July 14, 1941

TO: Mr. Orren H. Lull
Regional Director

FROM: Barbara Wright
Photographer

SUBJECT: Formula for Photo-Narration or Photo-Essay in Book or Folio and Exhibit form, describing NYA Resident Training or Local Projects for use by Youth Personnel Representatives and/or display purposes in Region IV.

It was suggested by you that I draw up an outline as to the use and type of photography for purposes of illustrating the function and activities of NYA projects to the youth and public at large, and that this outline be sent out to the various state administrators to be interpreted and developed by them, their technicians or photographic projects, as they see fit.

1) Book or folio form for youth personnel representatives.

2) Public displays or exhibits.

1) A sequence of pictures to be made by staff photographers, or youth on photographic projects, or photographers hired for the purpose. These shots to describe the aspects of a particular, or a number, of NYA projects, shots and texts to be worked up in narrative form. In order that the sequence be kept and the pictures prevented from becoming dog-eared or curled, a format to be designed in which to present them, by whatever methods are available in the various states.

A practice which is prevalent now among photo-journalists is to work with a "shooting script", that is, to work up a theme in visual terms on paper before going out to get a story.

The following is a suggestion: In covering a project with the intention of capturing the interest of youth who is in search of work experience and a wage, the obvious angle is to shoot material with a regard to the youth himself -- the questions HE wants answered, and not according to the administrative mind. Any self-respecting

youth is wary of the unknown quantities in an organization -- "What's in this for me?" -- "What kind of outfit is this?" -- "Wonder what the grub's like, if the equipment and the boss are any good; wonder if the crowd's friendly, what the money is like and if there is any room for a ball game." He may be extremely touchy about how clean things are.

All this can be illustrated for him, and the mood of the photography should be ACTION ALL THE WAY THROUGH. The theme should be youth in relation to the project -- environment - emphasis on human interest. Detailed illustration of shop equipment and living conditions are vital, but should be shot with the youth in relation to these things and NOT depicted as cold, objective studies for technicians. The atmosphere, as well as things, has a strong appeal.

Conventional Breakdown for shooting project life:

THE TOOL VERSUS THE YOUTH -- THE EQUIPMENT VERSUS THE YOUTH: Try for new angles, interesting lighting and extreme sharpness in the negative; these shots are the "guts" of the program -- youth learning something that they have never known before. Try to show keen absorption in the job -- catch concentration in the eyes -- some unselfconscious grimace in the face as he or she works out a manual problem. Try to get away from posed shots. They look dull, limp and without punch.

GENERAL SHOT OF EXTERIOR OF PROJECT: Show environment, neighborhood, proximity to city, town, or rural life -- building or buildings. Youth should be milling about on the project; there is something frozen and uninviting about buildings and grounds without people. Get a mob of youth outside and ask them to perform. However, keep in mind the structural forms of the project. Use wide angle lens, if possible, and filters for contrast.

THE KIND OF FOOD: -- How much, and how it is served. How big are dining quarters. This is subject matter for spontaneous facial expressions -- good humor.

SLEEPING: -- Beds, bunks -- youth reading during spare time, or sleeping; how much air - space. Show that his individual belongings are respected -- lockers -- pictures of family and friends on walls.

RECREATION: -- Library, books, magazines, games -- sports, recreational field and activities -- TRY TO SHOW THAT HERE HE IS MAKING NEW SOCIAL CONTACTS, NEW FRIENDS.

HEALTH: -- Examinations, first aid.

SUPERVISION: -- Try to show a friendly relationship, the supervisor instilling confidence in a newly arrived youth; the poise that comes with overcoming a manual problem and working with new techniques.

COLLECTIVE ENTERPRISES: -- Self-government and youth foremen participation as NYA in local community life and sports.

PAYROLL: -- Payday lineup; lots of good humor here. A good idea on this subject would be to break down the wage into tangibles -- what the average youth buys with his money -- illustrate it (shoes, shirts, dresses, beauty parlor, cigarets, movies, bowling, dancing, etc.) IF HE OR SHE IS ATTEMPTING TO GET A JOB on his off time, show that the money enables them to buy lunches, carfare, and that new clothes add to their morale while hunting for a job.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE: -- Show interview and youth working on new job.

Some of the regional staff members and myself have discussed different types of formats for this project, and in view of the urgency and time limit, we concluded that the simplest and at the same time attractive technique would be to gather a series of 8"x10" enlargements into a durable paper or cardboard folio which could be tied together with colored tape. Decoration might be used on the outside of the folio in the shape of a colored NYA insignia, or symbols, such as tools, or hands working with tools, etc., to be reproduced by silk screen process or photographic cutouts, or both. Lettering could also be used. I suggest that in order to keep these shots mounted (for durability) in sequence, they should be glued or pasted on dress pattern muslin, these to be folded accordion-wise as are postcard folders. This would be an easy way to handle a whole photo-story.

The essentials to keep in mind in producing the above folder should be simplicity of form and vivid content. It should be along the lines of the best commercial layout and design trends in the country. In appealing to a typical American youth, it ought to be remembered that he or she is apt to think in terms of "Life", or "Look", and the many excellent rotogravure sections throughout the country.

I comment on this in that my experience with editing pictures and picture-books sent in by the states to Washington has made me conscious of the number of book-projects which are ornate and ponderous, and the amount of pictures which are dull in composition and unimaginative and often too badly processed to be released for publication. This is a sorry proposition from the very beginning, because the effort has been wasted and the appeal is nil.

Although the quality of NYA photography has picked up incredibly fast, especially in the past year, there is still a terrific amount of waste paper and bulbs. This is unfortunate, inasmuch as NYA provides some of the most exciting source material in the country for pictures, and the country should know about NYA in the best possible fashion.

2) A number of Federal agencies, including NYA, have resorted to photo-narrative exhibits displayed in public places -- movie lobbies and available store windows -- as part of their information service. In view of the defense effort, more of this type of publicity might be used in Region IV.

I have written to the Federal agencies which I believe have produced the most outstanding designs and layouts in this particular field, asking them for photo copies of their displays. These agencies include the NYA National Office, care of Herbert Little; the Tennessee Valley Authority, care of Mr. Charles Krutch; the Public Health Administration, care of Mr. Robert Schmuck, and the Farm Security Administration, care of Mr. Roy Stryker. Photo copies of these exhibits will be sent to the various state administrators in this region, in the event they might wish to incorporate some of their ideas into their own program.

I have also written to ask Mr. Robert Schmuck to send copies of blue prints, giving specifications for what I believe to be a most ingenious exhibit stand. It is of modern design, streamlined and collapsible for traveling, light and easy to construct. Copies of these blue prints will also be sent to the administrators. This stand can be constructed in the NYA shops.

I should like to take advantage of this memo to make a plea for photographic projects throughout the region, and movie projects as well. A number of outstanding "celluloid" units have been developed within the NYA work program, and should be recognized and weighed in allotting the new appropriation. Still pictures and movies are accepted the world over as one of the primary communications in modern life -- as important as radio in reaching vast numbers of people. A year ago, the President included photography along with the radio in what was considered vital to defense. Europeans have exploited photo-techniques to their utmost as offensive and defensive weapons. The Director of Information in Washington has recognized recently that the still-files have helped enormously in explaining NYA through trade journals, education periodicals, etc., and the press. We have been able to explain briefly the meaning and complex functions of NYA to the youth, adult heads of organizations, professional people, etc., and the regular public, with a handful of pictures and movie shorts.

As a work project, the "celluloid" techniques offer endless possibilities for useful production, (among other things, photo murals for resident training projects) and job opportunities when the youth leave NYA. For example: Magazine, press and book illustration, commercial advertising and public relations, precision studies in industrial production, research and documentation in medical and all sciences, aerial and documentary photography for the army, production and transfer of decoration for industrial products (wall paper, textiles, metal and ceramic products, etc.), creative, therapeutical and recreational outlets, etc. The discipline required by precision, knowledge of chemistry, optics and familiarization with the fine mechanics of cameras and the creative end is high caliber work experience.

I would propose here that more emphasis be placed on the USE OF THE CAMERA by the youth themselves; that they be sent out on assignments to cover projects and youth activities and problem studies in their communities -- to encourage journalism and free-lancing among those youth who show aptitude.

The trend in color photography is quickening and it would be in keeping with the times if the state administrators were to encourage established color projects, or make available equipment and materials to already-established black and white photo projects.

BW:fm