

During the Industrial Revolution in the United States, many new jobs were created. Many of the workers who filled these new jobs were children. The problem of child labor was not that children were working, but rather they were being exploited or taken advantage of in the work place. Children were often preferred employees over adults. Instead of paying higher wages for adults to perform the same duties, children could be employed at a much cheaper rate. They were working long hours, for little pay, in unsafe working conditions, not permitting them to be children and getting an education.

Children worked in large numbers in mines, glass factories, the textile industry, agriculture, canneries, and as newsboys, messengers, shoe shiners, and peddlers. As America was becoming more industrialized, many poor families had no choice but to send their children to work in order to help the family survive. Working children were often hurt due to industrial accidents on unsafe machinery, uneducated since there was no time for school after working over 12 hours a day, and were infected with illness and disease due to the unsafe working conditions in which they were exposed.

Children in the mills usually worked eleven or twelve hour days, 5-6 days a week. Windows were usually kept closed because moisture and heat helped keep the cotton from breaking. Crushed and broken fingers were common in the coal mines. Most children working here were boys earning \$0.50-\$0.60 a day. Underground, a boy might work 14 hours a day. Working in a cannery was a seasonal job, very common for six and seven year old boys and girls. An ordinary day began at 3 a.m. At the height of the season, children often worked eighteen hours a day. Children carried boxes of produce weighing over 40 pounds. Three and four year olds often worked, unpaid, as "helpers."

By the late 1800s, over 1,000 laws regulating work conditions and limiting or forbidding child labor were passed. In many cases the laws did not apply to immigrants, therefore they were often taken advantage of and wound up living in slums working long hours for little pay. Opponents of the laws argued that child labor was an unavoidable and even beneficial part of national economic growth and development. Twice reformers tried to pass an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to allow the federal government to regulate child labor, and twice these measures failed. Some states tried to pass laws to prohibit child labor from factory employment. Unfortunately, these laws were often difficult to enforce or ignored by factory managers and owners. It did not help that children also lied about their ages in order to have jobs in order to put food on their family's table. Working children even formed unions themselves to improve conditions in industries where they were the primary workforce. For example, Seattle newsboys organized in 1892 and even went on strike to improve wages or to protest newspaper's attempts to restrict them from selling other publishers' newspapers.

In the early 20th century, almost three-quarters of all child laborers worked in agriculture. Many children were working land that did not belong to their families. Living conditions were deplorable. Several workers would be crammed together in one shack. There was rarely running water. Children worked late into the evening, often without a meal break.

In 1904, the National Child Labor Committee was organized by citizens and politicians, and was defined by Congress in 1907. Their main goal was to achieve federal child labor legislation that would apply to all children. The National Child Labor Committee led efforts to provide free, mandatory education for all children. By 1918, all states had passed some form of education requirement legislation.

From 1908 to 1912, photographer Lewis W. Hine took his camera across America to photograph children as young as three years old working long hours, often under dangerous conditions, in factories, mines, and fields.
<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/index.html>

Laws that were passed by government were later found unconstitutional by our Supreme Court, until the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938 was passed. In this act, children had to be at least sixteen years of age before they were permitted to work for full-time hours and were not allowed to help make products that were transported across states.

Sources: HISTORY.com; UNICEF; The National Archives; The Social Welfare History Project; Child Labor in America: **Photographs of Lewis W. Hine** **<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/>**