

# *Vanishing Georgia*

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## Children of the Loom

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Some say that the end doesn't justify the means, but you couldn't have convinced acclaimed photographer Lewis Wickes Hine (1874-1940). In order to further a cause he held most dear, Hine cajoled, deceived and flat-out lied to persuade people to pose before his camera or to allow him onto their property so that he could take pictures. He had no reservations whatsoever about the means he used to achieve an end, but withhold your judgment of his actions until you read the rest of this article.

A century ago, Hine embarked on a mission to expose child labor in the United States by graphically portraying the exploitation of children as young as seven years old. These children, Hine and many others believed, should have been

in school or at home playing with friends. Instead, they toiled in some of America's most unwholesome work environments, including canneries, mines, quarries, and fisheries.

In the South, the cotton mills drew Hine's attention. From Virginia to Mississippi, thousands of children worked in textile mills that produced the fabric that clothed a nation. In Georgia, there were dozens of these cotton factories in cities and towns like Lafayette and Athens in the north, Columbus, Macon, and Augusta in central Georgia, and Tifton in the south.

By 1910, one in four workers in the South's textile mills was between the ages

of 10 and 15 years. These youths received a few dollars a week for tasks ranging from running heavy machinery to monitoring the thread to guard against breaks. This was perfectly legal at the time, but Hine documented many instances of children as young as seven being employed. The youngest of these were usually "dinner toters" paid to carry meals to adult laborers. Schooling for any of the children who worked in the mills was irregular at best, or quite often nonexistent.

Hine, who was born in Wisconsin and worked many years in New York, came to Georgia twice to document child labor in the state's textile mills. His first visit took

**"A little spinner in Globe Cotton Mill in Augusta, Georgia. The overseer admitted she was regularly employed." (January 1909)**

ALL PHOTOS LEWIS WICKES HINE COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS





place in January 1909, and the second in April 1913. To gain entrance to the mills, he would arrive on the grounds dressed in suit and tie, posing as a Bible salesman, fire inspector, or as an industrial photographer making a record of factory machinery. When denied entry, he would linger by an entrance and photograph children as they arrived or departed.

Hine's stratagems were usually successful, for he proved to be a prolific photographer and researcher. Of 65 reports issued by the National Child Labor Committee, he authored at least 30. He illustrated each report with scores of photographs bearing highly detailed notations right down to the ages and addresses of the children depicted.

His beautiful yet disquieting photographs brought home the humanity – and inhumanity – of child labor. Incongruously, some of his photographs show youngsters with dirty faces and bare

**"Some adolescents in an [unspecified] Georgia Cotton Mill, January 1909."**



feet, dressed in coveralls, while others feature children seemingly freshly scrubbed and wearing fine outfits. Since photography was still very much a novelty at the time, parents aware that their children were to be photographed undoubtedly dressed them for the occasion.

The undeniable beauty of Hine's photographs and the dignity possessed by his subjects prompted some child-labor activists to complain. They felt Hine should have tried harder to exaggerate the poverty of the youngsters he portrayed.

Yet Hine was an effective and powerful opponent of child labor. He once told an audience, "Perhaps you are weary of child labor pictures. Well, so are the rest of us, but we propose to make you and

the whole country so sick and tired of the whole business that when the time for action comes, child labor pictures will be records of the past."

Thanks in no small part to Hine's work, in 1916 Congress enacted the Keating-Owen Act that restricted employment of children under 14 in industry. "The work Hine did for this reform," said the chairman of the National Child Labor Committee, "was more responsible than all other efforts in

**LEFT AND BELOW: "All these are workers in the Cherokee Hosiery Mill, Rome, Ga. Noon, April 10, 1913," Hine noted for the caption. "The youngest are turners and loopers. Other Hosiery Mills around here employ children of 8 and 9 years. Some of these appear to be as young."**





**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:** Bibb Mill, Macon, Georgia. “Many youngsters here. Some boys were so small they had to climb up on the spinning frame to mend the broken threads and put back the empty bobbins.” (January 19, 1909). “Two of the ‘helpers’ in the Tifton Cotton Mill, Tifton, Georgia. They work regularly.” (January 1909). Housing for the Massachusetts Mill workers in Lindale, Georgia, in April 1913. “Not a thing neglected,” noted Lewis Wickes Hine, “except the child.” A doffer boy in Globe Cotton Mill, Augusta, Georgia, January 1909. “Fursen Owens, 12 years old. Can’t read. Doesn’t know A, B, C’s. ‘Yes I want to learn but I can’t when I work all the time.’ Been in mills 4 years, 3 years in Olympia Mill, Columbia, S.C. and 1 year in Augusta.” (January 1909).



bringing the need to public attention.”

After finishing with child-labor work, Hine continued his social-advocacy photography. His later career included documenting poverty in the Balkans following World War I, drought and relief efforts in the Midwest during the Great Depression, and construction workers building the Empire State Building in New York City.

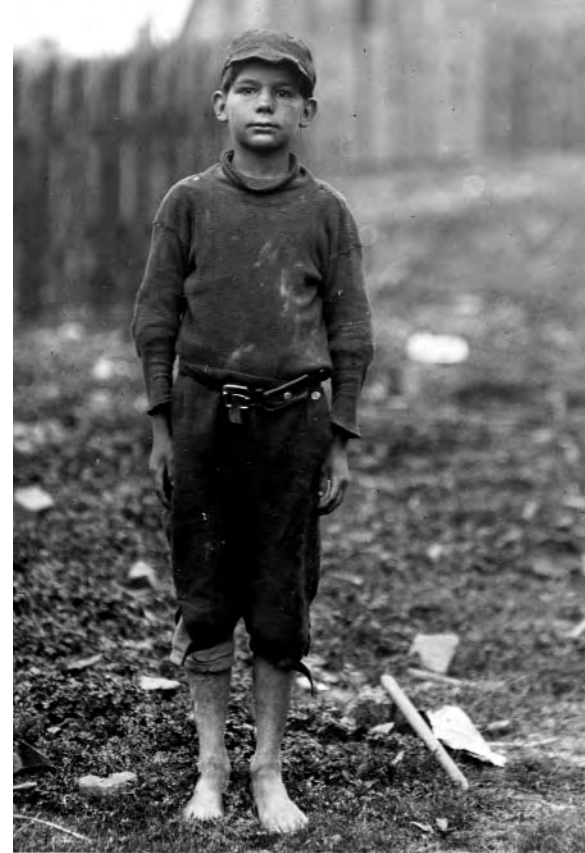
Despite his record of accomplishment, Hine found it difficult to earn an adequate living as a photographer. In January 1940, he lost his home to foreclosure. Ten months later, he died in extreme poverty in Dobbs Ferry, New York. His child labor photographs, though, remain a stirring memorial to his work, and all the more since they went so far to abolishing the practice.





Noon hour at Manchester Cotton Mill, Macon, Georgia, January 1909.

"A family working in the Tifton Cotton Mill. Mrs. A.J. Young works in mill and at home. Nell (oldest girl) alternates in mill with mother. Mammy (next girl) runs 2 sides. Mary (next) runs 1 1/2 sides. Eric (oldest boy) works regularly. Eddie (next girl) helps in mill, sticks on bobbins. Four smallest children not working yet. The mother said she earns \$4.50 a week and all the children earn \$4.50 a week. Husband died and left her with 11 children. Two of them went off and got married. The family left the farm two years ago to work in the mill." (January 22, 1909)



ABOVE: "Neil Power, 10 years old," wrote Hine. "Turns stockings in Rome (Ga.) Hosiery Mill. A shy pathetic figure. 'Haint been to school much.'" (April 1913). LEFT: "Ada Griffith, a very young spinner, apparently under 12, at Massachusetts Mill." (April 1913)





"In the spool cotton dept. Bibb Mfg. Co., No. 1, Macon, Ga. Jan. 19, 1909."

"Topper at her machine, Walker County Hosiery Mills, Lafayette Ga." (April 1913)



Noon hour at Massachusetts Mill in Lindale. "During the days following this," Hine noted, "I proved the ages of nearly a dozen of these children, by gaining access to Family Records, Life Insurance papers, and through conversations with the children and parents, and found those that I could prove to be working now, or during the past year at 10 and 11 years of age, some of them having begun before they were ten. Further search would reveal more." (April 1913)



“Two young workers in Spinning Room of Columbus Mill. Youngest is Lonny Clark. Been working there over a year. Dewey Clark, been working there two yrs. Father is boss of Spool Room. Lonny makes about \$4 a week.” (April 1913)



L.W. Hine (1874-1940)

“Another ‘Dependent Father.’ He is so recorded in the Ordinary’s office where he made application for his minor children to work. He has three children in the mill. When he married [his] present wife, she brought with her seven children, three of which are in the mill. The mother and father are both in mill work. He works part of the time. Lyell, Columbus and Swift Mills, Columbus, Georgia.” (April 1913)



Hine provided detailed information about this young man: “Norman Hall, 210 Park Street, Lindale, Ga. Went to work over a year ago in Massachusetts Mills at 10-1/2 years old. Family record says born October 16, 1901. Doffing. No real reason for his work as father and several others are working.” (April 1913). BELOW: At age 10, Tarlten Gree began working at Massachusetts Mill. Photographed here at age 13 (April 1913), Gree was by then a doffer in Spinning Room No. 2.



“Some of the workers in the Rome Hosiery Mill live in shacks like these,” Hine recorded. (April 1913)





LEFT: Luther Dorries displays a rather hopeless demeanor in this April 1913 photograph at Massachusetts Mill. Hine noted that Dorries had been “doffing some months in Spinning Room No. 2.” Hine also wrote of Dorries: “Said [to be] 12 years old, but very doubtful. Father and brother work.” RIGHT: “A 12-year-old girl who had been working in Weave room of Consolidated Duck Mill, La Grange, Georgia, for one year, and helping to support a father who works when sober.” (April 1913)



“Spinner in Bibb Mill No. 1, Macon, Georgia. Bad lighting and ventilation in spinning room.” (January 1909) A spinner walked the long aisles, brushing lint from the machines and watching spools for breaks in the cotton thread. Once they found a break, they tied the ends together. Spinners were on their feet working 10 to 12 hour shifts, six days a week.

“Dinner-Toters waiting for the gate to open,” Hine recorded. “This is carried on more in Columbus than in any other city I know, and by smaller children. Many of them are paid by the week for doing it, and carry, sometimes, ten or more a day. They go around in the mill, often help tend to machines, which often run at noon, and so learn the work. A teacher told me the mothers expect the children to learn this way, long before they are of proper age. Eagle and Phoenix Mill.” (April 1913)



A young doffer boy beside a machine in Massachusetts Mill, Lindale, Georgia (April 1913). Once a bobbin was filled with newly-made thread, a doffer removed it and replaced it with an empty spool. Boys as young as seven years old were employed as doffers.