

Child Labor Laws

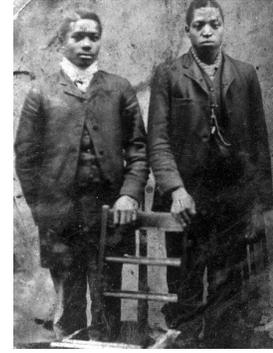
Lesson plans for primary sources at the Tennessee State Library & Archives

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Grade Level: 11th Grade

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Introduction:

For many young people, children as well as teens, the Industrial Revolution of the late 19th century signified not an era of new inventions, travel opportunities or progressive education, but a time of hardship and labor. This lesson plan is designed to introduce students to a topic which should surprise and shock many 16 year olds. Perhaps it will also allow them to see through different eyes the conditions in which they themselves labor.

Guiding Question(s):

- How did the demand for labor affect the lives of young people in the United States with an emphasis on Tennessee?
- What early attempts were made to counteract the harmful conditions in which these children toiled?
- Who were the competing forces and what reasons did they give for the exercise of working young people?

Curriculum Standards:

- **US.05** Describe the changes in American life that resulted from the inventions and innovations of business leaders and entrepreneurs of the period, including the significance of: Alexander Graham Bell, Henry Bessemer, Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison, J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, Nikola Tesla, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Madam C.J. Walker. (C, E, H)
- **US.07** Describe the differences between “old” and “new” immigrants, analyze the assimilation process for “new” immigrants, and determine the impacts of increased migration on American society, including: Angel Island, Ellis Island, Push and pull factors, Ethnic clusters, Jane Addams, Competition for jobs, Rise of nativism, Jacob Riis, Chinese Exclusion Act and Gentlemen’s Agreement. (C, E, G, H, P)
- **US.13** Describe working conditions in industries, during this era, including the use of labor by women and children. (C, E, H)
- **US.41** Describe the impact of the Great Depression on the American people, including: mass unemployment, migration, and Hoovervilles. (C, E, G, H)
- **US.43** Analyze the impact of the relief, recovery, and reform efforts of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal programs, including: Agricultural Adjustment Act, Civilian Conservation Corps, Fair Labor Standards Act, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, National Recovery Administration, Securities and Exchange Commission, Social Security, Tennessee Valley Authority, Works Progress Administration. (C, E, G, H, P, T)

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Materials Needed:

- [Reading of John Spargo, Child Labor in the Coal Mines \(1906\), excerpt from John Spargo, The Bitter Cry of the Children. \(New York: Macmillan, 1906\), pp. 163-165.](#)
- [Pictures of child laborers in New York City, excerpts from How the Other Half Lives, Jacob Riis](#)
- [In the Playtime of Others: Child labor in the Early 20th Century. Art to Zoo, News for Schools from the Smithsonian Institute, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Washington, D.C. 20560, December 1988.](#)
- [Confronting the Modern Era: Child Labor, Tennessee4Me, National Endowment for the Humanities. Website developed and maintained by: The Tennessee State Museum.](#)
- News article, [A Workforce of Children](#) by George Zepp (Included at the end the of lesson plan)
- [The History Place. Child Labor in America. 1908-1912. Photographs by Lewis W. Hine.](#)
- [Video, Lint Heads, Cotton Mills Workers](#)
- [The Child Labor Amendment, 1924-1934. A document from the CQ Researcher archives.](#)
- Governor Hill McAllister Papers 1933-1937. File 5, Box 72. (Tennessee State Library and Archives)
[Women of Wesley Class No. 3. Carroll Street Church, 1/27/1935](#)
[Sweetwater Hosiery Mills, 1/24/1935](#)
[Columbia Produce, 1/23/1935](#)
- Various political cartoons on child labor (Included at the end of lesson plan. Each cartoon is linked to a website with more information)

Background:

[Child Labor](#) Source: [Tennessee 4 Me](#)

Lesson Activities:

Activity 1: Hi Ho, Hi Ho, Its' Off To Work We Go!

Historically, in the United States, children have always worked outside the home. However, the type and requirements of child labor changed drastically with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Understand the differences between child labor in the antebellum and Industrial Era.

1. Read page 1 from [In the Playtime of Others: Art to Zoo](#). This compares the apprentice form of labor of early America with that of the Industrial Era.
2. On paper, create a comparison chart of the two forms of labor. Which would you find most beneficial? Be able to defend your choice.
3. From page 2 and 3 of [Art to Zoo](#), choose 1 of the 6 industries that traditionally chose children as workers. Study the photographs included.

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4. Participate in a mock query between the owners of the industry defending their work practices and The National Child Labor Committee which was attempting to reform work requirements for children.

Activity 2: Nobody Knows the Trouble We've Seen

1. Observation and analysis from yesterday's lesson– Assign students to write a short paragraph discussing your reaction to one aspect of child labor that surprised you. Discuss in class.
2. Today's lesson will focus on child labor in three specific areas which were most harmful : labor in the coal mines, piece work from home, and the cotton mills of the South.
3. Read from [John Spargo, Child Labor in the Coal Mines](#). Then discuss with your neighbor the picture that you visualize of these young boys. Have students list on the board what pictures would come to mind from their reading. Make observations.
4. The students will then study photographs of child miners from [Lewis Hine in Child Labor in America](#). Short discussion. What problems do you see these young workers experiencing?
5. From the pictures of [Jacob Riis, How The Other Half Lives](#), students will learn of the labor performed by young children, particularly in New York City, especially by new immigrants.
6. **For homework:** Have students choose one of the enclosed political cartoons that “speaks” about child labor. Direct them to answer for themselves what the cartoonists are trying to say in the drawing.
7. Fill out the cartoon analysis worksheet (found in the following attachments) which allows students to make observations and reflections about the cartoon they have chosen. **Finish for homework.**
- 8.

Lesson Activities Continued:

Activity 3: “Me and My Machines for the Rest of My Life”

1. Hold a short discussion of the students' chosen cartoons and their reactions to the drawings.
2. Finish study of conditions of children in working situations by looking at labor in the cotton mills of the South. Review [Art to Zoo](#) and the descriptions there of child workers in the cotton mills. Why were cotton mills so prevalent in the South? Class watches together the short video, [Lint Heads](#) which portrays the horrible conditions for children in the mills.
3. Tennessee was not immune from the hardships of child labor. Much of the work in this state centered around mills and mines. Have students read about child labor in Tennessee in [Confronting the Modern Era: Tennessee4Me](#). Study the photographs. Do they recognize any of the sites?

4. After studying child labor and their painful working conditions, discuss in class the solution. In small groups have students answer the following and share their answers with the class:
 - a. Where does the problem of child labor lie? Is it with parents, or with our capitalist system? Refer to the political cartoons to perhaps help with that question.
 - b. What is the solution?

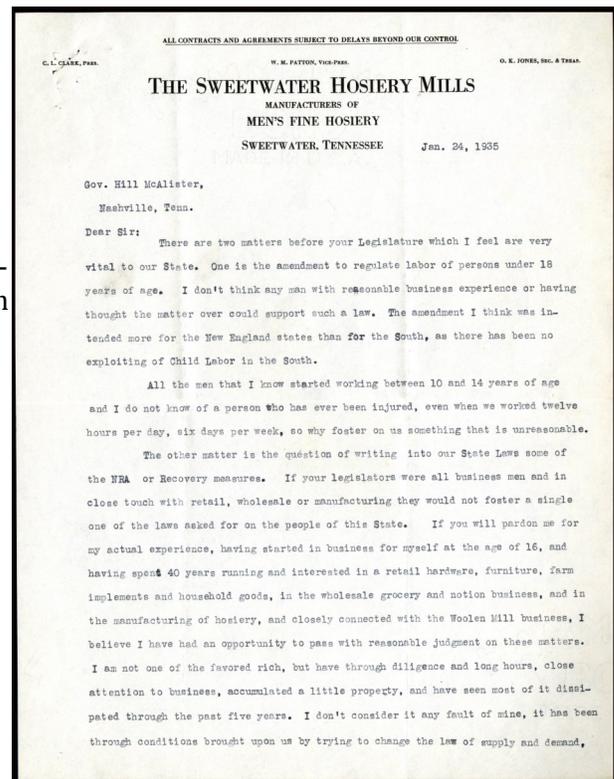
5. There were attempts made as early as 1904 to expose to the world the horrors of child labor and to curb its' use. Thanks to the National Child Labor Committee and the photography of Lewis Hine, public opinion began to slowly change in favor of legislation to regulate such labor. For **homework**, assign students to read the Tennessean article [A Workforce of Children](#) by George Zepp (found at the end of this lesson plan) to learn of the attempts made by Hine to expose the working conditions for children. Answer the accompanying questions. Be able to discuss the merits of photography in solving and exposing difficult social conditions.

Activity Four: "They Fought the Law but the Law Won"

1. Brief discussion of homework: How significant is photography in exposing social issues? Have students read about the governments' attempt to control child labor in [The Child Labor Amendment, 1924-1934](#). With a neighbor, have them discuss the reasons for and against this amendment. What were FDR's thoughts on the practice?

2. Finally, read letters written by Tennesseans to Governor Hill McAlister in support or against the proposed child labor amendment. Why would these people be opposed to such law? Choose to read one letter in favor and one opposed to the amendment. Then answer the letter analysis included following this lesson plan.

3. **Homework:** Read about the Fair Labor Standards Act in your text. We have finished the task of changing an awful practice in the United States and changing for the better the lives of young children. Explain to students that they, as workers and/or future workers, are the recipients of this major struggle. For the conclusion of this assignment, direct students to write a letter expressing to either Lewis Hine, Franklin Roosevelt or Governor McAlister their view of the individual's work in abolishing child labor. Be sure to have them include specific information that they learned from this assignment. Read some of the letters in class.



Cartoon Analysis Sheet

1. Look at the cartoon you have chosen and list any of the following you see:

Title:

Objects/People:

Words/Phrases:

2. Which objects are used as symbols?

3. Where were the symbols used and what do they represent?

4. Is anything exaggerated?

5. List adjectives that describe emotions viable in the cartoon.

6. What is the message of the cartoon? How do the above help you come to that conclusion?

7. Who are the people who might agree with the cartoon? What might be the public's reaction to this cartoon?

Child Labor

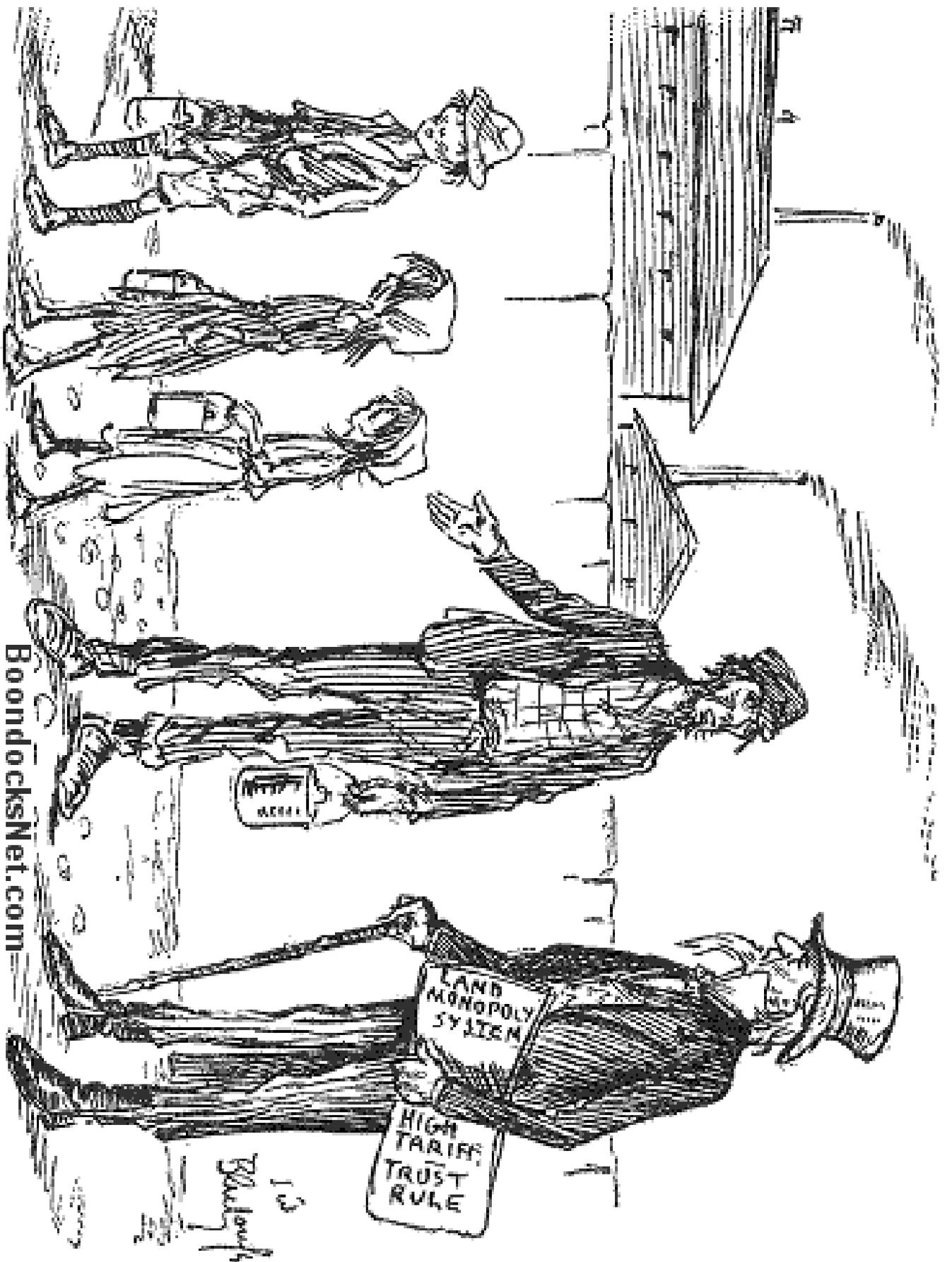
Lewis Wickes Hine

1. Identify Lewis Wickes Hine.
2. What was his role in showing the problem of child labor?
3. Why did he come to Tennessee and where did he visit?
4. How did Hine and the NCLC hope to limit child labor?
5. What methods did he use to gain access to the child workers?
6. Cite specific examples in Nashville of child laborers at a very young age. (3 examples)
7. Did Lewis Hine in the early 1900s play a significant role in limiting child labor? What?
8. Which do you think is more important in changing laws; people's opinions or laws?
9. Give one example to prove your point.

Letter Analysis Sheet

1. When were these letters written? How do you know?
2. Who is the author of the letters? Who is the recipient?
3. What do these letters reveal about the writer?
4. Does the author reveal any personal biases in this letter?
5. What was the author's objective in writing these letters?
6. What major event in American History was occurring when these letters were written? Did that alter the viewpoint of the author?
7. Did these letters change or add to your knowledge of this time period?
8. Compare the historical value of this letter with contemporary forms of correspondence such as telephone conversations, e-mail, and text-messaging. What historical evidence will we leave to help our children and grand-children understand our own lives better?





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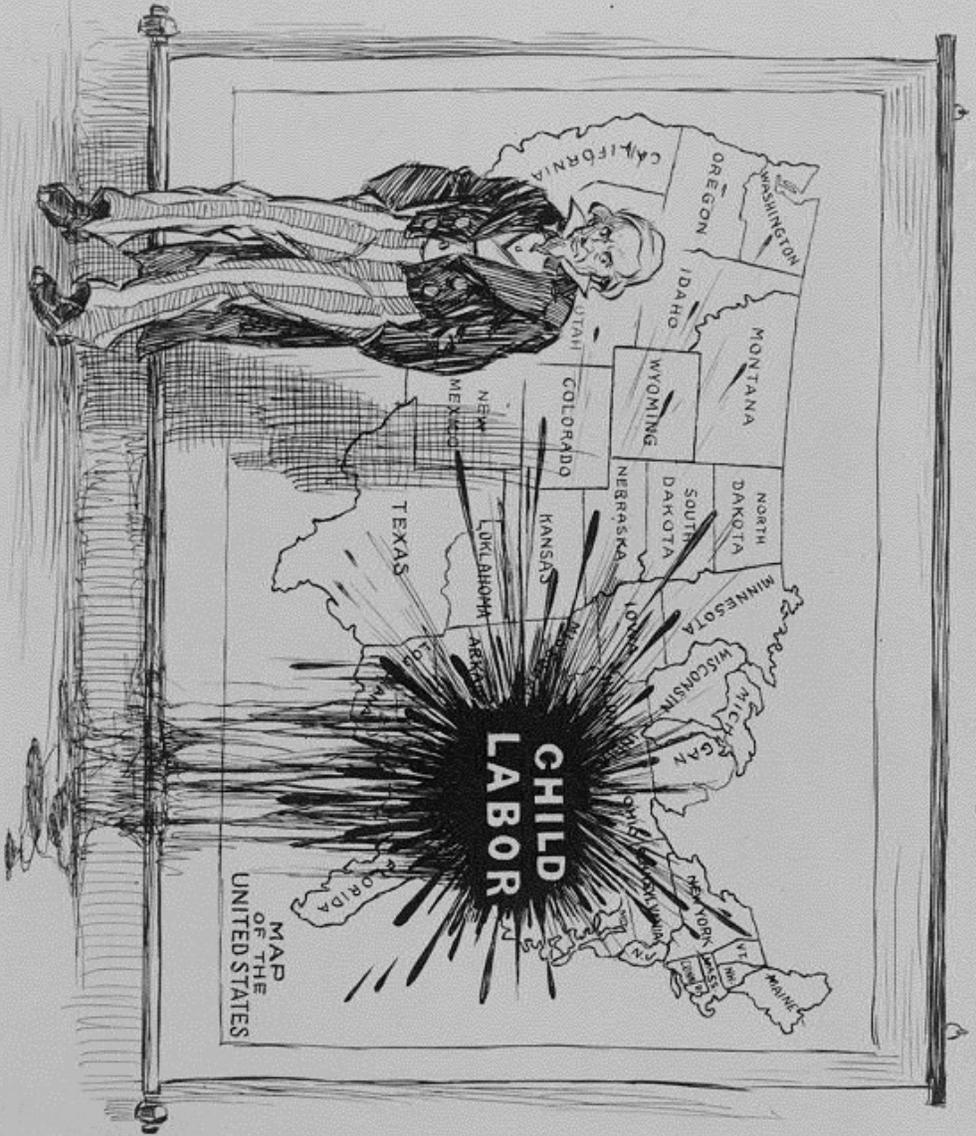
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VOTE
FOR
WOMEN

A WORKFORCE OF CHILDREN

National Effort To Stop Child Labor
Began 106 Years Ago

NASHVILLE CHILDREN FEATURED IN
CAMPAIGN'S PUBLICITY PHOTOS

By GEORGE ZEPP

Striking photos of young children who labored in Nashville factories and on its streets 100 years ago this year are reminders of how differently youngsters were viewed just ten decades back.

These unusual images of Nashville have appeared in books and are preserved by the Library of Congress.

But the story behind the photos has not been told recently, if at all.

It weaves together a Vanderbilt University chancellor, a national social movement, Nashville's fabric mills and street workers, as well as a notable photographer who toured America to document the injustice of toil by the young in place of basic education.

At the heart of it was Lewis Wickes Hine (1874-1940), a crusading photographer employed by the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), formed in June 1904 and still in existence in 2010.

For ten years Hine toured the country for the committee to document the plight of all sorts of child laborers, from factory to field to city street.

His posters and photo exhibitions were intended to sway public opinion and influence lawmakers to adopt legislation regulating working ages and hours. One exhibition was held in Nashville by early 1911, part of a national tour.

Its photos showed "little children at work for long hours in tobacco, canning, cotton and other factories, the pinched faces and stunted forms exciting the pity of all who view them," *The New York Times* reported on July 19, 1911.

Hine's visit to Nashville with his boxy camera in November 1910 was just one of many destinations for him. In that year alone he also photographed children in a Fayetteville, Tenn., cot-

ton mill and a Loudon, Tenn., hosiery mill, plus youthful street news vendors, bootblacks, coal miners and cranberry bog workers from St. Louis to Alabama and New York City to Vermont.

Hine covered 50,000 miles in 1916-17 alone. His photos for the committee span the period 1908-1918. The Library of Congress now has about 5,000 of them. Another 9,800-plus are held by George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y.

Hine's trip to Nashville wasn't surprising, since one of the founding members of the NCLC was Vanderbilt University Chancellor James H. Kirkland.

"Every child must have the privilege of working out his own life, of developing the best that is in him... (through) the chance of an education," Kirkland said in a 1905 address to the committee as it met in New York.

"Our problem is not merely to keep the child under 16 out of the factory or mine, but to keep the child at work in school. The factory is better than the slums. It may be that the factory is a better place than the home, but it is never better than the school."

The NCLC did not initially attempt to limit child labor through federal law. Instead, Kirkland noted, it would be through an "appeal to public opinion" that would influence leaders in all states.

Hine's photographs of conditions around the country, all meticulously documented, were the best propaganda available to these social reformers. Photos didn't lie.

But it wasn't always easy for Hine to gain access to factories. Once his mission became known across the country, factory owners became reluctant to cooperate in an effort to change accepted labor practices.

Hine developed a few techniques,

firmly ingrained feature on the urban landscape."

Boys—and sometimes newsgirls—purchased their papers from the publisher wholesale and made their money from the markup, often only 1- to 2-cents per copy. In reality, "the markup was whatever the boy could extract from the customer, including tips and perhaps overcharges," Hindman wrote.

Fabric mills, particularly in the South, employed many more children. Often they worked as part of whole families who relocated to cities from impoverished rural spots, living in low-rent mill housing and getting other amenities as part of the arrangement.

In 1900, Tennessee had 4,552 children ages 10-15 working in mills, representing 27.5% of the mill workforce, census figures showed.

Nashville's May Hosiery Mills was no different from others in its use of child workers. It was founded in 1896 by German immigrant Jacob May, who initially used prison labor with knitting machines inside the old state prison along Church Street.

In 1908, May and his partners opened a new hosiery mill on Chestnut Street in South Nashville, near Fort Negley. It was this one Hine visited two years later.

The May firm became very successful, selling to such big name outlets as Marshall Field, licensing Walt Disney images in the 1930s and even making socks NASA astronauts wore on the moon. It was sold in 1983 and moved from Nashville two years later.

The NCLC achieved one goal in 1912 when a Children's Bureau was established in two federal departments, Commerce and Labor. By 1920, the number of child laborers in the nation had been trimmed in half from 1910 levels thanks largely to legislation passed by various states.

The NCLC's bigger win came in 1938 with passage of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act, which had more extensive child labor restrictions.

George Zepp is author of the 2009 book *Hidden History of Nashville and the "Learn Nashville" column appearing eight years in The Tennessean.*

Sources: Metro Archives; Nashville Room, Nashville Public Library; Library of Congress; Lewis Hine: *Passionate Journey*, Karl Stetnor, editor, 1996; *Kids at Work*, Russell Freedman, 1994; www.nationalchildlabor.org.

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