

Background Information:

Child Labor in America (from www.historyplace.com): As early as the 1830s, many U.S. states had enacted laws restricting or prohibiting the employment of young children in industrial settings. However, in rural communities where child labor on the farm was common, employment of children in mills and factories did not arouse much concern. Another problem for children was the popular opinion that gainful employment of children of the "lower orders" actually benefited poor families and the community at large.

Entire families were hired, the men for heavy labor and the women and children for lighter work. Work days typically ran from dawn to sunset, with longer hours in winter, resulting in a 68-72 hour workweek. Many families also lived in company owned houses in company owned villages and were often paid with overpriced goods from the company store. Thus they lived a life entirely dominated by their employers.

By the late 1800s, states and territories had passed over 1,600 laws regulating work conditions and limiting or forbidding child labor. In many cases the laws did not apply to immigrants, thus they were often exploited and wound up living in slums working long hours for little pay.

Throughout America, local child labor laws were often ignored. On a national level, progress to protect children stalled as the U.S. Supreme Court ruled several times that child labor laws under question were unconstitutional. A subsequent attempt to pass an amendment to the U.S. Constitution failed.

In 1904, the National Child Labor Committee was organized by socially concerned citizens and politicians, and was chartered by Congress in 1907. From 1908 to 1912, photographer Hine documented numerous gross violations of laws protecting young children. At many of the locations he visited, youngsters were quickly rushed out of his sight. He was also told youngsters in the mill or factory had just stopped by for a visit or were helping their mothers.

Attempts at child labor reform continued, aided by the widespread publicity from Hine's photographs. As a result, many states passed stricter laws banning the employment of underage children. In 1938, Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act, better known as the Federal Wage and Hour Law. The Act was declared constitutional in 1941 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Act set a work week of 40 hours, with a minimum wage of 40 cents per hour. It prohibited child labor under age 16 while allowing minors 16 and over to work in non-hazardous occupations. The Act set 18 as the minimum age for work in industries classified as hazardous. No minimum age was set for non-hazardous agricultural employment after school hours and during vacations. Children aged 14 and 15 could be employed in non-manufacturing, non-mining, and non-hazardous occupations outside of school hours and during vacations for limited hours.

Child Labor Today: According to recent global estimates by the International Labor Office, the number of working children aged 5 to 14 in developing countries is in the order of 250 million, of whom some 120 million work full time in various jobs often under hazardous conditions amid crude living conditions. A surplus of unskilled workers and low wages have combined to create conditions for children similar to the worst features of factories, mines and mills from the 1800s with minimal chances for education and future happiness.

World-Wide Issues of Child Labor: An estimated 158 million children aged 5-14 are engaged in child labor - one in six children in the world. Millions of children are engaged in hazardous situations or conditions, such as working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery. They are everywhere but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in homes, laboring behind the walls of workshops, hidden from view in plantations.

- In Sub-Saharan Africa around one in three children are engaged in child labor, representing 69 million children.
- In South Asia, another 44 million are engaged in child labor.
- The latest national estimates for this indicator are reported in Table 9 (Child Protection) of UNICEF's annual publication The State of the World's Children.

Children living in the poorest households and in rural areas are most likely to be engaged in child labor. Those burdened with household chores are overwhelmingly girls. Millions of girls who work as domestic servants are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Labor often interferes with children's education. Ensuring that all children go to school and that their education is of good quality are keys to preventing child labor.