA)’s National Research Project. Hine documented workers in various industries to show the resilience and importance of human labor during the Great Depression (1929-39). The concept of "laborers at rest" in Hine's WPA work underscored his respect for the individual worker. These images celebrated moments of pause and respite, conveying the humanity of his subjects rather than focusing solely on their output.

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Steel & Smoke

Hine's focus on the immigrant experience did not end at Ellis Island. In 1907, he joined the Pittsburgh Survey (1907-8), a comprehensive socioeconomic analysis of one of the large stand most industrialized American cities. Funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and organized by the Charities Publication Committee under the direction of journalist Paul Underwood Kellogg, the study identified the city's social and environmental problems. The organizers used their findings to advocate for civic and industrial reform. Hine's and his colleagues' photographs illustrated a landmark 6-volume set of scholarly writings by progressive economists, historians, attorneys, social workers, and sociologists. As seen through Hine's lens, the Pittsburgh steel and coal that supplied the backbone of America's industry was forged by immigrants, now proud Americans.

At the same time, Hine's images included in the survey are his most haunting—illuminating the dark tunnels and grimy breaker rooms of the nation's coal mines. In Pennsylvania, the largest coal-producing state, thousands of boys as young as 14 were legally employed in the mines. Thousands more underage boys, some only 9, worked illegally, most commonly as breaker boys. The state's child labor laws were ineffective because they required no binding proof of a

worker’s age. The lack of government-run welfare programs and the limited availability of private charities forced many families to send every eligible family member to work.

One interviewee of the survey noted that working in the mines as a child “was very scary, believe me. Really, I don’t know how in the world I got the nerve to go there in the first place.
You didn’t dare say anything. You didn’t dare quit, because it was something to have a job—at eight cents an hour!”

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

***Young Boy, Steel Worker, Pittsburgh, PA,* c. 1908**

***Young Trackwalker, Pennsylvania Railroad*, 1920**

***Young German Steel Worker, Pittsburgh, PA,* 1908**

***German Steel Worker, Pittsburgh*, c. 1908**

***Italian Railroad Worker Joe, Pennsylvania Railroad, on his Long Patrol, Looking for Flaws in the Miles of Tracks,* 1920**

***Irish Steel Worker, Pittsburgh,* 1908**

Vintage gelatin print

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Steel Workers at Russian Boarding House, Homestead, PA, 1908

Vintage gelatin print

Immigrants helped fuel the rapid growth of the steel industry in Pittsburgh. More than four out of five of the common laborers in Carnegie's Allegheny County steel plants were Eastern Europeans. They were the ideal labor base because they often arrived in the United States alone with the intention of returning to their home countries and were willing to work long hours for low wages. These factors, as well as their isolation from local workers, made them unreceptive to labor unions.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Evensong—Slovak Steel Worker in Homestead, PA Entertains his Boarders after the Day's Work, 1909

Vintage gelatin print

Many immigrants lived in boarding houses—temporary, affordable housing often run by immigrant women. These homes not only provided housing, food, and laundry services, but also opportunities to socialize. Over time, immigrant communities formed into tight-knit, distinct clusters and settled in neighborhoods near the mills, including Braddock, Duquesne, Homestead, Munhall, and Rankin.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

NIGHT SCENE IN A SLAVIC LODGING HOUSE.

Three men in the far bed, two in the others, twelve in the room. In some of these lodgings day workers sleep nights in beds occupied by night workers in the daytime.

Lewis Hine, *Night Scene in a Slavic Lodging House*, from Paul Underwood Kellog, ed., *Wage-Earning Pittsburgh,* vol. 6. New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1914.

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Little Orphan Annie in a Pittsburgh Institution, 1908

Vintage gelatin print

Over time, this poignant image has become associated with the fictional character of Little Orphan Annie, introduced in 1924. The small girl here embodies the struggles of children who grew up without families to care for them. Her image reminds us of the many real-life stories behind the fictional character. Unlike the cheerful Annie, who found a loving home in the end, many of the children Hine photographed faced uncertain futures, emphasizing the need for societal reform and greater support systems.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Engineman, PA, c. 1924

Vintage gelatin print

In 1932, Hine published *Men at Work*, which celebrated the individual (male) worker's interaction with machines in the modern world. This image of an engineer in Pennsylvania is followed by a quote from the subject: "Forty years in the cab, and I've never killed anything, human or animal." Hine notes, "Such a record is the pride of this engineer."

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Drivers Going Home from Mine Macdonald, WV, 1908

Modern reproduction

Macdonald was a company town, founded by the MacDonald Collieries Company to house workers and provide infrastructure for the company's operations. Black workers were a large part of the labor force, experiencing both opportunities for economic advancement and persistent racial discrimination.

Drivers were often young boys who used mules or horses to pull coal carts through the mines. Here, Hine captures three young boys, covered in soot, riding home after a grueling day of work. It was common for workers to have 10–12-hour shifts, six days a week.

Library of Congress, National Child Labor Committee Collection

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Miners in a Coal Car, c. 1920

A Young Leader and a Driver, Shaft #6, 1911

Railroad Inspector, c. 1920

Vintage gelatin print

Hine took dozens of photographs in Pittston, a mining town with a large Italian immigrant community. Among its members was Pasquale “Patsy” Salvo, who emigrated from Montedoro, Italy via Ellis Island in 1906. At the time Hine captured his image (center), Salvo was 18 years old. He became a naturalized citizen in 1915 and later served in the United States military during World War I.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

A View from the Pennsylvania Breaker, South Pittston, PA, 1911

Modern reproduction

Breaker boys were stationed at the top of coal chutes in the mines. As the coal quickly cascaded through, they picked out pieces of slate and stone that wouldn't burn. The long hours and physical demands of monotonous manufacturing work threatened to impair children's development and long-term health, as did the hazardous environment in which they labored. During a day in the mines, Hine witnessed "two breaker boys fell or were carried into the coal chute, where they were smothered to death."

Library of Congress, National Child Labor Committee Collection

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

First Aid to the Injured: Coalminer in Safety Helmet, D.L. & W. Colliery near Nanticoke, PA, c. 1924

Vintage gelatin print

The worker for the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Colliery wears a Draeger Oxygen Helmet made for deep-sea diving. He is charged with rescuing injured coal miners. Hine wrote, “The need for and the presence of these rescue outfits is a strong argument against the employment of young boys.” The National Mine Rescue Association was chartered in 1924 in Leisenring, PA, to promote safety and mine rescue training.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Men, Women, & Machines

In 1919, Hine's photography shifted from a gritty documentary style to what he termed "interpretative photography." This was in part due to his change in employment status. He left his full-time position at the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) in 1918 over a salary dispute and began freelancing to support his family. These personal circumstances coincided with a larger shift in society that moved away from reform and towards new strategies for managing workers. As the labor movement progressed in the second quarter of the 20th century, companies sought ways to inspire workers' pride in their accomplishments to cultivate cooperation and loyalty to the company. Hine's "work portraits" sought to raise the stature of industrial workers, who were increasingly diminished by the massive new machinery that increased productivity and replaced the need for human hands. Despite his continued concern for the worker, Hine's artistic approach, which included hand-selected and precisely posed models, underscored the harmony between the laboring human body and machine. In a letter, Hine noted the change in tone of his photographs and his hopes that these works would appeal to management. He states, "...there will be plenty of progressive industries ready to pay the freight for this kind of publicity and morale stuff" (1921). Hine's new lens eventually paid off. Between 1923 and 1927, the most regular publisher of his photographs was Western Electric News, a company-published magazine for employees.

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Man with Micrometer Measuring a Shaft to a Thousandth of an Inch, 1920

Vintage gelatin print

Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Powerhouse Mechanic, 1920-1921

Vintage gelatin print

Hine’s photograph of a mechanic in a Pennsylvania power plant celebrates the worker as a noble contributor to industry. The picture’s perfect union of mechanics and machines equates human muscle with industrial strength. Hine carefully positioned the man within the curves of the steam line and cylinder head. Striking a coiled pose for the camera, the worker grips his wrench, but close inspection reveals that it does not connect fully to the nut.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Man Working on Engine at the Manual Training and Industrial School for Colored Youth in Bordentown, NJ, c. 1935

Modern reproduction

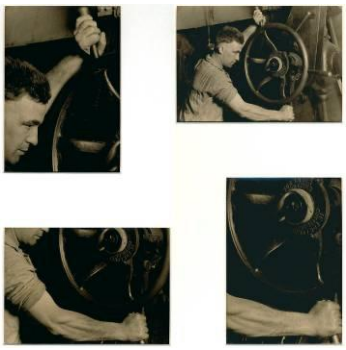
In *Men at Work* (1932), Hine states:
“We call this the Machine Age. But the more machines we use the more do we need real men to make and direct them.”

This work is part of a series taken at Bordentown School in New Jersey, a key institution for Black vocational and industrial education during segregation.

Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940



Tire Maker at the Control Wheel of a Great Calendar-making Auto Tires, Pennsylvania Rubber Co., c. 1920

Vintage gelatin print

Hine wrote of this work:
“The entire photo-study, made as an industrial design, although it is a unit and does not give the impression that it is made up of several pictures, I found could be split up, advantageously, into a number of smaller units.” He referred to the top-left detail as “the more human note,” while the two details on the bottom merging “more with the machine design.”

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Man with Typesetter, c. 1920

Typists, c. 1920

Women at a Modern Automatic Silk Loom, NJ, 1921

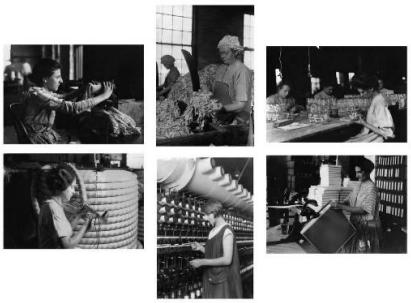
Skilled Mechanic in Large Machine Shop, 1920

Vintage gelatin print

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Women’s Work

At the turn of the century, most women contributed to the family economy through housework, but the number of women working for wages was steadily increasing. By 1910, one in four women over the age of 14 were wage earners. Age, race, ethnicity, class, geography, economic circumstances, and family situation all affected the options available. While a select few might secure “skilled” jobs (such as stenography, bookkeeping, and roles in manufacturing), most working women had “unskilled” jobs in a factory (such as tending machines, sorting feathers, or rolling tobacco). In factories, women’s work exploited the stereotype that women were "naturally” suited for certain types of tedious, repetitive, and delicate tasks. Industrial work was considered a valued position that was almost exclusively open to white and European immigrant women. Black women and non-European immigrants were excluded, often finding jobs in the less-regulated domestic sector, working as maids, nannies, cooks, or laundresses. Women working in factories faced long hours and dangerous working conditions, often without breaks. It is likely that many women, whether they worked in factories or domestic settings, still had to manage cooking, cleaning, and dependents after a long day of work. The lack of government social assistance programs forced many women to take dangerous or difficult jobs.



Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

***Young Girl in Mill Knitting Stockings*, c. 1920**

***Cutting Rags for Paper at the American Writing Paper Co. in Mt. Holyoke, MA*, c. 1920**

***Women Painting Decorative Glass Tumblers*, c. 1920**

***Telephone Worker with Western Electric Splice Cable*, 1920**

***Young Woman at Automated Loom*, c. 1920**

***Young Woman Making Paper Boxes*, c. 1913**

Vintage gelatin print

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940



Scrublady, New York, 1920

Woman Sweeping, c. 1920

Young Worker in a Paper-box Factory, c. 1920

Vintage gelatin print

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Higginbotham Baby Stays at Home with Negro Nurse. Father and Mother Work in West Point Cotton Mill, MS, 1911

Modern reproduction

Pervasive racial discrimination in most industries limited economic opportunities for Black women, forcing them to find work as nannies and housekeepers. Black women filled the gap left by white women who increasingly worked outside the home along with their husbands and older children. Domestic labor was isolated, undervalued, and unregulated. Additionally, many faced racist treatment from their employers.

Library of Congress, National Child Labor Committee Collection, LOT 7479, v. 3, no. 2017-A [P&P]

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Washer Woman, New York City, c. 1908

Vintage gelatin print

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Old Woman Making Cigars, Tampa, FL, c. 1909

Vintage gelatin print

The cigar industry in Tampa dates to 1886, and the city was considered the cigar capital of the world during the early 20th century. Women frequently worked at stripping the tobacco leaves, a job that required speed but little training. The majority of people working in these factories were Cuban, Italian, and Spanish immigrants. The district where the factories were located and where the largely immigrant workers lived is now the trendy historic neighborhood Ybor City.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Constructing a Landmark: The Empire State Building

Hine continued to focus on labor for the remainder of his career. During the Great Depression (1929-1939), he contemplated retiring to upstate New York “where there is more underfoot than overhead.” He ultimately remained in the city to document the floor-by-floor construction of the Empire State Building, the world’s tallest structure. Hine was hired as part of the publicity campaign funded by the Empire State Corporation. He was compelled to take the job because he personally was impacted by the dire economic realities of the Depression. Hine’s photographs of the construction of the Empire State Building celebrated the extraordinary feats of the workers, many of whom were immigrants, who raised 57,000 tons of steel to frame the building. A large group of the workers were Mohawk ironworkers, known as "Skywalkers." They traveled from their communities in northern New York and southeastern Canada, including Kahnawake, Six Nations Reserve, and Akwesasne, to perform skilled, dangerous work. While some safeguards were in place during the construction, these measures were less comprehensive than today’s safety standards, and the project resulted in five worker fatalities. Hine wrote that his images “have given a new zest [...] and perhaps, a different note in my interpretation of Industry.” He viewed this massively ambitious construction project as the crowning achievement of human labor.

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Topping the Mast, Empire State Building, 1930

Vintage gelatin print

During the 13-month construction, the organizers of the Empire State Building were in fierce competition with the Chrysler Building and 40 Wall Street. Each project aimed to be the tallest building in the world upon completion. Floors and other architectural elements were added throughout the construction of each building in a bid to win. To ensure it surpassed the competition, the Empire State Building's final plans included a 222-foot airship mooring mast on top.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Riding the Ball High Up on Empire State Building, 1930-1931

Vintage gelatin print

Between May and November of 1930, Hine documented the Empire State Building's many bricklayers, riveters, engineers, and steelworkers with 4 x 5-inch and 5 x 7-inch cameras—all without safety equipment. He produced almost 1,000 negatives during his six months on site. Most images celebrate the craft and skill of individual workers who came together during the Great Depression to produce the tallest building in the world.

Hine published many of his images from this project in *Men at Work* (1932), a photo book that celebrated the dignity and skill of industrial workers.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

Two Connecters on a Girder, Empire State Building, 1930

Vintage gelatin print

In *Men at Work* (1932), Hine wrote about this image: “As the building pushes skyward the connecters stay aloft and bolt the beams after they have swung into place … like spiders spinning a fabric of steel against the sky.”

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

A Derrick Man, Empire State Building, 1931

Vintage gelatin print

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg

Lewis Wickes Hine

American, 1874–1940

On the Mooring Mast, Empire State Building (the McClain Brothers), 1930-1931

Vintage gelatin print

Hine’s photographs, taken from nearly 1,240 feet above the busy streets of midtown Manhattan, gave the public a newfound appreciation for these modern-day heroes of industry. The “sky boys,” as he called them, labored in perilous conditions to put the steel frame into place. At the height of activity, nearly 5,000 workers swarmed the site on a single day, working together on many separate but interconnected projects.

The collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg