"PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE WHO FEED YOU"

Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age
As rapid industrialization and global war transformed the Western world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those on the margins of society bore the brunt of dislocation. Major demographic shifts from rural to urban areas altered settlement patterns and the traditional social order, as many urban migrants took up dangerous, ill-paying work in mills, factories, and mines, reorienting their lives around the bell that claimed the beginning and end of the workday. Disease, malnutrition, and dangerous working conditions claimed the lives of many, fracturing families and leaving countless children to struggle along without adults to protect them. Other children found themselves abandoned by parents unable or unwilling to take care of them, or sent out to work at a young age to help support parents, grandparents, and younger siblings. The dislocation and privations of war made still others refugees and orphans, struggling to meet basic needs for food, shelter, and education.

These children – frequently exploited, frequently victimized, yet still historical actors in their own right – are the subject of this exhibition at Gettysburg College's Schmucker Art Gallery. Curated by Rebecca Duffy '16, a double major in Art History and History, Pray for the People Who Feed You foregrounds the experiences and voices of children who were rarely provided an opportunity to speak for themselves but instead often silenced by those who spoke “for” them. The paintings, photographs, illustrations, and documentary records making up the exhibition explore the intersections between depictions of these children’s lives and the realities of child poverty, looking particularly closely at images and descriptions meant to provoke audiences to compassion, empathy, and action.

Charles Dickens’ enormously popular books Oliver Twist and A Christmas Carol offered exacting critiques of the byproducts of industrialization, and of England’s harsh new Poor Laws, which severely limited the range of options available to impoverished Britons through expanding the workhouse system: a refuge of last resort for those with nowhere else to go. Through creating sympathetic characters such as Oliver and the Cratchit family, Dickens humanized poverty for his audience. The pure-hearted goodness of Oliver and the Cratchits made them the face of the “deserving poor,” infusing their sufferings with nobility and rendering them worthy of assistance. It’s no coincidence that both Oliver and Tiny Tim are children.
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innocent, helpless, and dependent. Their trials were meant to evoke pity and prick the conscience of the nation.
Yet in creating such a contrast between his pure-hearted heroes and the corruption, cruelty and suffering around them, Dickens helped to contribute to the popular conception that assistance and compassion should be restricted to those conforming to middle-class expectations of worthiness. He also reinforced the link between the supposed helplessness and dependence of children and the image of the deserving poor.

Minna Citron’s *Grist for the Mill* and the Lewis Hine photographs employ social realism to highlight the contrast between idealized images of childhood as a sheltered, carefree time and the realities of child labor. By juxtaposing the small stature and youthful features of child laborers with their dangerous, outsized workplaces, the Citron and Hine images indict both those who directly profit from children’s labor and the broader capitalist society that condones such practices.

In bringing together these pieces, student curator Rebecca Duffy challenges us to consider not only the question of how we ourselves in 21st-century America profit from the exploitation of children, but also how ideas about dependence and virtue can blind us to structural inequality and stifle voices that possess the right to speak for themselves. Heartfelt thanks is due to Shannon Egan, Director of Schmucker Art Gallery, who embraced the proposal for this exhibition with enthusiasm, and to Carolyn Sautter, Molly Reynolds, and Amy Lucadamo of Special Collections and College Archives as well as Lauren Rosenhe at the Adams County Historical Society for their astute guidance and invaluable assistance.

Jill Ogline Titus
Associate Director, Civil War Institute

**“PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE WHO FEED YOU”**

Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age

Following the Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, countries such as the United States and England experienced a widening gap between the rich industrialists and the impoverished working class. As a result, poverty quickly shifted from a localized problem to a national epidemic. Each country was faced with the challenges of addressing and alleviating poverty on a national scale. With a limited amount of resources, questions arose about who should receive relief. What should it look like? How should it be administered? And how would poverty and policy affect political, economic, social and familial structures?

Policy makers sought to “cure” their social disease through economic support systems and workplace standardization legislation. Meanwhile, middle and upper class families offered “salvation” for those burdened with poverty through educational programs and moral guidance. In reality, however, ad hoc private and public relief systems for the impoverished were laden with their own problems, such as disagreements over actions, false impressions of success, as well as corruption and abuse. There certainly was no easy way to cure or save the impoverished. This exhibition “Pray for the People That Feed You: Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age” includes paintings, photographs and literary illustrations to reveal the intersections between the depiction of and the realities for children in poverty from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States and Europe. The exhibition also uses artifacts and books from the era to explore Pennsylvania’s efforts at reform in Adams County. Policy makers and the upper class first began to address the question: with scarce resources, who deserves the aid most? DISTanced from the realities of poverty, the upper class aristocrats and emerging middle class extended the hierarchical system which dominated nineteenth-century life, to draw new distinctions within the impoverished class between those whom they considered
innocent, helpless, and dependent. Their travails were meant to evoke pity and prick the conscience of the nation.

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the deserving poor (those deserving of aid or help) and the undeserving poor (those who did not deserve aid). It became commonplace to attribute unemployment of able-bodied adults to immorality, laziness, and vice. From the eyes of the upper classes, capable adults should be either looking for a job or working, which would ameliorate their own situation. They should not need help. Meanwhile, children and the elderly were not blamed for their impoverished position. It was not their fault if their caretakers were immoral or lazy. They deserved better care; they deserved the chance to be successful. Policy and charity grew from this distinction. The dichotomy, however, was not this simple; families were comprised of many age groups and abilities. Therefore, economic insecurity within the lower class during this era challenged not just politics, social stratification, and economics, but also the structure of the family and the role of the child within it.

In the nineteenth century children were no longer helping on the family farm, but were sent away to work in the factories of wealthy industrialists for wage—a higher social status. The figures appear youthful, but not too short, and their features are elongated from tight, dark lines, appear hunched over. Their clothes are tattered; their pants are too short, and their features are elongated to emphasize their thinness. These depictions, and those of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Jed, the Poorhouse Boy* embody the period’s stereotype of a pauper child. Their exaggerated, fragile features garner compassion from the upper class, they seem to beg for salvation. These stories attend to an idealized upper class goal, a willingness and ability to teach morals, manners, and religion to youth to save fragile bodies and minds from poverty.

It is perhaps partially because of these idealized stories that encouraged the muckrakers near the turn of the century to seek to represent the world of the poor more accurately, investigative reporters such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine captured their version of reality in quantitative notes and expository photographs. Hine published several series of photographs presenting children in the
perhaps there was a value to the carefree child than just acting as a miniature adult? Was there more to being a childhood? Could it be more than just a time society began to wonder: what is the significance of childhood? And if the significance of childhood rests in the social construct, then who deserves it? Does this dynamic affect the structure of the family? Are the solutions dictated by charity, or are the policies inadvertently creating a new social welfare? Policy makers and the aristocracy had different answers to these questions, but both adopted the poor child as their symbol; they sought to cure poverty that ravaged the innocent rather than that which shadowed the foul-hearted. As a result, impoverished children became the primary beneficiaries in the emerging early welfare programs in both the United States and the United Kingdom: the British Workhouse and the American charity systems. Policies including the Education Acts in England, regulations on orphanages and children’s homes, and Child Labor Laws provided children with schooling and safer living and working conditions to alleviate poverty.

This ideology of guidance for the young and deserving is reflected in the illustrations for Oliver Twist. These depictions of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain illustrate how an impoverished child can achieve—with moral guidance and hard work—a higher social status. The figures in the illustrations for Oliver Twist and A Christmas Carol appear youthful, but not full of life. The boys’ bodies, constructed from tight, dark lines, appear hunched over. Their clothes are tattered; their pants are too short, and their features are elongated too thin, and their features are elongated. Their exaggerated, fragile features garner compassion from the upper class; they seem to beg for salvation. These stories attend to an idealized upper class goal, a willingness and ability to teach morals, manners, and religion to youth to save fragile bodies and minds from poverty.

It is perhaps partially because of these idealized stories that encouraged the muckrakers near the turn of the century seeking to represent the world of the poor more accurately, investigative reporters such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine captured their version of reality in photographs. Hine published several series of photographs presenting children in the

Lewis W. Hine, Manuel, the Young Shrimp-Picker Biloxi, Mississippi, 1911. Photographic print. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, National Child Labor Committee Collection. [LC-DIG-nclc-00828]

Yet, Hine’s photographs do not give the viewer the satisfaction of Alger’s or Twain’s happy ending. These photographs demand that the audience imagine the ending for themselves; the works in a way implore the viewer to rescue these children themselves. Hine conveys a reality where most of these children are not yet saved, where the crusade against poverty must continue and is not merely a fantastical entertainment for middle class readers.

The gap between representations and realities of poverty and the question of the immorality of poverty continued into the sphere of charitable and religious based relief. In a * Salvation Army Social Campaign* lithograph published in 1890 in *General William Booth’s* *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, the Salvation Army is represented as a lighthouse, a beacon of hope amongst the sea of misery. The sea is labeled with “waves” of immorality: starvation, drunkenness, unemployment, and prison. Individuals are shown drowning within it. Salvation Army volunteers pull the victims from the sea towards the lighthouse, a beacon of hope amongst the sea of misery. The sea is labeled with “waves” of immorality: starvation, drunkenness, unemployment, and prison. Individuals are shown drowning within it. Salvation Army volunteers pull the victims from the sea towards the lighthouse, a beacon of hope amongst the sea of misery.

In regards to legislation, the book *History of Poor Relief Legislation in Pennsylvania 1682-1913* by William Clinton Heffner outlines a broad range of initiatives for adults and children alike; however, the concept regarding the significance of morality and virtue as a solution for amelioration of childhood poverty are evident in policy as well. The Pennsylvania state legislature established homes for the children of Civil War soldiers. The Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Commission of Soldier’s Orphan Schools was released every few years by the government and contained exemplar forms and regulations orphanges used to keep records and to ensure fair treatment of the children. For example, displayed in this exhibition is a certificate which was to be filled out for each child who outgrew the orphanage, ensuring that the child had behaved and learned proper morals. The orphans could then show this certificate to a prospective employer to guarantee that their learning has rescued them from the depths of immoral poverty.

The realities of charitable organizations, however, indicate the propagandistic quality of the books and lithographs. The Homestead, a soldier’s orphanage in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, for instance, had a notorious reputation for child abuse. The Homestead opened in 1866 to provide a home for the children of fallen Civil War soldiers. For the earlier portion of its life, it provided a comfortable home for workplace, unearthing a reality riddled with abuse. Hine’s photographs of children focus on their laborious tasks, such as knitting, mending threads on spinning wheels, shucking oysters, and preparing beans. The young boys and girls sometimes perform tasks, which require smaller, smaller bodies than adults, and at other times, they work alongside the adults. These children are not rescued by morality; rather, they seem to simply have bypassed the newly emerging social construction of childhood, working as hard as adults. In one photograph by Hine, Manuel, a six-year-old shrimp picker, is photographed with his filthy apron in front of a mountain of oyster shells, evidence of the work he and the other children completed. His skin is not taut, his features are not elongated, and he is not shadowed from the viewer like illustrations of contemporary novels. Instead, his eyes look plaintively at the viewer. His expression is not of sorrow, but rather is simple and hardened, just another man at work. Similarly, the boys in Hine’s photograph, * No work at Massachusetts Mill*, stare out toward the viewer as well, with the same expression as Manuel and of the older men behind them. The children exude no sense of playfulness or frivolity. Not one cracks a smile. Similar to the illustration in Alger’s or Twain’s books, most of the children photographed do not wear shoes, their clothes are tattered and ill-fitting. They, too, need to be rescued.
Yet, Hine’s photographs do not give the viewer the satisfaction of Alger’s or Twain’s happy ending. These photographs demand that the audience imagine the ending for themselves; the works in a way implore the viewer to rescue these children themselves. Hine conveys a reality where most of these children are not yet saved, where the crusade against poverty must continue and is not merely a fantastical entertainment for middle class readers.

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children and performed at the government’s standard teaching manners and skills. However, just ten years after the Homestead was opened, Matron Rosa Carmichael was found guilty of assaulting a child. In the following year accusations of abuse continued to arise, including the allegation that Carmichael had chained the children up in the basement as punishment. Carmichael was convicted in 1876 and the orphanage closed in 1877. These children clearly did not experience the newly crafted notion of a childhood protected from hardship. They did not receive enough food. They did not even receive the moral lessons guaranteed by the government, which were considered part of the solution to relieve poverty and its presence in the future. Quite simply, the Homestead was not a home for these children.

The exhibition considers how issues of children in poverty continued into the twentieth century with Minna Citron’s painting *Grist for the Mill* (1934). Citron’s work captures the complexities of the gap between the idealized opportunities of the illustrations and Hine’s harsh realities, in the context of the Great Depression. The widespread and sudden poverty resulting from the Great Depression acted as the ultimate test of the new policies and programs as well as the recent social construction of childhood. Here, Citron depicts two young boys sitting on the sidewalk absorbed in the newspapers they had been selling. Their clothing clearly suggests they are impoverished. Their pants are patched; there are holes in the boys’ socks, and their coats are much too big. These boys exist somewhere between the exaggerated, languid children illustrated in the nineteenth-century novel and the hardened, adult-like children of Hine’s photographs. Their bodies are not elongated and dark; instead, Citron paints them more naturally. Though they are pale and thin, their faces are lit, and they are engaged whole-heartedly in reading. With downcast eyes and pursed lips, they intently read the newspapers. Citron’s painting at first appears slightly humorous, as one expects this kind of concentration from adult readers, not newsboys. Meanwhile, as they sit atop a stack of unread papers, one can almost hear the cry of the young newsboys, the shouts of headlines, and the chatter between the boys about their articles. Citron’s boys do not directly confront the viewer regarding the relationship between the headlines and their own lives. Unlike the Hine photos, the boys are afforded a brief moment of leisure. But, their poverty is still seen in marked contrast to the wealth of Ruth or Lindbergh. As seemingly literate and apparently healthier than the children Hine pictured, the boys in Citron’s painting advocate the significance of education in the mitigation of poverty, rather than just exposing conditions. Because the boys do not face the viewer the way Hine’s children do, the title of the work, *Grist for the Mill*, utilizes a contemporaneous idiom to subtly remind viewers of the reality of conditions for children. Grist is corn brought to the mill to be ground into flour. When farmers would say they were bringing “grist for the mill,” they meant that their corn would be turned to profit. Later, the phrase became used to describe anything that may potentially garner a profit.
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Therefore, when she uses this expression as the title of this work, she asks the viewer to consider the idea of the “profitability of children.” Thus, the painting still questions the sanctity of childhood and poverty of children; however, Citron’s painting further considers the impact of industrialists’ greed on children, instead of the benevolence of industrialists willing to rescue children from the poverty effectuated by the immorality of their parents. Perhaps because her work supervised the series of Hine’s displayed here by nearly two decades and was created in the midst of the Great Depression, she conveys a less idyllic reality and suggests a less prejudiced solution: literacy, rather than morality.

The reality of life for children was much different than the ideal goals of policy makers and the depictions of the rich saving the weak and helpless. However, just as the viewer cannot actually hear the boys’ gasps or shouts through Citron’s painting, the voices of the impoverished children were rarely heard. Their realities were ignored in part because their destitution proved too great a contrast to the prosperity industrialization had brought to the middle and upper classes. Many of the efforts to alleviate poverty challenged social, political, economic, and familial structures, just as these complex relationships continue to perplex activists and policy makers today. Its total extinction begged a seemingly impossible, complete reorganization of society. Rather than truly suggesting change, the new literary and visual representations of the salvation of pauper children assuaged any guilt of the aristocracy. The reality, however, was that the children, employed as workers, were continuously exploited for financial gains for this aristocracy. The child’s figure, as fragile, as a symbol of a new notion that childhood should and could be protected, emerged in the Industrial Age. Works of art and literature, as well as policies and documents, suggest complex relationships between birth status and opportunity and the evolving rhetoric surrounding despair and hope. As a result, depictions of impoverished children used to support idealized policies reveal only a muted version of the difficulties experienced by real children.

Rebecca Duffy ’16

4 Ruth Collins and Cindy Stouffer, One Soldier’s Legacy: The National Homestead at Gettysburg (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1996), 61-62. According to Collins and Stouffer, “Children were kept in the cellar of the Homestead for days at a time. The cell was five feet deep, eight feet wide, and four feet high. There was no ventilation or light, and the children were shackled to the wall.”
5 Collins and Stouffer, One Soldier’s Legacy, 64. See also Catherine Reil, Alone in the World: Orphans and Orphanages in America (New York: Clarion Books 2005), 68-73, 80.
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Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age

CURATED BY REBECCA DUFFY ’16

SEPTEMBER 9 – OCTOBER 24, 2015

GALLERY TALK:
OCTOBER 2, 5 PM.
RECEPTION TO FOLLOW UNTIL 7 PM

COVER: Minna Citron, Grist for the Mill, 1934. Acrylic on Masonite, 24 x 28 in. Gift of Thomas and Virginia Citron, Class of 1947. Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College

Gettysburg College
300 North Washington Street
Schmucker Hall
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania 17325
717.337.6080

Schmucker Art Gallery

www.gettysburg.edu/gallery  Tuesday - Saturday 10 - 4 Building is accessible.