

Impact Statement

Sophia Lee, Grade 10

Hine the Hidden Hero, 2025

Pencil on paper, 12 x 16 inches

Independent Study, Arnold O. Beckman High School, Tustin, CA

Unsung Hero: Lewis Hine

Lewis Hine was an American photographer who documented living conditions during and after World War 1. Hine's photographs raised awareness of the cruel working conditions of both adults and children. I respect Lewis Hine because he gave hope and provided comfort to those in pain. He was an advocate to the millions of children who were silenced and forced to work in unsafe conditions. I admire Lewis Hine's determination to find courage in a time of injustice.

Lewis Hine was a full-time photographer for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). Hine produced numerous posters and photographs to raise awareness of the brutal working conditions. Hine was creative in finding ways to document child labor but would often get caught. However, through the mistreatments, Hine remained brave and steadfast. In the end, Hine was successful as legislation was passed to protect children from cruel exploitation. I was inspired by Lewis Hine and his photographs of the poor living and working conditions of the people. I wanted to focus on the underlying emotions of Hine's photographs that captured the children's innocence and sadness. Hine's main purpose was to focus on the children, and I wanted to honor his devotion by making it one of my central themes. I wanted to showcase that although Hine was a singular man behind the camera, he was a strong individual who sacrificed his life to bring forth future generations of freedom. The hanging feet in my artwork represent the men who helped construct the Empire State Building and ate lunch at dangerous heights. This addition was a necessity as I wanted to symbolize their powerless state and desire for freedom. I decided to utilize a pencil as my sole choice of material to represent the coal mines that many children labored in and how it was a colorless and oppressive time.

Through this journey of learning about Lewis Hine, I understood that a hero is defined not only by their courage but their ability to persevere in action. Hine devoted his entire life to advocating for exploited children who were treated with injustice and cruelty. Lewis Hine once stated, "There are two things I wanted to do. I wanted to show the things that needed to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that needed to be appreciated." Hine believed in the strength of children and the capabilities of their voices. He worked endlessly to document these children's lives and told their story through photographs of their tears and broken-tooth smiles.

I hope in today's generation children can view Lewis Hine and his impact through my artwork. Hine would have wanted everyone to acknowledge that they have the power and inspiration to change a generation of brokenness and in times, injustice. That confidently, my artwork can carry on this meaning: To be a hero does not mean to boast, it means to have courage and tell the stories of the ones who were silenced. To be an unsung hero can often mean to be hidden, but it is never a diminishment of your impact on the world or who you were.