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Book Review

Lewis Hine as Social Critic. By Kate Sampsell-Willmann. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009. xii, 331 pp. \$50.00, ISBN 978-1-60473-368-6.)

In the foreword to *Lewis Hine as Social Critic*, Alan Trachtenberg notes that the important early documentary photographer Lewis Hine had the technical and intellectual capacity to control the output of his camera. His pictures did not simply record what was in front of Hine; they looked that way because he meant them to look that way (p. ix). It is therefore important to understand Hine's intellectual development. Kate Sampsell-Willmann grapples with the photographer as intellectual in this important if somewhat flawed study. 1

Two major themes are developed throughout the book: first, that Hine fully participated in the intellectual life of the early twentieth century, as a student of John Dewey and then as an elucidator and enlarger of Dewey's pragmatic tradition through his photography; and second, that Hine was preeminently the defender of "the dignity of work as a human value and the worker as primary mover in industrial society" (p. 13). While Hine might well deprecate the exploitation of children or women through long hours and/or unsafe working conditions, he nevertheless celebrated work and workers throughout his life. 2

Sampsell-Willman, is at her best when analyzing Hine's photographs in relation to his humanistic/pragmatic philosophy. Her comparison of some of Hine's best early pictures of immigrants at Ellis Island with Alfred Stieglitz's well-known image titled "The Steerage" and her discussion of Hine's work for the Red Cross in Europe just at the end of World War I are particularly rich. Hine's photography of the construction of the Empire State Building also provides the author with a strong body of work that perfectly illustrates her two themes—the photographer as elucidator of pragmatism and as celebrator of the dignity of work. 3

As intellectual history this can hardly be improved. In treating Hine's personal life, however, the book runs into trouble in its discussion of the 1920s, and the trouble gets deeper in the 1930s. During that period, Hine found it increasingly difficult to make a living and became more and more isolated from former friends and supporters. Hine quarreled with Florence Kellogg, the editor of *Survey Graphic* magazine. His sales to Kellogg dropped off to nearly zero. Hine won a contract to photograph the development of rural power for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) at the astronomical salary of \$1,000 per month. After five weeks, he left the job after reportedly quarreling with the director of the TVA. Hine applied to his old friend Roy Stryker, the Resettlement Administration's director of the historical section, to join that federal agency. He demanded the right to keep his negatives (which no photographer was allowed to do under federal regulations) and was not employed. There is a pattern in all this, yet somehow the author misses it. To Sampsell-Willmann, Hine's problems are invariably the fault of someone else. Hine's sad final years and the author's difficulties in dealing with this period should not, however, diminish the very real accomplishment of 4

a first-rate intellectual history of a seminal photographer.

F. Jack Hurley, *Emeritus*
University of Memphis
Memphis, Tennessee

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