

✓ Question ^[2]

What is the image's date, title, & creator? "Shorpy Higginbotham, a 'greaser' on the tippie at Bessie Mine, of the Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Co. ... Bessie Mine, Alabama," 1910, Lewis W. Hine.

What type of person might have created this image, and for what purpose? Photographer Lewis Hine was a well-known social reformer. 1910 is during the Progressive Era when Hine and others (e.g., Riis, Byron) used provocative photos of child labor to reveal and hopefully end unfettered capitalism's ability, perhaps tendency, to exploit workers, especially children and women who were—and still are to this day—often employed at far lower wages than men. Hine often worked for the National Child Labor Committee, a non-profit organization to end child exploitation.

Was it personal or published, candid or posed, amateur or professional? Published, posed, and professional: Clearly a posed photograph, everyone is looking at the camera. Hine was a professional and often published his photos in an investigative, often exposé, journalistic style.

Everyone in the photo, all males, looks like he's been working really long and hard at a dirty job: their faces and clothes are filthy. Their ages range from perhaps 11 to 25: around this time 1 in 6 (17%) of children between 5 and 10 were employed [10]. They may be on a break (standing outside, unbuttoned coats, hats pulled-up somewhat). They are sad and depressed (faces, posture). The person in the background on the right side of the photo with a tall hat may be timing them (supervising?) until they need to return to work.

Furnace owners were wealthy while workers were often "poor, but proud" [7] members of the community, African-American and white, looking for opportunities for upward social and economic mobility.

This framework is very likely a *tippie*, a common structure at early coal mines for unloading coal from mine-carts. Miners put extracted coal into small carts that traveled along narrow-gauge railway tracks to other parts of the mining facility. Tippies overturned the mine-cart, emptying the coal into a cargo train car for transport to another city [8]. The tippie apparatus then turned the mine-cart upright and it was sent back to the mine.

This tippie is part of a steel & iron company located at the Bessie Mine outside *Birmingham, Alabama*. Birmingham was one of the world's leading producers of pig-iron, an intermediate step turning weaker metals into steel [5]. The mine and its furnaces closed in 1971 and are now a historic landmark and Halloween haunted house.



Considering the photo's title and that Hine positioned this child at the front-and-center of the photograph (a convention for conveying significance and importance), one may assume that he is *Shorpy Higginbotham* and that he's a "greaser."

"Greasers" slathered a mine's narrow-gauge railway tracks to reduce friction, making mine-carts travel smoothly. Shorpy and the other greaser in the photo, the young African-American holding a bucket on the left, are literally covered in grease and dirt. They dangerously moved between, around, and under moving mine-carts: there are countless reports of greasers' injuries and deaths. Others in the photo could be "pushers" who guided the mine-carts from mines to furnaces to tippies [4].

While African-Americans and whites are pictured here working along-side each other, notice how the African-Americans are "on the margins" of the photograph, an indication of their *social status and overall race relations* in Birmingham at the time. 1910 is amid the Jim Crow Era in America when many southern cities and states passed harsh segregation laws and ordinances (e.g., making illegal interracial marriage, dining, transportation, and other social acts involving African-Americans and whites together).

Shortly before this photo Alabama legislators, emboldened by the U.S. Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, wrote a new state constitution establishing a "separation of the races" that disenfranchised African-American voters in an attempt to build a state based on whites' supremacy. These laws continued until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 abolished many of them [9].

✓ Reflect

How does this image compare with other evidence? Many other historical photos depict aspects of industrialization (e.g., textile factories, urbanization) and also indicate the influence of working conditions on the lives of the poor and those who were employed. This photo seems similar to those revealing lives of the children in Pennsylvania (breaker boys), Massachusetts (spinners), Indiana (glassworkers) who also worked in cruel and dangerous conditions for little pay.

Why might other evidence (messages and data) agree or disagree with this image? Other photos by Hine are likely to support his message. Perhaps journal and diary accounts from these workers would, too. Newspaper articles and, sadly, obituaries, from this era may also support the message that children across the nation are suffering from such exploitation. Furnace, factory, and coal mine owners and managers may have refuted the claims. Some parents, too, may have wanted their children to work in financial support of their family.

What else do you need or want to know about this image? Did the children consider themselves "adults"? What protections, legal or by social convention, did child-workers have? What symbol is on many of the workers' caps? Where other child-workers' experiences in the American North, Midwest, and West similar? Were girls' experiences comparable?

In about one sentence state the image's overall message. Hine is using his photography to combat the injustice [6] of child exploitation; he is using the emotions associated with protecting innocence to motivate, perhaps shame, community members into acting to protect children.

Hine, Lewis. (1910). *Shorpy Higginbotham, a "greaser" on the tipple at Bessie Mine, of the Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Co. ... Bessie Mine, Alabama.* Library of Congress [1].



Citations →

Citations: [#] throughout the primer

1. Hine, Lewis. (1910). *Shorpy Higginbotham, a "greaser" on the tipple at Bessie Mine, of the Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Co. ... Bessie Mine, Alabama.* Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA; www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004000594/PP. No known restrictions on publication
2. Adapted from the Library of Congress's "Teacher's Guides and Analysis Tools" webpage found: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>
3. McKiven, H.M. (2011). *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920.* University of North Carolina Press: NC.
4. www.shorpy.com/shorpy
5. Bennett, J. R. & Utz, K. R. (2010). *Iron and Steel: A Guide to the Birmingham Area Industrial Heritage (Alabama: The Forge of History).* University Alabama Press: AL.
6. Nordstrom, A. & McCausland, E. (2012). *Lewis Hine.* Distributed Art: New York.
7. Flynt, W. (1989). *Poor, but proud: Alabama's poor whites.* Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
8. Colliery Engineer Company. (1905). *The Coal and Metal Miners' Pocketbook of Principles, Rules, Formulas and Tables (9th ed.).* Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co. p. 617. Found at: http://ivdyxsr.archive.org/stream/coalmetalminersp00inteuoft/coalmetalminersp00inteuoft_djvu.txt
9. From <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1248>
10. National Effort to Solve Child Labor Problem (PDF). *New York Times.* 1904-11-27. From <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D00E5DF133AE733A25754C2A9679D946597D6CF>