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Archives of American Art

Celebrating 175: Lewis Hine, Elizabeth McCausland Files, Manuscripts and Published Articles, 1938

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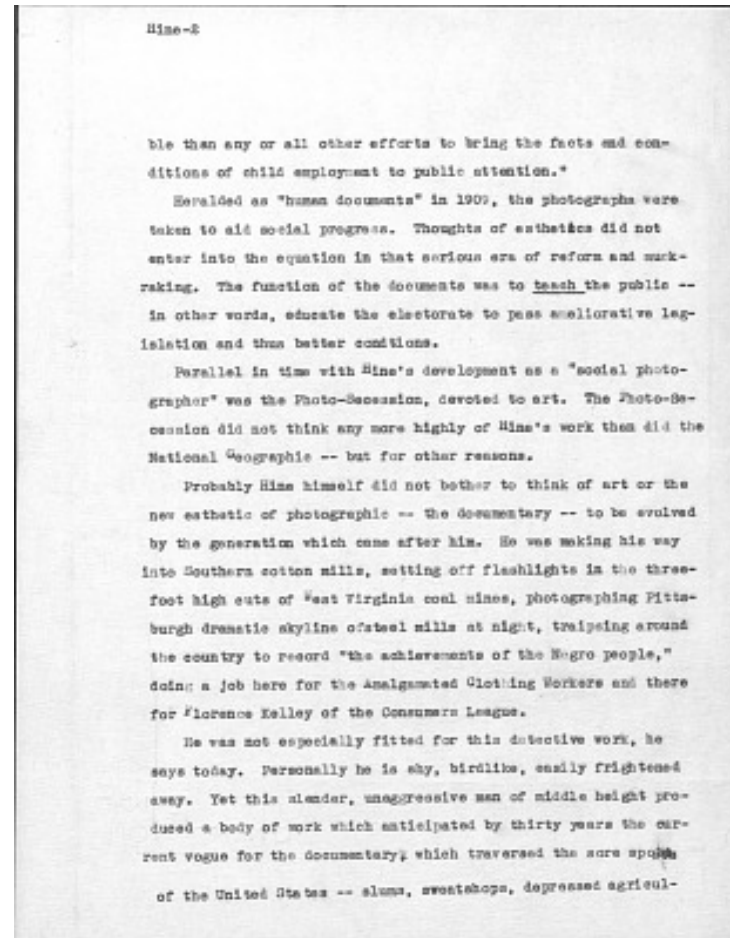
ble than any or all other efforts to bring the facts and conditions of child employment to public attention"

Heralded as "human documents" in 1909, the photographs were taken to aid social progress. Thoughts of esthetics did not enter into the equation in that serious era of reform and muck-raking. The function of the documents was to teach the public-- in other words, educate the electorate to pass ameliorative legislation and thus better conditions.

Parallel in time with Hine's development as a "social photographer" was the Photo-Secession, devoted to art. The Photo-Se-cession did not think any more highly of Hine's work than did the National Geographic-- but for other reasons.

Probably Hine himself did not bother to think of art or the new esthetic of photographic -- the documentary -- to be evolved by the generation which came after him. He was making his way into Southern cotton mills, setting off flashlights in the three-foot high cuts of West Virginia coal mines, photographing Pitts-burgh dramatic skyline of steel mills at night, traipsing around the country to record "the achievements of the Negro people," doing a job here for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and there for Florence Kelley of the Consumers League.

He was not especially fitted for this detective work, he says today. Personally he is shy, birdlike, easily frightened away. Yet this slender, unaggressive man of middle height produced a body of work which anticipated by thirty years the current vogue for the documentary, which traversed the sore spots of the United States-- slums, sweatshops, depressed agricul-



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