



Impact Statement

Katherine Chao, Grade 11

The Witness, 2026

Acrylic on canvas board, 12 x 10 inches

Young's Art Studio, Anaheim, CA

Unsung Hero: Lewis Hine

During the early 20th century, America's industry grew and expanded rapidly, but at the cost of stolen childhoods of many laborers. The Unsung Hero I chose was Lewis Hine, a photographer who displayed the harsh reality of the workforce behind the booming economy, fighting for social justice through artistic expression.

I chose Lewis Hine at first because I recognized him from my U.S. history class at school. I remembered him being someone that stood out to me during this unit because of his photographs that I saw in class. Every picture seemed to tell a story and various emotions behind the photographed people's eyes. As I researched more on his background, I was inspired by him because he devoted his talents and his life to acting with empathy and justice. As cameras were made and the career as photographers grew, the competition for the best aesthetics and visuals were the main concern of the era. However, Hine was concerned about revealing the truth of the working force. I admire his moral values and bravery he showed for the millions of children and other laborers working in inhumane conditions. Hine often had to go undercover as a salesman or inspector to document child labor in factories, mines, and mills and the dangerous living conditions. His resilient character and dedication for the justice and dignity of the workers he photographed make him a role model for anyone to use their personal talents for a better change.

Hine's impact on American history is significant; however, he remains an Unsung Hero to us who benefitted from the labor laws he helped establish. He was the staff photographer for the National Child Labor Committee starting in 1908, and traveled around the United States, documenting the brutal realities of workers in coal mines, cotton mills, and the streets. His photographs not only appealed emotionally to the rest of society, but legislatively. By capturing the photos of children, he's able to lead to the establishment of the Keating-Owen Labor Act. He changed the course of history by proving that his visual evidence holds power to bring change to society.

My painting is titled *The Witness*, showing the visual interpretation of Lewis Hine and the people he photographed. The main subject of the painting is Lewis Hine with his camera, with a stoic expression. He is the bridge between reality to the harsh history of factories. In the background there is a young boy working in a textile mill that seems to stretch on forever, signifying the long, brutal hours children worked. The vision of the painting was to make it look like Hine was holding the camera to take pictures of the young boy in the background and other similar young

laborers like him. This explains the sepia toned background compared to the realistic warm tones of Lewis Hine.

Working on this project changed my perspective and attitude on the power of visual media. Hine's story taught me that true impact does not always come from being an influential leader or the person who stands out; often it comes from being the most observant. Hine inspired me to be more aware of the world around me with the injustices that are easily ignored and to think about how to use my creative work and talent to serve a higher purpose. By honoring Lewis Hine's legacy through this painting, I hope that others will be reminded that we all have the ability to act as witnesses to the world and that we have the power to change it.