

Helping Students Visualize the Process of Change with Historic Images

Stephen Wesson and Cheryl Lederle

Public protests. Sensational headlines. Scathing editorial cartoons. Sloganeering posters. Are these signs of upheaval and disorder? Or are they evidence of a healthy public debate—one that could lead to legislation dramatically changing American life?

In the Prints and Photographs Division at the Library of Congress, three albums archive more than 800 prints of photographs taken by Lewis Hine between 1908–1924. All have been digitized and are available online—three are featured in this article. They show children working in a variety of trades—and include images of political cartoons, exhibit panels from the National Child Labor Committee, and more. These materials can introduce students to the public debate about child labor at the beginning of the twentieth century that eventually led to the introduction of legislation. Contemporary newspaper articles tracing how the Keating-Owen child labor bill became law in 1916 can take student understanding one step further, and introducing students to the legislative tracker on the new Congress.gov website may encourage their curiosity about bills being considered by Congress today.

Images that Make an Argument

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the nation was convulsed by controversy over child labor. By 1900, millions of children were engaged in wage labor, often in unhealthy, dangerous conditions, and reformers argued that the

U.S. government had a responsibility to protect them.

One of the most visible advocates for child labor reform was the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), which seized the tools of the emerging mass media and used them to keep the child labor debate in the public eye. Their campaigns were fueled by staff photographer Lewis Hine, who crisscrossed the country and took thousands of photos of children at work in factories, fields, and street corners. These young workers' faces appeared in newspapers, magazines, magic lantern shows, and NCLC exhibit displays, and to this day they still influence what we think of when we hear the words “child labor.”

The images can also help your students better understand the drive and controversy around child labor reform. Give pairs of students a copy of “Cartoon”—a political cartoon photographed by Lewis Hine—with the caption at the bottom folded under. Ask them to study the cartoon and then write a caption expressing the cartoonist's perspective on child labor. Allow time for pairs to share their captions with the class, and then look at the caption on the “Cartoon.” Brainstorm with your students a list of ideas and questions that they have

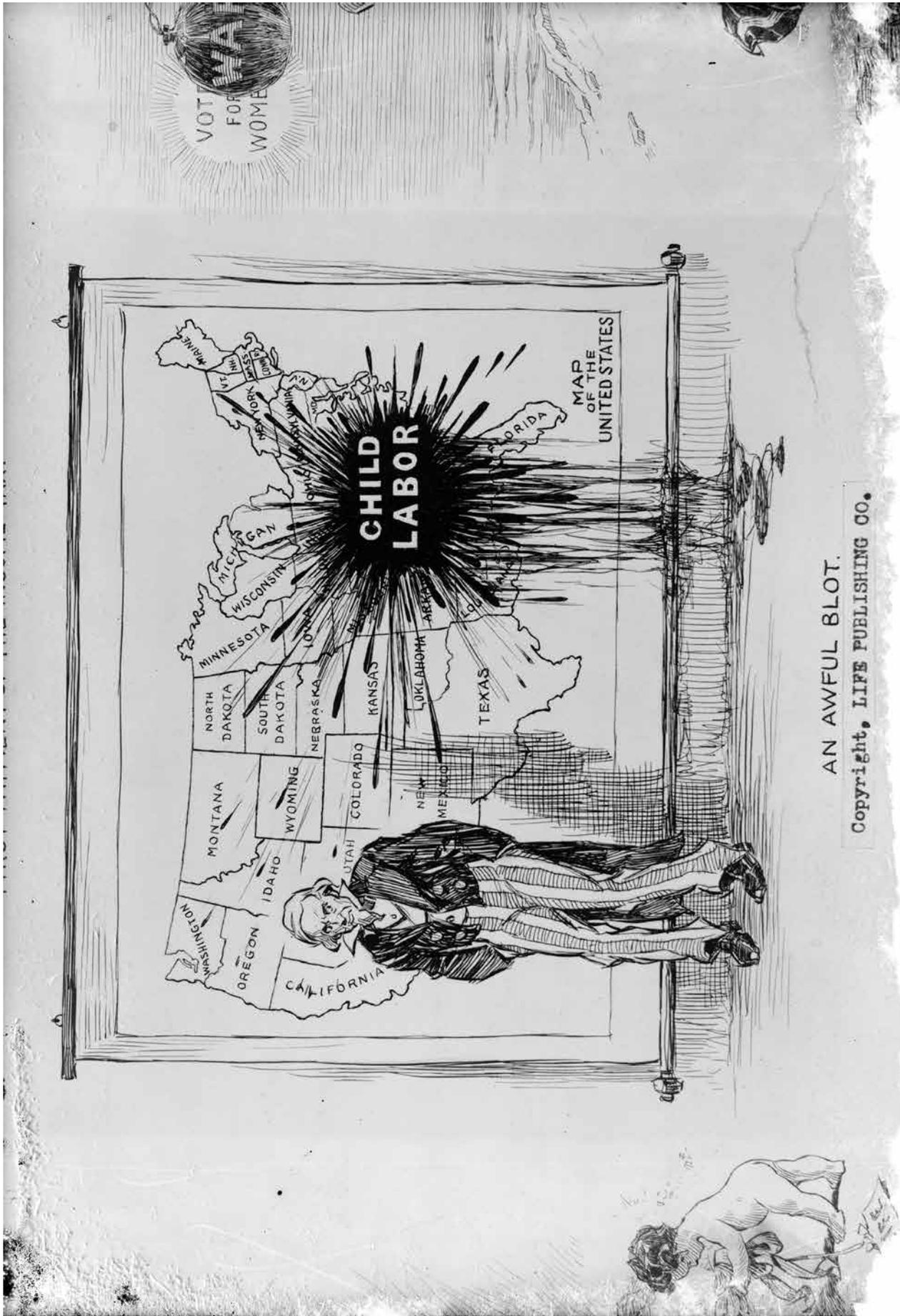
about what was happening at the time the cartoon was drawn, around 1914, which might have inspired the cartoonist to create this. Invite students to imagine that they were seeing the cartoon in 1914 and ask how they would have reacted.

Introduce the work of the NCLC and distribute or display the photograph of “Celery Vendor Gus Strategies.” Allow students to study and analyze the photograph and then introduce students to the caption that Hine wrote for the photograph. Take a poll on whether the photographer would have agreed or disagreed with the cartoonist about the need for reform, and invite students to support their choices with evidence from the visual images.

Finally, show students the “Exhibit panel” to see one way that the photos were used to sway public opinion and spur people to take action. Ask if they can find Gus Strategies and what other persuasive techniques they notice in the panel. Again, invite them to imagine how they might have responded to this if they were seeing it when it was initially created.

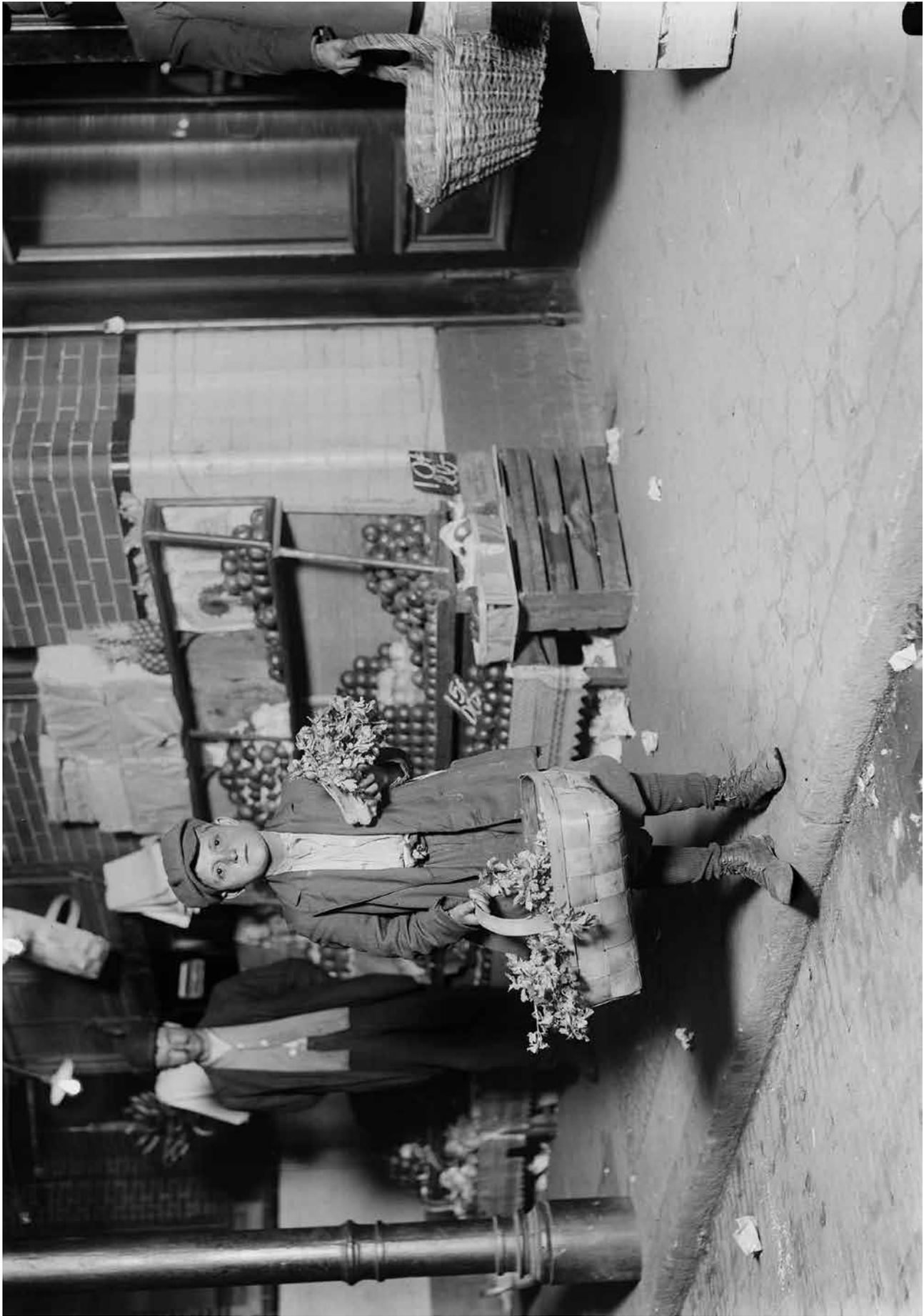
Lewis Hine's photographs are so powerful that today they are appreciated as unique art objects. For Lewis Hine and the NCLC, however, they were tools for making a case against child labor. The reformers put Hine's photos to work, using them as data in reports on working conditions, illustrating articles with them,

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AN AWFUL BLOT.
Copyright, LIFE PUBLISHING CO.

"An Awful Blot," cartoon photographed by Lewis Wickes Hine, circa 1914 (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division), www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004000340/PP/



10:30 p.m. At Center Market. 11 yr. old Celery Vendor Gus Strategies, 212 Jackson Hall Alley. He sold until 11 p.m. and was out again Sunday morning selling papers ana [sic] gum. Has been in this country only a year and a half. Location: [Washington (D.C.)] by Lewis Wickes Hine, April 1912 (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division), www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004000647/PP/

NEARLY TWO MILLION CHILD WORKERS

Under Sixteen Years To-day.



Placed in a Procession Twelve Feet apart
they would reach from San Francisco to Boston *and* thence to New Orleans.

This Procession Is Recruited from
More than One Hundred Occupations.



The above are estimates from United States Census Reports for 1900 and 1910.

Exhibit panel by Lewis Wickes Hine, circa 1913 (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division), www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004002186/PP/

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and incorporating them into giant exhibit panels that traveled to expositions and conferences around the country. Even the captions seem like evidence, as Hine carefully took down the names, ages, and wages of the children laboring in mines or sewing clothes.

Many of these images are heartbreaking, and their emotional force was an important part of the reformers' appeal to their audience. However, although the NCLC's campaigns changed people's minds, one of their goals was to change the nation's laws, and to secure lasting protection for children through the passage of legislation.

Tracking the Legislative Process

In the United States, lively—and even ugly—public debate isn't a distraction from the process of government; it's an important part of it. A long and extensive argument over an issue can lead the people's representatives to introduce legislation that addresses the issue. Knowing the legislative process can inspire students to watch as the remedy for an issue travels through, and is changed by, the process.

A new website from the Library of Congress, [Congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov), makes it easy for students to track a piece of legislation through each step of the legislative process, from its introduction to becoming law.

While this is invaluable to students following the current political scene, it can also be a powerful tool for exploring contentious issues from the nation's history. For example, if legislation had been introduced related to a topic under study, students could find newspaper articles, cartoons, or other primary sources from different stages of the bill's progress. Connecting these raw materials of history to legislative stages can bring what might seem to be a dry, distant process to life, and give students a sense of all the messiness and drama that often lie behind long-ago events.

In the case of child labor, students can search the Library's database of historic newspapers, *Chronicling America* (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov), to trace the progress of 1916's Keating-Owen bill, which would have severely restricted interstate trade with businesses that used child labor.

A few minutes of research can produce articles that cover every stage of the bill's progress from a wide range of perspectives and temperaments. Students can watch with the eyes of 1916 readers as the bill is introduced, as it passes the House, and as senators with connections to the cotton industry bog it down in the Senate. One frustrated voter is quoted as asking, "The Keating-Owen bill is on the Senate calendar. Why not save the kiddies now?"

Check Out [Congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)!

Tammie Nelson

"Educate and inform the whole mass of the people... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."

—Thomas Jefferson

Your students can use [Congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov) to remove some of the mystery from the legislative process. A wealth of legislative data exists at this one-year-old website, which will ultimately replace [THOMAS.gov](http://www.thomas.gov) as the official legislative website of Congress. Included on the site are:

A series of nine short videos

(<http://beta.congress.gov/legislative-process/>) that summarized the legislative process. Each has a closed captioning option and a written transcript with embedded links to a legislative glossary (<http://beta.congress.gov/help/legislative-glossary/>).

A "bill tracker" that provides a visual cue on every bill's detail page. This tracker summarizes the status steps en route to passage. For past legislation, the tracker shows how far the bill or resolution progressed before the end of its Congress. Bills in the current Congress provide a "You Are Here" orientation: steps that have been accomplished are shaded; future steps are also included to show what must happen in order for the resolution to be passed or for the bill to become law.

Member information that is easily accessed from many points in the website. The homepage includes a "leadership carousel," presenting photos and titles for the leaders of the House and Senate. A student can easily find members by state or by name using pulldown lists on the homepage. Links to member pages

are also included from sponsorship data on a bill detail page. Navigating to a member's profile page provides both an overview and a legislative résumé. The overview box includes a photograph, a link to the member's biography, a listing of the member's terms, and contact information for currently seated members. The area below the overview lists all legislation that this member has sponsored or cosponsored. The student can use the facets on the left to learn about this set of bills or to narrow the list in order to locate specific legislation sponsored by this member.

Finally, in addition to data about members, bills, and resolutions, [Congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov) also includes **the Congressional Record, committee profile pages, and committee reports**. This website is being developed iteratively; new releases every few months increase the breadth and depth of data and add functionality. Upcoming releases will add legislative data beginning with the 93rd Congress, data about Nominations and Treaties, and improved search functionality. We welcome your feedback through our survey at <http://beta.congress.gov/survey/>.

A bill's journey, however, does not end once it reaches "Became Law" on the tracker. Even though Keating-Owen was passed by both houses of Congress and signed into law by the president, it was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. Keating-Owen was the law of the land for less than two years, but it paved the way for later reform legislation. By the 1940s, child labor was effectively abolished in the United States.

Primary sources have a unique instructional power, and can make the events and the disputes of the past real to students like nothing else can. The photographs of Lewis Hine, along with the other documents from the battle over child labor, can not only connect students with the passions and persuasive strategies of the groups involved in this

long-lasting campaign. It can also help them discover the role that advocacy plays in the U.S. system of government and remind them that principled and committed calls for reform have led—and can lead—to real, lasting changes in the life of the nation.

If you try these suggestions, let us know what you discover! There will be a post on the *Teaching with the Library of Congress* blog (blogs.loc.gov/teachers) shortly after this article is published, and we invite you to share your teaching strategies. ●

STEPHEN WESSON and **CHERYL LEDERLE** are educational resources specialists at the Library of Congress. **TAMMIE NELSON** is the Library of Congress project manager for *Congress.gov*. For more information on the education programs of the Library of Congress, please visit www.loc.gov/teachers/.

Related Resources and Opportunities from the Library of Congress

If your students would like to study additional images, direct them to the National Child Labor Committee collection in the Prints and Photographs Online Catalog (www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc/).

To read more about the public debate and conversation around child labor, students may search in *Chronicling America* (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>). Possible search terms include "Keating-Owen" and "National Child Labor Committee;" the advanced search tab offers the option to specify a date range, which may improve search results.

Below are newspaper pages from *Chronicling America* for each stage of the legislative tracker.

