



## **Sadie Pfeiffer, Spinner in Cotton Mill, North Carolina, Lewis Wickes Hine**

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Lewis Wickes Hine  
American, **negative**, 1910;  
print, about 1920s–1930s  
**Gelatin silver print**  
11 x 14 1/16 in.  
84.XM.967.15



### **Questions for Teaching**

Take time to look closely at the work of art. What do you see?

What do you notice about the person? What is she doing?  
*(She is working at a large machine containing countless rows of spools of thread.)*

How is this worker different from the other workers we have discussed? *(She is a child.)*

What can you tell about the girl by the way she is dressed? *(Her clothes are shabby and wrinkled, so she is probably poor. The style of the dress and shoes reveals that she lived almost a hundred years ago.)*

What do you notice in the background? *(There is another person in the photograph. She may be older and looks as if she is also working.)*

What else catches your eye? What else does that tell you about the photograph?

What do you think the girl is thinking?

### **Background Information**

In this photograph, a young girl wearing a wrinkled and shabby cotton dress is busy working at a cotton loom. The photographer, Lewis Wickes Hine, chose a vantage point close to a row of tall windows that fill the space with soft light and illuminate the large spinning machine that dominates the room, dwarfing the young girl.

Hine was known to sneak into factories and warehouses under false pretenses to make photographs of child laborers in as realistic settings as possible. He would hide a pad and pencil

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in his pockets to note the names and heights of his subjects. Sadie Pfeiffer was forty-eight inches tall when Hine captured this image.

As one historian noted, “Hine was a firm believer in the power of knowledge to vanquish evil.” Introducing middle-class America to the ugly truth about children’s working conditions, Hine’s photographs, made while on assignment from the National Child Labor Committee, were instrumental in the passage of child **labor laws** in the United States.

### **About the Artist**

Lewis Wickes Hine (American, 1874–1940)

Lewis Wickes Hine was trained to be an educator in Chicago and New York. A project photographing on Ellis Island with students from the Ethical Culture School in New York galvanized his recognition of the value of documentary photography in education. Soon after, he became a sociological photographer, establishing a studio in upstate New York in 1912.

For nearly ten years Hine was the photographer for the National Child Labor Committee, contributing to exhibitions and the organization’s publication, *The Survey*. Declaring that he “wanted to show things that had to be corrected,” he was one of the earliest photographers to use the camera as a social documentary tool. Around 1920, however, Hine changed his studio publicity from “Social Photography by Lewis W. Hine” to “Lewis Wickes Hine, Interpretive Photography” to emphasize a more artistic approach to his image making. Having joined the American Red Cross briefly in 1918, he continued to freelance for them through the 1930s. In 1936 Hine was appointed head photographer for the National Research Project of the Works Progress Administration, but his work for them was never completed. His last years were marked by professional struggles due to diminishing government and corporate patronage.