Lewis Hine, Ellis Island, and Pragmatism: Photographs as Lived Experience[1]

By Kate Sampsell Willmann, Georgetown University

The origin of Lewis Hine's invention of social documentary photography can be found in his intellectual alliance to pragmatism. Reading Hine's photographs as primary sources of the author's intent, in context with Hine's progressive intellectual milieu and in contrast with his contemporaries, Jacob Riis and Alfred Steiglitz, reveals Hine as a self-conscious and tolerant commentator on the lives of individual immigrants and workers. Although Hine left the objects of his portraits mostly unnamed, through his documentary style, he conferred upon them individual identity in contrast to the nativism, exploitation, and social Darwinism that surrounded immigration issues in the early 1900s. Through his images, Hine transmitted his own perceptions of 1900s New York City, especially Ellis Island. Since Hine was inspired by William James's formulation of "lived experience," the historian can read Hine through a lens of James's philosophy, solving the pragmatist problem of communicated language by replacing words with images.

In fact, [the picture] is often more effective than the reality would have been, because, in the picture, the non-essential and conflicting interests have been eliminated.—Lewis W. Hine (1909)

Although Lewis Hine enjoyed most of his popular success when photographing in the 1910s for *Survey* and the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), he claimed in a 1932 letter to *Survey* editor Paul Kellogg that his "credo" could be found in the introduction to his only published book, *Men at Work: Photographic Studies of Men and Machines*, his widely admired visual record of the construction of the Empire State Building, taken between 1929 and 1931.[2] The introduction to *Men at Work* drew on the philosophy of William James, a philosophy with which Hine was long acquainted.[3] *Men at Work* opens with a quote that Hine attributed to James's 1906 essay, "The

[1]I owe a debt of gratitude to Alan Trachtenberg and the anonymous *JGAPE* readers, all of whom saw merit in finding the ideas of the photographer. The staff of the George Eastman House in Rochester was, as always, professional, helpful, and interested in the work, and the Bradley University Library worked overtime finding resources from the 1900s. My late friend Thomas Winter deserves a special mention for pushing me to write on the Progressive Era and introducing me to *JGAPE*. Finally, I thank Doug for everything.

[2]Lewis Hine to Paul Kellogg, Sept. 8, 1932, in *Photo Story: Selected Letters and Photographs of Lewis W. Hine*, ed. Daile Kaplan (Washington, 1992), 48.

[3]Hine mentioned James and alluded to the philosophy expressed in James's "The Moral Equivalent of War" in a 1910 letter to Frank Manny (his mentor at the Ethical Culture School

Moral Equivalent of War." In fact, the quote came from James's widely read essay from 1899, "What Makes a Life Significant." Hine also slightly altered the quote, perhaps a key to his own understanding of the "moral equivalent of war":

> Not in clanging fights and desperate marches only is heroism to be looked for, but on every bridge and building that is going up to-day, on freight trains, on vessels and lumber-rafts, in mines, among the firemen and the policemen, the demand for courage is incessant and the supply never fails. These are our soldiers, our sustainers, the very parents of our life.

Hine's "credo" then follows under the headline, "The Spirit of Industry":

> This is a book of Men at Work; men of courage, skill, daring and imagination. Cities do not build themselves, machines cannot make machines, unless back of them are the brains and toil of men. We call this the Machine Age. But the more machines we use the more do we need real men to make and direct them.[4]

To Kellogg, Hine claimed that *Men at Work* "was built as a picture book for children, from the adolescent up."[5] In such statements, Hine meant to explain his didactic intent when making and publishing the images: to convey that workers are the *real* heroes in society, that the things built by such workers—including *Men at Work* itself—contained "the character of the men" who built them, and that by looking at these images the viewer would gain a respect for the working class obtained by the photographer through years of intimate contact. In citing James, Hine meant to underscore that he considered the act of photographing his work portraits as a statement of respect. But, that respect did not appear spontaneously in 1931; as deep convictions do, Hine's dedication to James's ideas and their implications for his photography grew throughout working life.[6]

and to whom Hine dedicated *Men at Work*). See Hine to Frank Manny, May 2, 1910, in *Photo Story*, 5–6.

[4]Hine, *Men at Work: Photographic Studies of Modern Men and Machines* (1932; New York, 1977), frontispiece. The exact quote from James is: "Not *in* clanging fights and desperate marches only is heroism to be looked for, but on every railway bridge and fire-proof building that is going up to-day. *On* freight-trains, on the decks of vessels, in cattleyards and mines, on lumber-rafts, among the firemen and the policemen, the demand for courage is incessant; and the supply never fails....These are our soldiers, our sustainers, the very parents of our life." See William James, "What Makes a Life Significant" in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (New York, 1899), 274-75.

[5]Hine to Paul Kellogg, Sept. 8, 1932, in *Photo Story*, 48.

[6]For a more complete interpretation of Hine's "credo" in the context of his life and work

Lewis Hine thought his pictures could communicate ideas. Yet over the past century, many eloquent critics have contended that once a photograph is made, the ideas of the photographer no longer matter much—photographs have their own lives divorced from the intentions of their maker and exist mainly in the present tense.[7] As Susan Sontag wrote in 2003, "The photographer's intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it."[8] This essay will argue that with qualifications Hine was correct and that the skeptics about photography's communicative power have overstated their case. The wind-swept career of an image does not *negate* the author's original intent. Historians need to consider the photographer's intentions, for it is in the photographer's vision and selection that the career of the image began. If contextualized to time and place and supported with careful historical research, the author's original meaning and/or experience can emerge and enter into the whole analysis. Furthermore, photographs are primary sources of the events they depict, including the experience of making the photograph. Of course, photographs, like any historical source, can mislead. However, if historians examine photos with care and vigilance, they can discern in these artisan-composed documents the specific point of view that the photographer sought to express at the moment the image was taken, even some of that person's general perspective and opinions.

For example, Lewis Hine relied on John Dewey's instrumentalism and William James's pragmatism to form his own core values, which in turn would have presumably affected his artistic output. In analyzing Hine's images, we can use the same ideas that he relied upon when creating them. James would tell historians not to worry themselves into inaction over the inescapable ambiguity of photographic images, to weigh the risk of misinterpretation as similar to the risk assumed by analyzing any human-created source. All human production can confuse, but by studying it one can still develop useful conclusions, which can, after all, be revised or overturned by

in the 1920s, see my manuscript, "'If I Could Tell This Story in Words…': Lewis W. Hine and the Intellectual History of Social Documentary," forthcoming.

[7]Many writers and practitioners have dealt with the conceptual and practical problems inherent in the effort to communicate through photographs. See, for example, Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, 1980); and Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in Print* (Albuquerque, 1981). For a discussion of the issue by Lewis Hine, see "Social Photography: How the Camera May Help in the Social Uplift," Proceedings, National Conference of Charities and Corrections (June 1909), repr. in *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, 1980), 110–13. In this article, Hine made his famous statement, "Photographs don't lie, but liars may photograph." If the author's message did not matter, whether he or she were liar would be moot.

[8]Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York, 2003), 39.

subsequent investigators. Photographs should be approached with caution and authority, but they should *not* be excluded preemptively from normal historical analysis simply because they might have a greater tendency to confuse than other documents might.

Visual images form such a central part of modern expression and experience that for cultural scholars to argue themselves into what James would see as a metaphysical belief in their inscrutablity is to indulge in pointless intellectual acrobatics. The life and mind of Lewis Hine, a powerfully important figure in the intellectual and stylistic definition of American culture in the first four decades of the twentieth century, remains largely unexplored because Hine himself relied on his photographs—his so-called Hineographs—to speak for him. For some periods, the only sources of Lewis Hine's expression available to historians are his images. When heavy-handed theorists take Hine's photographs out of the hands of the historian, they have refuted Hine's own belief that ideas could be read from his images. This stance is in effect a radical presentism that bolsters a fundamentally antihistorical argument. If, for example, Picasso could make a statement of social protest through *Guernica*, Fitzgerald through *The Great Gatsby*, Griffith through *Birth of a Nation*, Stravinsky through *La Sacre du Printemps*, or Whitman through *Leaves of Grass*, Hine's own belief that his images spoke for him should satisfy those who use them to document his intellectual and political life. They are social statements of a careful, highly competent, ideologically driven artist.

Self-Conscious Photography

As practitioner and theorist, Hine was obviously a product of his intellectual environment. The battles he picked were some of the core causes of the progressive movement: expanding education, combating nativism, treating urban poverty, creating decent working conditions, and abolishing child labor. Especially close to Hine's heart were movements to encourage more respect for working people and to dignify work itself. Hine studied with John Dewey at the University of Chicago and then chose to enter the teaching profession.[9] Frank Manny, superintendent of the Ethical Culture School (ECS), convinced Hine to take a position in 1901 at the experimental school. He taught at ECS until 1908 when he began photographing fulltime for the progressive weekly *Charities and Commons*. Soon thereafter, Hine became a photographer for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), under the direction of Owen Lovejoy. The period of Hine's greatest notoriety, impact, and professional success came when he became the director of photogra-

[9]Hine's college transcript at the University of Chicago lists courses with Dewey in pedagogy and psychology, along with courses in history, rhetoric, education, geography, botany, geology, and physiography.

phy for the NCLC. During the 1910s, Hine probably ranked among American reformers just below famous figures such as Jane Addams and Lincoln Steffens in name recognition.

Hine is most known for his portraits of children laboring in adult workplaces, but Hine learned his photographic craft as an adjunct to teaching; he practiced with his students and at Ellis Island. In the years when Hine first photographed at Ellis Island, 1903 to 1906, he had steady employment as a teacher and did not depend on photography for his living. Thus, some of the difficulties encountered in reading Hine's later photographs—his imprecision with captions and misidentification of subjects, for example—arose from his need in later life to resell images to generate income and are therefore not serious factors in interpreting the early Ellis Island images.

While at ECS, Hine began a lifelong friendship with Arthur and Paul Kellogg. When Hine left the ECS, it was to become a photographer for *Charities and Commons*, which would later become the *Survey* and then *Survey Graphic*. This step led to Hine's greatest period of renown.[10] The weekly, best known under its final incarnation, *Survey Graphic*, published a cross-section of views held by the various movements and factions under the broad "progressive" umbrella. A reformist, pro-social science, melioristic tone inflected the editorial voice of *Survey Graphic*. It was a dense, thoughtful publication that served as the primary outlet for reformers of all stripes in the first decades of the twentieth century.[11]

After returning from photographing refugees of World War I for the American Red Cross, Hine began a slide into anonymity and poverty, only picking up occasional photography jobs.[12] He never again reached the heights of his prewar fame. Except for his "work portraits" of daring young men building the Empire State Building in 1929 and 1930—his most self-

[10]Paul and Arthur Kellogg began their work with the Pittsburgh Survey under the auspices of *Charities,* which became *The Survey* in 1909 to reflect the approach pioneered in the Pittsburgh Survey. The surname *Graphic* was added in 1921 to acknowledge the debt owed to photographs and photographers, specifically Hine, in pursuing the causes championed by the periodical. For the Pittsburgh Survey, see Maurine W. Greenwald and Margo Anderson, eds., *Pittsburgh Surveyed* (Pittsburgh, 1996). See also Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York, 1989), 195–98; and Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890–1950* (New York, 1989).

[11]Clarke A. Chambers, *Paul U. Kellogg and* the Survey*: Voices for Social Welfare and Social Justice* (Minneapolis, 1971). See also the *Survey Graphic* collection at the Social Work Archives, University of Minnesota.

[12]In 1918, Hine took a hiatus from the NCLC to join the American Red Cross (ARC), where he assisted in a "special survey" of European refugees conducted by Homer Folkes. He briefly returned to the NCLC at the conclusion of this service in 1920, but postwar Europe had changed Hine's outlook. Although he continued to photograph sporadically for *Survey*, Hine made a conscious decision to show "the positive" side of life with depictions of affirmative activity, such as his Empire State photos, rather than portrayals of social ills.

conscious images of New York City as subject and the source of his only published book, *Men at Work*—and short stints with the TVA and WPA, Hine rarely had steady work after 1920.[13] Yet, he is often given the sobriquet "father of social documentary photography." This is correct, but Hine is rarely treated in ways other than purely stylistic. Hine was faithful—perhaps too faithful for his own good—to the justice of his causes. His fidelity to the life of struggle counseled by James can explain both his innovation and its enduring resonance.

The Unnamed Immigrant as a "Type of One"

Hine evidently took from Ellis Island an understanding of America as an immigrant nation as well as a deep and lifelong opposition to nativism; he also thoroughly rejected the growing xenophobic fear of the abstracted "immigrant."[14] Combined with his understanding of democratic egalitarianism in the philosophies of John Dewey and William James, Hine had an ideologically informed definition of what it meant to be an American. Furthermore, Hine rejected the condescending view of the immigrant as refugee, defined by his contemporaries with adjectives such as "stumbling," "wretched," "degraded," and "despised." Bracketed by those who viewed immigrants with xenophobic fear and those who viewed them with moralistic condescension (with sometimes barely concealed contempt, as in the case of Jacob Riis), Hine saw the United States as an immigrant nation and new arrivals as strong (but not threatening) future citizens who would infuse "the melting pot" (his words) with energy and vitality, and who would be "100% AMERICAN."[15] Hine's outlook on the immigrant as a component of the nation would flourish in the 1930s, but in the 1910s, pluralist visions of the United States were only beginning to gain voice. Hine was tolerant of difference, encouraged by the dignity of work, and keen to the individuality of his subjects. He approached his subjects this way in the early 1900s.

[13]For summaries of Hine's education and career, see Kaplan's introductory essay in *Photo Story;* and Alan Trachtenberg, "Ever—The Human Document" in *America and Lewis Hine: Photographs, 1904-1940 [Exhibition]* (New York, 1977), 118–42.

[14]The standard definition of nativism remains that offered in John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1865–1920* (1955; New York, 1972). According to Higham, nativism "should be defined as intense opposition to an internal minority on ground of its foreign (i.e., 'un-American') connections" (p. 4). Nativism in this context is much more than simple xenophobia; it is a multifarious doctrine centered on protection of the nation from a variety of dangers allegedly posed by those of foreign birth or extraction. At the end of his life, Hine supported Louis Adamic's assertion that Ellis Island was as important as Plymouth Rock to the American social fabric. See Hine, "Plans for Work," in Kaplan, *Photo Story*, 174.

[15]The Lewis W. Hine Collection at the George Eastman House (GEH) in Rochester, New York, contains pamphlets and other reading materials bearing Hine's notes. Hine often high-

Figure 1: Lewis Hine, "Russian Jewess: Ellis Island (1905)." Courtesy George Eastman House, Rochester, New York. Reprinted by permission.

Scholars who examine Hine's images notice a dialectic between the one and the many; Hine made pictures of "types" that were simultaneously deeply personal portraits of individuals. Work (also defined as the lives of those who worked) was the focus of Hine's "social photography"; to him the path to social salvation was through the photograph—a stylistically recognizable "Hineograph"—and the face of the individual subject.[16] Maren Stange, in describing Hine's photographs of immigrants passing through Ellis Island, notes that the way the photographer "posed his subjects to allow for an expression of individual qualities lifts the portraits to a realm beyond the mere depiction of familiar immigrant 'types.'"[17] To accompany

lighted and emphasized items that indicated his commitment, even at the end of his life, to include a broadly construed and inclusive concept of what made an "American."

[16]Hine always saw his images as having a unique quality. To distinguish them from what he saw as images with inferior power to persuade, he called his "Hineographs." For Hine's designation of "social photographer," see Peter Seixas, "Lewis Hine: From 'Social' to 'Interpretive' Photographer," *American Quarterly* 39 (Autumn 1989): 381–409, and Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs,* 164–230.

[17]Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life*, 52.

this statement, Stange offers Hine's 1905 "Young Russian Jewess at Ellis Island" (fig. 1). Indeed the photograph is dissimilar from much immigrant photography made around the same time, specifically that of Jacob Riis and Alfred Stieglitz. "Russian Jewess" does not accentuate the subject's foreignness or membership in a teeming mass, but is rather a sensitive observation of a delicate and beautiful young woman. Nonetheless, on first examination, the photograph lacks the primary element to make it a true portrait: individual identity. In his caption, Hine categorized a human being into a type: Russian Jewess. She was only one of countless female Russian Jews who immigrated in the first years of the twentieth century.[18] For Hine, the end was social progress, not individual triumph or salvation—not even his own. But his method was to use the experience of the one individual to signify the experience of the many and then to represent that message to his audience.

In "Russian Jewess," one of Hine's best-known early photographs, the photographer's signature perspective is immediately apparent. He made eye contact with his subjects. He met their gaze head-on with his Graphlex. Although the subjects may have felt like they were staring into a black, anonymous lens (for many, Hine's might have been the first camera they had ever seen), from Hine's perspective, he was looking them straight in the eye, squarely and without flinching. Hine's work at Ellis Island, and indeed for the rest of his career, was not candid. It was purposeful, intentional, self-conscious, and direct. Yet, his subjects, like the young woman in "Russian Jewess," are mostly unnamed. What, then, can the scholar read from Hine's failure to identify his subjects by name? To answer this, one can look both to our present and to Hine's.

In her criticism of contemporary Portuguese photographer Sebastião Salgado, whom she identified as "a photographer who specializes in world misery," Susan Sontag assailed Salgado's failure to caption his portraits, especially in his seven-year project titled "Migrations: Humanity in Transition": "It is significant that the powerless are not named in the captions. A portrait that declines to name its subject becomes complicit, if inadvertently, in the cult of celebrity." By failing to identify his subjects—his "migrants"—Salgado, according to Sontag, "demotes" them to being "representative instances of their occupations, their ethnicities, their plights."[19] Only the

[18]Furthermore, Hine rarely identified his subjects by name and at times manipulated his captions to misidentify subjects according to needs. A photograph of a working person from Pittsburgh could easily be recaptioned for use later; after all, the photograph was of a *worker* in dire industrial circumstances. See Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life*, for a discussion of Hine's caption switching. The record suggests that Hine especially switched captions amid the pressing financial difficulties of later life.

[19]Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 78–79.

famous keep their names. Is this a fair reading of Salgado? If so, was Hine also guilty of reinforcing the powerlessness of his subjects? Although Hine and Salgado can be fairly compared in the abstract—both made their names photographing poor, struggling, displaced people, both failed to name their subaltern subjects, and, significantly, much of Salgado's work is obviously visually influenced by Hine—but the substance of the photographs is much different. One can easily read (and indeed must put effort into *not* reading) "Russian Jewess" as a depersonalized type, a "representative instance" of ethnicity and gender. Yet Hine's images communicate identity, whereas Salgado's tend to deny it.

Sontag's criticism of Salgado is partly based on how his photographs have been commercialized, making a "spectacle" of collective misery. His pictures group "under [a] single heading a host of different causes and kinds of distress." All of Salgado's migration pictures have in common his remarkable brooding style of printing and his tendency to avoid photographing happiness or even scenes that could generate emotional neutrality. Most of his subjects are refugees and the downtrodden. They share in actuality what historians and contemporaries of Hine have judged in Hine's photographs: the immigrant-as-refugee paradigm. But Hine's migration pictures were not commercialized; the photographer offered them as records of social fact to be of use in alleviating the conditions he witnessed. Only in the last forty years have Hine's images achieved commercial success; the man himself died in poverty.

Close inspection of Hine's immigrants (indeed, even his later photographs of actual refugees from World War I taken for the Red Cross) rarely reveals despair. It is in this aspect of Hine's work where one can find his positive argument against nativism and against the widespread belief that most immigrants to America were desperate refugees. The "Russian Jewess" is not strictly anonymous. The word denotes namelessness, but only in the sense of having one's name withheld; she has an identity. Hine's portrait is of a unique individual with a past and a future. She does not need rescue, nor is succor (or outrage) the emotion she inspires in the viewer. She stands erect, able to look into the lens (or even past it) without faltering, flinching, pleading, shrinking, or cowering. This image is a meeting of two people on an equal level, not a picture of a woman so beaten down that she passively accepts being photographed.[20] The portrait is matter-of-fact. Hine photographed her with her consent, not out of entitlement or appropriation. Hine's relationships with his subjects was more akin to converser than

[20]For example, Paul Schuster Taylor wrote about the passivity with which Florence Thompson allowed Dorothea Lange to photograph her and her children. See Paul Schuster Taylor, "Migrant Mother: 1936," in *Photography in Print*, 355–57.

poacher. The nameless woman is, without a doubt, not the object of the photograph. She is a subject, with all the first person autonomy that implies. This sensitivity to the personhood of even the unnamed and vulnerable marked a departure from how others—writers and photographers alike—depicted immigrations and immigrants. The Russian Jewess might have been vulnerable, but thanks to Hine, she did not appear powerless. Treated by Hine, she retains dignity, the source of individual worth. He took note of a beautiful young woman and paid tribute to her identity by extracting her face from the many.

In his ability to typify and individualize in the same document, Hine's approach illustrates principles articulated by the Chicago instrumentalists he encountered as a student. For example, Chicago psychologist Adolf Meyer (1866–1950) pursued a methodology based on observation, experience, experimentation, and pragmatic perspective.[21] According to Ruth Leys, Meyer developed "a functional, biological approach that would do justice to the actual lived experience of the human subject."[22] To be functional, Meyer had to rely on forensic categorization in order to identify and diagnose behaviors that could be considered unhealthy. First, the practitioner must recognize a standard of health before he or she can observe deviations from it. Second, mental illness—as with any illness—presents in recognizable, symptomatic ways. Although each patient was unique, and Meyer found each patient's individual experience essential for diagnosis and treatment, there were certain recognizable categories of symptoms. Meyer thus spent his career balancing between the type and the individual. In a book review, William James commented on Meyer's antidualism: "[I]ndividuals are types by themselves." Meyer shared with many contemporaries "the goal of making individuality intelligible by grading people according to a variety of norms, scales, and standards....For Meyer...standardization is what makes individuality possible."[23] Without a picture of the normal, the ordinary, nei-

[21]Although there is no direct evidence that Hine met Meyer, Hine was "caught up" in the intellectual "ferment" of the Chicago School of Sociology. See Robert W. Marks, "Portrait of Lewis Hine," *Coronet*, Feb. 1939, 14–57. The correspondence between Hine and Marks indicates that the piece derived from conversations with Hine and that Hine approved of it before publication. According to Marks: "At [Frank] Manny's suggestion, [Hine] went to Chicago and took a degree at the University. Chicago caught up Hine like a match in a whirlpool. The century was turning; new tides of ideas were sweeping away the Victorian dross. Lincoln Steffens was alive then; and John Dewey was still a social force....It was an era of oversimplification. People still believed that to correct an abuse it was only necessary to expose it. In this ferment, Hines's patterns were set. His interest in nature extended to human nature." Manuscript copy of *Coronet* article, 3, Robert Marks Collection, College of Charleston.

[22]Ruth Leys, "Types of One: Adolf Meyer's Life Chart and the Representation of Individuality," *Representations* 34 (Spring 1991): 1–28, quote on 4.

[23]Leys, "Type of One," 10, James quote in n29.

ther the *ab*normal nor the *extra*ordinary could exist. It is by putting individuals into a typology that one can count those traits that communicate the "exceptional" and unique. And likewise with the "Russian Jewess," without labeling her with an adjective and a noun known well to the New York of the day, Hine would have been unable to accentuate the atypical.

In 1905 New York, there were three main and competing ideas regarding the nature of immigrants: immigrant as threat, immigrant as refugee, and immigrant as subject for social science. All three of these competing approaches objectified immigrants and distanced observers from them. By captioning the portrait within a type, Hine addressed the assumptions around him. By allowing the Russian Jewess to compose *herself* for the camera, Hine defeated the alienating objectivity of social science and offered an early version of the pluralist vision. The photographer-as-viewer thus changed the observation. By representing her as a child—tired, yes, but neither powerless nor threatening—Hine rebuked the nativists: She was a danger to no one. By photographing her at eye level, looking directly into the camera, she was no longer the cowed refugee. Hine recognized his subject's individual dignity and strength. By typifying the young woman, Hine acknowledged the current standards of measure used to judge and categorize immigration. Simultaneously he defeated them with his perception of the characteristics that makes each person unique. Perhaps she was not a typical Russian Jewess, but rather *that particular* Russian Jewess. Looking at Hine's Ellis Island pictures, most of which were made between 1903 and 1915, one can also see a departure from the melioristic view held by many of the social reform progressives who published in the *Survey*. In his photographs of immigrants at Ellis Island, Hine challenged his colleagues' view of immigration as well as the lingering (and ultimately triumphant) ethic of Social Darwinism.[24]

In the caption added for his 1938 retrospective, Hine chose a quote from Walt Whitman's 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* as the title for "Russian Jewess": "Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound, But where is what I started for so long ago—And why is it still unfound. WHITMAN."[25] The poem from which these lines derive, "Facing West from California's Shores," was also inscribed at the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exhibition. In the early twentieth century, commentators sometimes read this poem as an evocation of American manifest destiny. But Hine was clearly in line with prevailing and more durable interpretations of Whitman in seeing the poet as a kindred spirit, in his own way dedicated to cultural and social democracy. Hine's

[24]If only for himself. Hine's initial trips to Ellis Island were more for his own education as a photographer and to satisfy his social curiosity than to make a political statement, although these sentiments were reflected in his later letters. See Kaplan, *Photo Story*.

[25]"Whitman" is written in Hine's hand. See Lewis Hine Collection, GEH, file 126.

vision of himself as an egalitarian in Whitman's tradition stands out more when one recalls the famous and seemingly apropos poem that Hine did not quote—Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus"—a poem more in the spirit of the photographer most often held by scholars as Hine's stylistic counterpart, Jacob Riis.

Jacob Riis's (1849–1914) approach to alleviating suffering in New York's Lower East Side in the 1890s and 1900s presumed assimilation to northern European norms. Reflecting the environmental impulse in late-nineteenth-century reform thought, Riis appeared to believe that an immigrant's individuality was less important than the conditions in which he or she lived. Riis's moralistic humanitarianism led him to proselytize for the immigrant, not to identify with him. Lady Liberty's "huddled masses" and "wretched refuse" swept through "the golden door"; Riis's belief in Christian decency demanded society help to uplift them, not leave them to wallow in filth and to live and die at the whims of industry. Since Riis and Hine are often lumped together by nonacademic sources into a single early-twentieth-century chimerical photographer who made pictures of the poor with a social message, it is important for understanding Hine to focus on the place where they differ: each artist's view of the individual.[26] To oversimplify, Riis saw environment to be determinative of character: Change the environment and the individual will have a fighting chance; abandon the individual to a degraded environment, and only the fittest will win the Darwinian struggle of the slums. Although environment was important to Hine, it was not determinative. Like Riis, he hoped to liberate children from tenements and sweatshops and to put them into school. However, Hine went further by seeing agency in the faces of his subjects, belief in their own free will. That child workers could remain children in spite of their intolerable environs signaled the triumph of the human over the environmentally fated. This contrasts with Riis's photos, in which circumstances have brutalized the subjects *en masse*. A feature of Hine's photography that made it so successful in the 1900s and 1910s, and so influential since, is the elevation of the person being photographed from object in the photographer's narrative to subject in his or her own story, thus denying the strict determinism of one's surroundings.

Historians Miles Orvell and Gabriel Ibieta compare the photographs of Riis and Hine this way:

[26]For an introduction to the extensive scholarship linking but distinguishing Riis and Hine, both intellectually and stylistically, see James Curtis, "Making Sense of Documentary Photography," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Photos/> (June 2003).

> But whereas Riis emphasized housing problems, Hine portrayed the immigrants in a more complex and well-rounded way: whereas Riis tended to see his subjects as victims, often with brutalized expressions on their faces, Hine saw the immigrant as a human being with positive feelings and aspirations as well.[27]

Again, for Riis, environment determined the character of the inhabitant. In his 1902 monograph *The Battle with the Slum*, Riis even reproduced a photograph depicting a dirty street with a solitary horse cart under the title "Survival of the Unfittest":

> [The tenement] stood for a while after that down in a deep sort of pocket with not enough light struggling down on the brightest of days to make out anything clearly in the rooms,—truly a survival of the unfittest; but the tenants stayed. They had access through a hallway on Crosby Street; they had never been used to a yard; as for the darkness, that they had always been used to. They were "manured to the soil."[28]

Riis's moralistic humanitarianism required that attention and help be directed to the poor, but it discouraged identifying with them. Given Riis's prominence in the New York reform scene, Hine almost certainly knew of his work even before he took up photography for himself and may even have heard Riis lecture. In a letter written in 1906 or 1907, while he was contemplating leaving ECS for a career in social-work photography, Hine commented to Frank Manny, his mentor and friend, on other photographers who were working at the same time: "[T]here is a crying need for photographers with even a slight degree of appreciation and sympathy."[29] This easily could have been a reference to Riis and other photographers who believed in uplift for, but distance from, the people of the slums.

"The stuff we are made of..."

The text of a 1909 article in *Survey* that accompanied Hine's photograph, "Climbing into America" (fig. 2), is an indication of the degree to which professionalism and the organic social science ethic had eroded the moralistic ethic of the previous generation of high-minded volunteer reformers.

[27]"Introduction" in *Inventing America: Readings in Identity and Culture*, ed. Gabriella Ibieta and Miles Orvell (New York, 1996), 466–67.

[28]Riis, *The Battle with the Slum* (New York, 1902), ch. 1.

[29]Hine to Manny, in *Photo Story*, 2. Hine retroactively dated his early letters during his preparation for the 1938 retrospective at the Riverside Museum. This letter was dated 1906, but Kaplan thinks it was actually written in 1907 (*Photo Story*, 2n3).

Figure 2: Lewis Hine, "Climbing into America: Ellis Island." Courtesy George Eastman House, Rochester, New York. Reprinted by permission.

Less condescending than diagnostic—yet still positing a distance between readers and the poor—the anonymous author of the article summed up the recent report of the New York Immigration Commission: "Difficulty in securing work, schooling, and justice is shown to be almost inevitable....The commission pictures [the immigrant] as, typically, a man, young, unmarried or coming before his wife: a laborer, strong, willing, unskilled...a man who 'has become a constituent force in every field of American endeavor—on the farm, in the factory, in the mine. In the construction of railroads and

other public works he has become indispensable.' *He is the stuff we are made of.*"[30] Far from expressing a patronizing superiority, that author acknowledged that America was an immigrant nation and that its industrial muscle depended on the hard work and dedication of the immigrant. *Survey* saw the immigrants as the solid foundation of American society (an idea that pervaded Hine's work). The article's author goes on to lament how those who contributed so much to the social and industrial strength of America were treated. They were cheated, discriminated against, sweated, and targeted: "But in spite of his handicaps, this alien finds and holds work and saves money" and tried to improve his condition.[31]

Unlike his child labor photographs, Hine did not make the early Ellis Island photos under the aegis of an organization pursuing a political agenda. At that point (1905 or 1906), he was following his own curiosity and perfecting his singular style. *Survey* published "Climbing into America" in 1909, even though the image carries a possible range of dates from 1905 to 1908.[32] *Charities* used the image to supplement a written explanation of a social wrong—the victimization of recent immigrants—and to argue for a solution: public intervention. With the photo thus placed in a different context, the article's message could easily color the image's interpretation. The original context when the image was made would be lost if we accept that the first time it was *published* it acquired its first meaning. Hine's photographs for the NCLC have documentation (his reports) confirming the fact that Hine made those images for the purpose used. This is not true with images he undertook to compose as part of his own curiosity and education. Disconnecting "Climbing into America" from a writer's editorializing and trying to read what Hine was saying, one may arrive at a different interpretive conclusion.

The article is typical of much progressive writing at the time, in that it applies a social science outlook to a social problem. The writer assures the reader that the New York Immigration Commission's findings were "based on the reports of investigators, the minutes of hearings, a great mass of correspondence, official opinions, court decisions, and affidavits"; in short, the conclusions are trustworthy because the data on which they rely are both authoritative and corroborated. The article also takes the anti-nativist, pro-

[30]"Climbing into America," *Survey* 22 (Apr. 3, 1909): 111–14, quote on 111.

[31]Ibid., 112.

[32]The George Eastman House, the repository for Hine's personal collection of his work, gives both 1905 and 1906 as the dates for three prints they own. See <http://www.geh.org/fm/lwhprints/htmlsrc/ellis-island_sum00003.html#77:0177:0039>. The catalog *America and Lewis Hine*, 29, dates the photo to 1908. In preparation for the Riverside Museum retrospective, Hine dated the photograph 1906 then edited the date to 1905. The earlier dates make more sense because Ellis Island was Hine's own project; by 1908, he was photographing for the NCLC.

worker, pro-regulation, and state-action point of view common to progressive social science. The author sees from the report "swarms of men and women coming to America as the land of the free, anticipating easy entrance and quick opportunity; realizing that they must climb into America, toiling painfully upwards from the moment they start to mount the stairs of Ellis Island."[33] The immigrants in the *Survey* prose have to start struggling for everything from the moment they arrive; as such, as in "The New Colossus," they present no foreign threat of the sort decried by nativists.

The pragmatism of James and the instrumentalism of Dewey readily supported the social-science/social-justice outlook expressed in *Survey*. But it could also support the fluid perspective that Hine himself expressed in the photograph made independently and then transformed by editors into an illustration. Dewey's instrumentalism called for a unity of theory and practice, what we have come to label *praxis*. James's pragmatism explained knowledge as experience-based: Selective attention involves voluntary choice (particularly important considering the highly constructed genre of photography), and knowledge amounted to "truth" if it was successful in a social, psychological, or natural setting.[34] Utility defined meaning. The philosophies of James and Dewey were inherently democratic and celebratory both of human agency and its offspring, choice. And elements of both are in Hine's photographs. In modern parlance, Hine empowered his subjects by observing and engaging the individuality of his subjects, not shoehorning them into stereotypes of alterity that James would dismiss as meaningless, metaphysical categories. Hine engaged individuals in poor circumstances, but he rarely found the character of his subjects to reflect the environment in which they lived.

"Climbing into America" and another photograph reproduced with the 1909 *Survey* article, "Jill Came Stumbling After" express a nuanced narrative when read under the rubric of contemporary statements of the pragmatic approach to knowledge and experience, for example James's 1904 article, "A World of Pure Experience." James's arguments provide insight into why Hine chose to photograph in the style that he did. In this essay, James asserts that perception is dynamic, anticipatory, saccadic; perception is a continuous exercise. With each new perception, we integrate new, incoming data with old, stored ideas in a fluid, indivisible process. James identified perception as knowledge in his formulation of empiricism. As in most of his writing, the philosopher rejected any need to refer to absolutes or fixed truths as devices for filling gaps in knowledge.[35]

[33]"Climbing Into America," 111.

[34]For a clear introduction, see Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York, 1992), ch. 13–14.

[35]William James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and*

The relevance of what James came to label "radical empiricism" to photography in general and Lewis Hine in particular relates to how an observer shares perceptions, and thereby knowledge, with someone else. Obviously, the viewer of a photograph cannot have the same experience as the photographer. Even so, the viewer can in theory have certainty of its content if that content can be verified. A historian can use logic, analysis, and sources external to the image to establish its veracity and thus the "truth" of its content; in fact, he or she must do so in order to analyze the photograph as an expression of its author and in context with its creation. Hine acquired his knowledge through observation, recorded it on film, then shared it with his students and then the public. In Sontag's formulation, Hine was a witness whose reportage should be trusted until it proved to be inconsistent with other evidence: "Whether the photograph is understood as a naïve object or the work of an experienced artificer, its meaning—and the viewer's response—depends on how the picture is identified or misidentified; that is, on words."[36] Still, the photograph is only one perspective of the action that appeared before the camera, a perspective subject to multiple interpretations, especially when the viewer does not know, does not understand, or discounts the photographer's written explanation—assuming this exists. In the absence of clear and dependable guidance from the photographer, how can photographer and viewer, or two viewers, see the same photo in the same way and share knowledge about it?

To James, "minds meet in a world of objects which they share in common." He continues:

> In general terms, then, whatever differing contents our minds may eventually fill a place with, the place is a numerically identical content of the two minds, a piece of common property in which, through which, and over which they join. The receptacle of certain of our experiences being thus common, the experiences themselves might someday become common also. If that day ever did come, our thoughts would terminate in a complete empirical identity, there would be an end, so far as *those* experiences went, to our discussions about truth. No points of difference appearing, they would have to count as the same.[37] (Emphasis in original)

Scientific Methods 1 (1904): 533–43, 561–70. Page numbers in future citations will refer to Christopher D. Green, ed., *Classics in the History of Psychology, An Internet Educational Resource*, <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/james/experience.htm>, 1–13. An expanded version of this essay appeared posthumously in a compilation work in 1912. I prefer to use the 1904 version because this is the version that Hine would have first encountered, assuming this eager student of contemporary philosophy read it early on.

[36]Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 29.

[37]James, "A World of Pure Experience," 8.

A single photograph has identical content for two different viewers; if they come to the same conclusions regarding its meaning, there is empirical identity or sameness. An idea has been shared. Hine went to Ellis Island in order to share an idea with others, perhaps only his ECS students, or to create a historical record, but there and throughout his career, he may have formulated his pictures to accomplish the ends recommended by James. He constructed his photographs to avoid as much interpretation as possible from the point of view of the consumer, as opposed to the highly interpretive work of Alfred Stieglitz, which he later criticized. Hine sought to present all the information needed to share an idea without "non-essential and conflicting" details that might confuse the viewer. With a Hineograph in hand, one could rely on the existence of what was portrayed in an image without having to see the original for oneself.

Read in context of James, Hine presented his ideas using a visual representation of subject in order to transmit his version of lived experience. By "fixing" his perspective on a chemically treated negative, Hine removed one level of uncertainty by eliminating an infinite number of perspectives. By creating and reproducing his own "straight" style, unique to him as an individual, Hine provided an opportunity for others repeatedly to verify his perspective. Hine witnessed and testified in the same instant on the veracity of what he saw. Once others viewed his signs *and agreed on their meaning*, Hine could claim—in the philosophy of William James—to have established a truth. Hine's understanding and application of pragmatic epistemology came to serve as an intellectual and philosophical underpinning for straight social-documentary photography. Hine *chose* to make straight images with a relatively easily accessed narrative (rather than continuing his early, soft-focus symbolist experiments) for the purpose of eluding obfuscation and communicating a verifiable image of what he saw. Hine thus becomes the intellectual progenitor of the idea of creating and using photographs as social documents, not merely the stylistic parent.

Returning to Figure 2, the first career of the photograph was as a record of light and shadow on a specific day in a specific place. It is and will always be a primary source, a document representing that place in time. The difference in dates between the making of "Climbing into America" and its publication indicates that Hine did not make the photograph to support the ideas surrounding it in the 1909 *Survey* article. There are infinite ways to experience the image, but ultimately it does verify Hine's experience. The first use of a photograph, the scene it records, occurs simultaneously with the second, what the author intended when he or she captured it. A photograph cannot be made from memory; light, the subject, chemically sensi-

tized film, and the photographer were all present at the making of the image. And, for "Climbing into America," all of this substantially preceded in time the first published commentary.

To make the photograph in Figure 2, Hine was standing on a landing in a stairwell or at the bottom of the stairs. The people standing behind the man with the wicker basket and rimless hat are standing on the same level as Hine. Instead of being in a location where he could observe at a distance, Hine was "down" among the subjects, placing himself in their midst, on a landing or at the bottom of the stairway. Probably neither Jacob Riis nor Alfred Stieglitz would have considered photographing from the same physical perspective as their immigrant subjects viewed the world. The image is comparable to Riis's style in one way: The image was made with flash powder, a practice Hine used with subtlety. Setting up a magnesium flare flash in 1890 or 1905 was not a quick task.[38] Riis operated in deep darkness in the "morgues," "dives," and "black-and-tans," where he surprised people and stopped action with a blinding burst of white-hot light, followed by a quick (and occasionally narrow) escape. Although Hine used an artificial light source (as evidenced by the wide-eyed expression on the face of the man who is looking into the camera but who is partially hidden [in Figure 2]), it was not harsh. The flare stopped some action, but it was not invasive to the point of disrupting conversations or reading. The subjects in this photograph knew that Hine was there before he took the photograph; they would have seen him setting up, which means that Hine would have been observing for at least a few moments before exposing the film. His experience—the historical veracity of what appeared before the lens and what is represented in the negative—is verifiable because it was observed and verified before it was documented; and, it contains very little extraneous visual or rhetorical commentary.[39] Hine could say: "I was there. I saw this," and people from the same cultural background would agree substantially with each other on a narrative interpretation of the image. The more abstract an image becomes, the less likely agreement will occur. Hine rejected abstraction completely, thus fixing himself permanently into what came to be known as the straight social-documentary genre.

From Hine's perspective in their midst, the subject of "Climbing into America" is not the climb that awaits the recent arrivals (it *is* a stopped action photograph, after all) but rather the people themselves on their climb.

[38]Harold Edgerton (1903–1990) developed the first strobe-light flash in 1931.

[39]The opposite can be said about Jacob Riis's "flashlight" image of a startled-looking young African American man sitting on a barrel, titled "A Black-and-Tan Dive in 'Africa' [Broome Street, about 1889]." For the image, see, Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1901; repr. New York, 1971), 114, photo added to new edition to illustrate ch. 13, "The Color Line in New York."

If Hine wanted to show movement, the act of climbing, it would have been easy to do so in low light. Even at this early stage in his photography, Hine was an excellent technician. He used a flash to stop action, not to represent it. Nor is the image a panorama; rather it is an intimate introduction. Draped in the clothing of foreignness and carrying all of their possessions, the new immigrants do not appear to be the tired, poor, huddled masses. They are energetic, curious, and strong; one on the extreme left even manages an excited smile over his right shoulder; another checks his paperwork. The photograph even contradicts the sympathetic sentiments expressed in the article. Indeed, trials that these newcomers expected, along with many they did not anticipate, lay at the top of those stairs; at the moment Hine took the photograph, however, they do not seem to be "toiling painfully." They are not somber, afraid, or tired. If anything, they are being patient. They appear to be eager, determined, and ready to do what needs to be done in order to ascend, including, as revealed in other images, looking a camera square in the lens. The *Survey* article that this photo came to illustrate, however, does express the all-too-frequent outcome of that optimistic and dignified labor: disillusion, exploitation, and poverty.

Hine wrote a caption for the photograph in preparation for his 1938 retrospective, although it is unclear whether the caption was reproduced from notes taken in 1905 or from memory.[40] The caption made in the 1930s strengthens the argument that *Survey* used the photograph as a disconnected illustration and did not build the story to reflect Hine's specific experience at Ellis Island. The text of Hine's caption read:

> [Climbing into America
> Ellis Island – 1905]
> ~~Waiting to get Passports checked – 1906~~
>
> Here is a Slavic group waiting to get ~~their passports checked~~ [through entrance gate]. Many lines like these were prevalent in the early days. There was no room to keep personal belongings[,] so the ~~I~~[i]mmigrants had to carry their baggage ~~along~~ [with them] all the time.

Furthermore, the original handwritten caption is titled "Waiting to get passports checked – 1906."[41] Hine made two significant changes. The first

[40]Hine was an avid note taker when he worked for the NCLC; he took notes for other photographs at Ellis Island. If Hine made notes when he took "Climbing into America," they are either unidentified as such or lost. See Hine Collection, file 126, for the typed caption with editorial corrections in Hine's handwriting.

[41]The handwritten captions are in Hine Collection, file 127. Alan Trachtenberg left a note in June 1988 for subsequent researchers: "These notes may be by Elizabeth McCausland,"

is the title. The original title is a statement of fact, a record of the events that transpired in front of the camera. It tells a great deal about the subjects of the photographs. They had passports issued by their home countries, a fact that might lessen their foreignness to the consumer of the image. The gerund "Climbing" (probably coined by *Survey*) indicates striving. "Waiting," however, gives the impression of patience, confidence, and routine. The change to a more sensational title belies the touch of art historian and publicist Elizabeth McCausland, probably in reference to the photograph's first published use. Under her editorship, the photograph assumed (and retained) the title of the 1909 article.

Second, Hine changed the uppercase "I" in "Immigrant" to the lowercase. This might have been a simple capitalization error corrected by a schoolteacher out of long habit (as he did correctly add the comma in the third line), or Hine might have felt that capitalizing the word "immigrant" objectified those whom he perceived as individuals, subjects in their own story. Rather than a category requiring a proper noun, the lowercase "i" indicates a factual description of a group. The photograph, now known as "Climbing into America" and taught as an emblem of the otherness of immigrants, started life as an invitation to empathy with these newcomers.[42]

The second photograph in the article, universally ignored in writing on Hine, was strangely titled by *Survey*, "Jill Came Stumbling After."[43] Hine's notation on the back of his original print read "Slovak Mother—Ellis Island—1905" (fig. 3).[44] In *Survey*, the photograph was cropped to remove the woman from her environment altogether (fig. 4). Gone is the evidence on the wall of a high and harsh light source, as are the hard shadows, the chain-link fence, and the stain at her foot. Since the background is missing

the art critic who helped organize the retrospective. The handwritten captions are in three distinct handwritings. Hine's handwriting is present, but it is not the most frequently found. There is no indication of how Trachtenberg came to his conclusion. "Waiting to get Passports checked" was written by one hand, edited by another (in a darker pen), and commented on by Hine. The four people who worked on preparing the show were Hine, McCausland, Berenice Abbott, and, one presumes, his wife Sara Hine (if not his son Corydon Hine as well). Sara Hine died on Christmas Day, 1939. One month later, Hine wrote: "There is much yet be done, finishing up and continuing lines that have been started, and in which she had a real part." See Hine to Paul Underwood Kellogg, Jan. 25, 1940, in *Photo Story*, 167.

[42]A web search yielded several syllabi using this image, one under the title "Climbing into the Land of Promise," as evidence that immigrants were huddled masses, displaced and anxious. See <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/2004/3/04.03.03.x.html> and <http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~hius202/images/lecture03/climbing.htm> as examples.

[43]"Climbing Into America," 113.

[44]See <http://www.geh.org/fm/lwhprints/htmlsrc/m197701770101_ful.html#topoftext> for the entry in the GEH inventory. The photograph is reproduced under the GEH name in Lewis Hine, *Lewis Hine: Passionate Journey, Photographs 1905–1937*, ed. Karl Steinorth (Rochester, NY, 1996), 42.

Figure 3: Lewis Hine, "Slovak Mother–Ellis Island–1905." Courtesy George Eastman House, Rochester, New York. Reprinted by permission.

in the cropped image, the *Survey* reader did not know if the woman was standing on the same landing as those "Climbing" or if she was waiting in line, standing with her family, near a seat or an exit: The editors at *Survey* decontextualized her to suit their explanation of events. According to the narration, the man comes first; his family follows. Disregarding the woman on the steps in Figure 2 who had the same types of expectations as the men around her, the editors reinforced their narrative by altering the photograph in Figure 3. What is curious is the choice of caption. The woman in Figures 3 and 4 is stolidly frozen in place, efficiently carrying a heavy burden. She is not bowed from the weight on her back and in her hands. If anything, she is very competently handling a large load. Hine would have only known that she was a mother (she is quite young) if her children had been near her. So, she was not coming "after" her family. Most striking, however, is her posture; "stumbling" is a most inaccurate gerund to describe this image. The editors captioned the photograph and in the process shoehorned this Slavic woman into the Anglo-Saxon nursery rhyme, "Jack and Jill," and editorially assimilated her and denied her the dignity of her identities—ethnic (Slovak)

JILL CAME STUMBLING AFTER.

Figure 4: Hine's "Slovak Mother," cropped and retitled, "Jill Came Stumbling After." From *Survey* 22 (Apr. 3, 1909): 113.

and familial (mother)—identities that Hine had preserved in his discarded caption.

The Seceshs

Lewis Hine's social-documentary images of immigrants contrast not only with those of the moralistic Riis but with those of Alfred Stieglitz, the period's best-known proponent of a non-utilitarian emphasis in photography. Stieglitz's photographs of immigrants and city scenes emphasize the distance between the photographer and his subjects. First, his impressionistic technique intentionally served to turn his subjects into objectified, depersonalized props without identities. Although Stieglitz did make straight portraits, most famously of Georgia O'Keefe, most of his photographs of people in the 1880–1920 period were in the soft-focus, diffuse, gum-print style of the Photo-Secession. The most cogent analysis of Stieglitz's and Hine's work as compared to each other remains Alan Trachtenberg's chapter, "Camera Work, Social Work," in his book, *Reading American Photographs.*[45]

[45]Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 164–230.

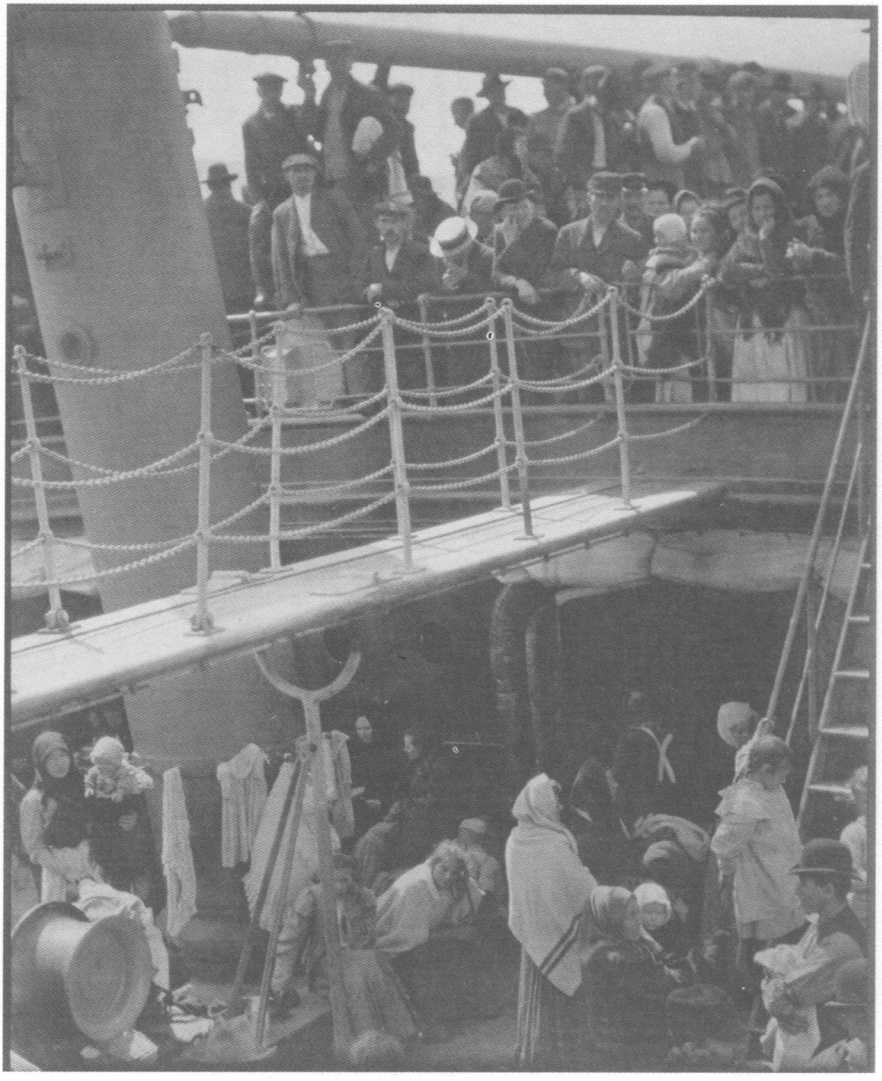

Figure 5: Alfred Stieglitz, "The Steerage" (1907, photogravure). Courtesy J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Reprinted by Permission.

In contrast to the goal of this essay, Trachtenberg's analysis of Hine and Stieglitz concentrates on how they photographed the city, not the people in it. Neither "Climbing into America" nor Stieglitz's masterpiece photograph in the era of immigration, "The Steerage," appears in his book. The evidence that these two innovative photographers knew each other personally in this period is scant, although the professional photography community in 1900s New York was very small. That Hine knew about Stieglitz and his Gallery 291 well established; he took Paul Strand there on an outing with his photography class. Hine's references to the Photo-Secession are rare and not entirely complimentary—he called them "the Seceshs," mostly because he

saw photography as a tool for social change, not as a bourgeois pastime or art for art's sake. Hine believed that photography was art, but it was art that had power. To squander that power was inconsistent with his ideological commitment.

Analyzing the incongruity in these two photographers' approaches to photographing immigration also yields valuable insights. In comparing Hine's "Climbing into America" to Stieglitz's photograph "The Steerage" (fig. 5), one can read the difference in each photographer's message. Made in 1907, the same year that Hine took Strand to visit 291, but not published until 1911, "The Steerage" represents a markedly different political, economic, ideological, and photographic view of those who would emigrate. Stieglitz's photograph is mired in the mythology of the immigrant-refugee. Indeed, users of the photograph have over the decades often mistaken it as an image of people immigrating to America, thus reinforcing the refugee narrative. In fact, Stieglitz made this photograph on the *Kaiser-Wilhelm* when leaving New York, bound for Germany. Although Stieglitz claimed only metaphor for his images, all photographs are primary-source documents, both of the photographer's mind and of the instant when they were taken. Contextualizing the photograph as an *artifact* to a specific historical moment—something Stieglitz had no desire to do—can significantly change the narrative that others have deliberately or haphazardly constructed.

Although the economic metaphor of up and down is represented visually in the photograph, as it is in Hine's, this is not a photograph of people engaged in the upward or forward portion of the immigrant's journey. They are returning home, leaving behind what most American citizens assumed to be everyone's Promised Land. Research on return migration shows that millions of immigrants never intended to adopt the United States as a new home. The dream of America had a limited, mainly practical attraction for them. Those who intended to return to Europe after a period of work took a calculated risk that they could survive the potentially soul-degrading mill of industrialization to be able to return to their homes intact culturally and enhanced economically. From Stieglitz's photograph, one cannot know how long any of these people had remained in the United States before deciding to leave. Nor can one know how many of them had accumulated the level of savings that would allow them to achieve their real goal, an improved position in their home societies. Many people struggled in America, saw their dreams fade, and found themselves diverted, stuck, drained, or defeated. Still, the dream of America, not as a superior way of life, but as a tool for capital accumulation, remained plausible enough that millions ventured across the Atlantic with the aim of doing after a time what Stieglitz's steerage passengers were doing. Whether they had succeeded or failed in their

original ambitions, the people making this return trip had at least saved enough to afford the cost of passage and to do so looking rather healthy. Rather than climbing into America, they were rejecting, maybe even escaping from it. The people in Stieglitz's photo undoubtedly had hundreds of distinct stories, but collectively these voluntary immigrants—sojourners holding passports from home—were far from being "wretched refuse."

Stieglitz claimed that he was apolitical in his choice of composition. He refused on ideological grounds to accept the camera as a tool for work. Photographs were, to him, indeed art for art's sake. The photograph was not made for the political implications of the tableau, and Stieglitz offered no narrative meaning. Yet, the perspective of the photographer in "The Steerage" is undeniable. He is standing over his subjects, looking down. He is not among them, watching their progress from one point to the next, except as a passenger on the same ship. In that exception alone is his perspective the same as Hine's. His social class literally placed Stieglitz above his subjects. There is an upper and a lower in this image, and there is no mistaking where the photographer stands, on the edge of one looking down into the other. And despite the ladder on the right side of the photograph, the two areas are graphically separated by the bridge in the middle; only the small child (in a European-style dress) even attempts an ascent. The figure in the straw hat, sporting American or western European garb and bending over the gate, further accentuates the alienation and segregation between the two groups. He experienced the third-class passengers as a tourist, a voyeur. Stieglitz averred that he was attempting to escape the suffocations of first class when he made the image, yet he did not visit third class; he merely observed from above.[46] Those above wear city/modern dress; those below wear country/traditional clothes. Retaining the traditional woman's shawl or the suspenders of a workingman undermines the ethic of assimilation; drying their laundry in the open air, they were visually, physically, and metaphorically other.

This image lacks the intimacy that Hine achieved with his face-to-face, engaged portraits, but Stieglitz, by his own admission, was not seeking intimacy; he was escaping familiarity by seeking distance. The faces, the conditions, the lives of the people so pictured existed for Stieglitz only as the compositional elements of positive and negative space. Also lacking is any acknowledgement of individuality beyond that of the photographer. The photograph is about Stieglitz; he claimed as much when he spoke about it.[47]

[46]George Dimock, *Priceless Children: American Photographs, 1890–1925: Child Labor and the Pictorialist Ideal* (Seattle, 2002), 13–15.

[47]Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" (1975), repr. in *Photography in Print*, 452–73. Sekula offers a scathing critique of Stieglitz's symbolist assertion that he was conveying a feeling in "The Steerage."

To Stieglitz, the photograph—indeed *any* photograph—only expressed whatever impression the photographer held at the time of creation. Hine intended his images to convey political and philosophical ideas. Stieglitz's title reflects the self-absorption of the photographer. "Steerage" denotes the part of the ship where the helm of the vessel was located. After the eighteenth century, the helm was moved on deck, freeing areas under the deck for passengers. Afterward, the area that was sold as third-class passenger berths kept this name. The image by Stieglitz is not of an area of the ship; the subject of the photograph is mostly human beings. Stieglitz did not acknowledge their individuality or any action of their lives; the area of the boat where they lodged—their environment—defined their existence. Rather than portraits of individuals, Stieglitz made a photograph of otherness; individuals merged into an undifferentiated mass whose personal hopes and stories did not matter. Stieglitz defined them by their accommodations. The only identity allowed to them by the photographer was the name of the area where they slept.

Even though Stieglitz probably never intended his photographs to be used as historical documents, as straight, unmanipulated images, they are primary sources of the scene that occurred before the camera and the physical perspective of the photographer. Most people, historians and lay alike, assume that "The Steerage" is a picture of immigration to America. Reading this image in light of James's theories of knowledge and communication, the photo represents a verifiable, visually captured experience. The present historian can use the image as an artifact to confirm a fact that disrupts preconceptions: Many people willingly left America.

Hine's distance from other contemporary photographers once again appears in his sensitivity to social class, the nature of work and leisure, and his intended audience. Trachtenberg is correct; Hine must be read in light of Alfred Stieglitz.[48] In his essay, Trachtenberg demolishes the artificial line between art and documentary photography. Hine's work is no less art because it carries specific information, and the historical use of Stieglitz's photographs is not diminished by his emphasis on the camera as an aesthetic tool. No clear distinction exists between art and document in photography, nor indeed in any of the arts. There are, however, significant departures in text and context between the two photographers, and these differences do lie more with the artists than with the art.

Although Stieglitz constructed a personal fiction of himself as a classless *flâneur*, the notion of the *flâneur* carries an implied leisure, whether from self-inflicted impecuniousness, as in Walker Evans's case in Paris, or from inherited wealth, as in Stieglitz's. Both Hine and Stieglitz (and later Evans) pho-

[48]Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 164.

tographed more of New York than just scenes of its growth; they both tried to capture its soul. Stieglitz used metaphoric allusions in the place of descriptive captions; Hine chose his subjects based on their (and his) experience in New York City. The varied pictures he took over his career indicate that he was self-conscious about photographing the city but insisted—as indicated by his credo quoted in the first paragraph—that the people who toiled there were the ones who made it work. Stieglitz's views of the city, especially of the working classes, reveal a jarring bourgeois detachment:

> Nothing charms me so much as walking among the lower classes, studying them carefully and making mental notes. They are interesting from every point of view. I dislike the superficial and artificial, and I find it less among the lower classes. That is the reason they are sympathetic to me as subjects.[49]

Hine could have said the same thing, but he never considered the lower classes mainly as subjects for art. Stieglitz was slumming. Throughout Hine's career, he considered his photography to be work and himself to be a worker. The photograph to him, if executed well, was a beautiful work of art, but it was first a tool meant to accomplish an end. Hine's idea of work did not romanticize (in 1905, anyway) his connection to those he photographed. With few exceptions, Hine struggled financially his entire life. For most of his life after 1916, Hine was paid for piecework, rarely under contract, and only for individual images he produced, much like the New York tenement dwellers he photographed a decade earlier.

Communicating Lived Experience

Eventually, sometimes years later, many in the 1930s generation of photographic documentarians lauded Hine as their progenitor. Berenice Abbott, Ben Shahn, and Arthur Rothstein all credited Hine as a major influence, especially in his sensitivity when photographing the poor and dispossessed. Furthermore, and in an especially difficult lesson learned by Rothstein, Hine taught that a straight photograph must be an honest one; otherwise, interpretation would destroy the persuasive goal of the image and would undermine its usefulness in confirming experience.[50] The farther from accuracy the document is, the less it assures viewers of experienced fact, and the less persuasive it becomes. Through his photographs, Hine's sympathetic and

[49]Stieglitz in 1896, quoted in Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 184.

[50]Referring, of course, to a well-known brouhaha caused by Rothstein's pictures of a cow skull in several different positions. Rothstein, the youngest of the Farm Security Agency photographers and the only one to work his way up from being a darkroom technician, gave fuel to opponents of the FSA Historical Section, who claimed that the photographs were staged.

organic view of immigrants, workers, the dispossessed, and his other subjects informed the 1930s view of struggling, impoverished Americans. Rather than protecting America's supposed virtue against intrusion by social forces generated by the poor, the 1930s saw a proletarianization—or laboring—of culture, one that was understood by Hine two decades earlier and expressed in his photographs.[51] One foundation of Hine's democratic/egalitarian view of those he photographed was his pragmatic philosophy.

Pragmatism, like other American democratic intellectual movements, was grounded in individual experience, yet it was also an organic movement. Organicism claims that society must be viewed as a whole, greater than its constituent parts, but its constituent parts are not to be discarded. From this perspective, pragmatism, as James explained in 1906, contradicts elements of James's own, earlier radical empiricism, which claims: "Empiricism...lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction."[52] How best to function as a society is always open to debate. The whole is the goal, but achieving it is a matter of discussion and planning. Thus, to the pragmatists, there were an infinite number of pragmatisms, many equally valid, but intellectually similar to the function that Aristotle applied to the life of the polis. In worth, the parts are subordinate to the whole.

Pragmatism rejected objective truth and analytical logic as the sources of knowledge for the imperfect world of conversation and observation. Functionality took precedence over essentialism. Both James's and Dewey's versions of pragmatism rejected the pursuit of ontological Truth in favor of experiential knowledge. An ontologically based system for acquisition of knowledge will create a mysticism of individual enlightenment. Experientially based systems of epistemology discount the value of received knowledge and accentuate observation. Abstract Truth yields to subjective truths. This approach raises the difficult question of whether knowledge, that is, truths, can ever be communicated. What is the role of authority? Ontology requires the use of symbol and allegory for the transmission from a priest class to the masses. Pragmatism accepts the limitations of human conversation but puts a high premium on ways of communicating *lived experience*. Knowledge becomes what we agree is true, not what is essentially true.

In this paradigm, the objective accuracy of both Alfred Stieglitz's and Jacob Riis's photographs—including their nature as highly edited tableaux—was unimportant to each author; the message communicated overrode both photographers' lived experience and that of the people in their images. Both

[51]See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997).

[52]James, "A World of Pure Experience," 1.

Stieglitz and Riis used images to pass on *their* understanding of truth. The images acted to bolster credibility and asked the viewer to receive knowledge vicariously, in line with William Stott's notion of "vicarious persuasion."[53] Conversely, Stott describes "direct persuasion" through the "human document," communicating lived experience and implicating the audience in the fate of the subject.[54] This latter way of transferring knowledge treats the subject differently. In a social documentary photograph, rather than being an icon of suffering displayed to inspire trust in a third party—the photographer—the subject is a party to the conversation. The way of photographing, shaped by the intent of the photographer, makes the difference. Riis recorded the spaces where immigrants lived; the natures of the bodies themselves were consequences of those conditions. Stieglitz recorded people as abstract forms of light and shadow. Hine did not go to Ellis Island to record the defects of the building, the flaws in the system, or compositional elements of symbology; he went to photograph people. For Riis, a journalist imbued with middle-class moralism, the story, the manner in which "the other half" lived, was the center of the image. For Stieglitz, the center of the image was the photographer's aesthetic reaction to what was observed. For Hine, the center of the image was the subject: a person and his or her experience at that moment in time.

To Riis and many other progressives, middle-class status removed them from personal contact with the impoverished, even when Christianity and the Social Gospel created a responsibility to help improve conditions for the disfranchised and discarded. Riis came, blasted with a flash, and left, rarely engaging a subject in conversation; most of his photographs with people in them refer to the place where the subject is located, not the person before the lens. How is it that Hine could make such sensitive photographs—images that communicated the misery or joy of those whose experience he never completely shared? Perhaps the act of photographing did allow Hine to momentarily share the experience of his subjects. Hine himself referred to his images as "human documents," a designation that William Stott also used, without crediting Hine.[55] Hine's compositions were a result of his compassion; he was moved by what he saw; indeed, he lived it, if even for the shortest amount of time. The evidence was communicated to him *before* he tripped the shutter. In that way he *did* show the experiences of his subjects. Whether his sensitivity came from his own working-class background,

[53]William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Chicago, 1973), 33–45.

[54]Ibid., 12–15, 26–45.

[55]In a letter to Jane Addams, Hine described his work after the child labor days: "Since then I have been doing some interesting work in Industry, trying to interpret to the outsider what I consider to be the human basis of industry." Hine to Jane Addams, Aug. 1933?, in *Photo Story*, 56.

his gentleness, or an innate visual ability is inconsequential. That he shared experiences with his subjects is incontrovertible. Subject and artist were engaged, eye-to-eye, in nearly every image. Hine solved the pragmatist problem of communicated knowledge by replacing words with images.[56]

Hine can then be situated in the wider intellectual historiography of the twentieth century. Not only does his work prefigure Stott's dichotomy of direct/vicarious persuasion in 1930s documentary style, but it can also be said that Hine's lifetime output augured the trend toward a laboring of American culture observed by Michael Denning.[57] Hine's utilitarian and documentary output qualifies as high art as well. Hine's work validates the photographer as a cultural worker as well as an artist or journalist, a very different designation than can be claimed for either Stieglitz or Riis.

The same cultural and economic forces faced by his subjects affected Hine as a cultural worker, including the struggle for money. Although Hine rarely suffered bodily harm (he did break his leg while on assignment; he could not work while in recuperation and did not earn when he did not work), one should not discount the emotionally devastating impact not only of his poverty and having to rely on the wealthy patrons for employment, but also of being abandoned in a field he had helped to create. Others capitalized on his ideas (literally created wealth and fame for themselves). Hine's lifetime experience mirrored the lives of the industrial workers he documented, and he was aware of that parallel. Hine saw himself as a worker; this consciousness suggests that the very notion of "a working class" might be reexamined for the period of the Progressive Era to incorporate cultural workers, as Denning did for the 1930s. Class redefinition was a feature of 1930s America, and although there has been much scholarship on class definition in the early twentieth century, no one asserts that, like Hine, Jane Addams ceased being a middle-class reformer because she made her domicile at Hull-House. Hine, however, was himself a worker, an educated cultural producer who, like the mass of both the skilled and unskilled, depended on corporate largess and the whims of the economy for his livelihood. As much as any industrial worker, Hine saw himself as a "man behind a machine" who "sweated" in the social-work field. His experience was more akin to that of the following generation of cultural producers who flocked to Greenwich Village in the months after World War I (as described, for example, in Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return*) than his Photo Secessionist contemporaries such as Stieglitz and Eduard Steichen or reform documentarians such as Riis. Hine could not rely on a middle-class income and had

[56]An idea that becomes even more tenable when examining Hine's "work portraits," made when Hine's finances put him in much closer class proximity to his subjects than he had ever been before.

[57]Denning, *The Cultural Front.*

to take jobs that he thought were below his sense of artistry.[58] He remarked that his income never again reached the level or security that he had enjoyed at the ECS, yet he continued to photograph in his nonexploitative, respectful way, even in his last years of life. He was an idealist who used his craft to create documents of beauty and grace that featured workers as honored subjects. His commitment to the economically and socially powerless rendered him nearly unemployable after 1920, even though he tried to convince "industry to pay the freight" of his ideological commitment.[59] Hine's burden stemmed from fitting into a paradigm not yet construed. He was indeed a man ahead of his time, with an artistic and intellectual output that belongs as much to the 1930s as to the pre-World War I years.

[58]Steichen Americanized his name to Edward in 1918 when he left the Photo Secession and began a career as a professional (read paid) photographer. See biography of Edward Steichen, International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum, <http://www.iphf.org/inductees/esteichen.html>. Steichen and Stieglitz had a falling out over Steichen's plans to earn a living from photography.

[59]Hine to Paul Kellogg, July 7, 1921, in *Photo Story*, 20.