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Painted With the Faces of America

Whitnel Cotton Mill Spinner which

presents a very young girl, wedged between a windowed wall and a cotton mill machine, inside

strangers into friends. What seems to be a relatively uninteresting scene, workers exiting a factory, is actually a quaint glimpse into a slice of life. Hine catches the girls in a moment where they exhibit their youth; shaking off the premature aging of work and dashing into blissful childhood. As the older workers dutifully leave their industrial home, the girls sweetly laugh and appear more like they are leaving a play yard than a long, tough work day.

Hine intended for these images to be used in aiding the plight for eradication of child labor. However, the aim for Hine was to reform child labor, not begin a revolution (Rosenblum).⁵ He firmly believed in democracy, only longing to rid capitalism of disease, thus allowing its industrial graces to fall in a more equitable manner (Rosenblum).

By using the similarities found between *Whitnel Cotton Mill Spinner*, *Cigar Makers*, and *Workers Leaving Factory* an accurate analysis is long lasting contribution to photography. Each of these images exhibit acute technique a glamorous, long tonal range including dark blacks, light whites, and a myriad of sterling grey tones, a feat considering the early materials with which he had to use.⁶ This flair that Hine possessed for creating beautiful imagery spawned ⁷ He not only advocated sociological ideals but, he truly believed in them and therefore took great care to show these principles in the best possible methods, marking a turning point in photography as a tool and art (Rosenblum).

Preceding Hine, photographers, such as Jacob Riis, took documentary, transparent images with little to no psychological substance. Hine was on the cusp of an artistic wave which promoted the inclusion of theory, emotion, psychology, and humanism. Through innovative uses

of aperture, as in *Whitnel Cotton Mill Spinner*, where viewers feel almost hypnotized in the circular lure caused by the arrangement of elements, or in *Cigar Makers*, where an aptly placed plank adds intensity and discomfort, Hine is able to use artistry to prove his point. This method of combining artistic emotion and function altered reality in two ways. For his time, the portrayal of emotion in the children drew the American public into the image. Hine made the compelling boys and charming girls in his images look like children with which middle and upper class America could connect. In addition, a blend of art and function served as an example of unforeseen photography. This fresh concept would help inspire future art movements, such as New Vision, which would promote artistic abstraction of natural forms, furthering the cause of function *through* artistry.

Whitnel Cotton Mill Spinner, *Cigar Makers*, and *Workers Leaving Factory* are three of the most intriguing exhibit the best use of technology for his day, as well as, served to thrust a new type of photographic artistry into the public. Lewis Hine viewed his work and art as grounded in the fluidity of everyday people; their history, present, and future. His vivid, moving images expressed a hope for a better America coupled with a sense of democratic community with a free and enriching life for all.

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America and took extensive field notes about the children he photographed in hopes of finding them again for a follow-up.

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Lewis Hine, *Whitnel Cotton Mill Spinner*, 1909.



Lewis Hine, *Cigar Makers*, 1909.

Lewis Hine, *Workers Leaving Factory*, 1910.