

Humanities

Carter Names New Chairman



Joseph D. Duffey was nominated on August 3, 1977 by President Carter to be Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. His career includes extensive experience in higher education as well as in civic and public affairs.

Mr. Duffey comes to the Endowment from the Department of State where he served as Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs. Prior to that he was chief executive officer and spokesman for the American Association of University Professors, where he served on a number of national boards and associations in the field of higher education.

Mr. Duffey is a native of West Virginia and a graduate of Marshall University of Huntington. He holds graduate degrees from Andover Newton Theological School, Yale University, and the Hartford Seminary. He received his Ph.D. degree with a thesis on Lewis Mumford's philosophy of technology and culture.

From 1969-1970, Mr. Duffey was an Associate Professor at the Hartford Seminary, as well as founder and Director of its Center for Urban Ethics. He was a Fellow of the John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics at Harvard University in 1971. From 1971-1973, he was Adjunct Professor at Yale University and a fellow at Calhoun College there.

He played a key role as policy adviser to President Carter in the 1976 campaign, and prior to that was Chairman of the Democratic National Committee's Task Force on Education.

Mr. Duffey has traveled and lectured widely and is author of articles on social policy issues in a number of journals. He was the recipient of a Rockefeller Doctoral Fellowship and was named a post-doctoral fellow of the Society of Kent and Danforth Fellows.

Mr. Duffey is married to Anne Wexler. The Duffeys have two sons.

"In Pursuit of Liberty" Airs on Labor Day

The first of four new TV documentaries, produced by WNET-13 in New York with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, was shown on Monday, September 5, over member PBS stations. Others in the series will be shown on successive Mondays.

These documentaries present dramatically four civil and personal liberties generally thought by Americans to be among the most fundamental to the pursuit of a decent life: the right to work, to freedom of thought, to privacy, and to freedom of the press. The series will look at the evolution of liberties, the dangers which threaten them, and the ways in which each may conflict with

other, equally important, freedoms.

Dr. Charles Frankel, on leave from Columbia University to serve as president of the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, is writer, editor, and host of the series. A panel of humanities scholars drawn from the membership of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences has served in an advisory capacity.

The aim of the National Endowment for the Humanities in supporting "In Pursuit of Liberty" is to illuminate the history, philosophy, and social customs of a society in a manner which is instructive, provocative, and entertaining.



"The Best of Families" on Public TV

A new historical dramatic series, "The Best of Families" by CTW, will premiere on October 20 over the 267 member stations of the Public Broadcasting Service. Through the device of fictional characters in three diverse segments of American society during the turbulent period between 1880 and 1900, the series will dramatize the effects of urbanization and technology that concern the nation to this day.

The National Endowment for the Humanities has made a major grant for the new series to CTW, known for its educational programs such as "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company." Additional major support has come from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Mobil Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and CTW itself.

The first presentation in the new series will be a two-hour episode at 9:00 p.m. EDT on October 20, with

seven additional episodes of one-hour length to be aired at the same time in subsequent weeks.

Against a background of real events taking place in New York City during the period, the stories of three fictional families and their friends emerge. More than 40 family members, friends and dramatic characterizations of such historical personages as Theodore Roosevelt give depth and variety to the storied presentation of the period.

Working with the CTW production staff for this series is a 14-member board of advisors, consisting primarily of historians. Chairman of the board is Gerald S. Lesser of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University; vice chairmen are Neil Harris of the National Humanities Institute, University of Chicago, and David Rothman of Columbia University.

"The Best of Families" is being videotaped at the old 20th Century Fox Studio on West 54th Street in New York. The component families in the series are: the Raffertys, a family of newly-arrived Irish immigrants trying to survive in a complex, strange environment; the Lathrop-Baldwin element, an alliance between a mid-western construction foreman seeking success in the big city and a middle-class minister's daughter with artistic talents and an urge to express them; the Wheelers, wealthy, upper-class representatives of the upper strata of New York economic and social life. The thread that ties these disparate elements together is the heat wave and financial collapse of 1880, affecting each of the families in different ways. Stemming from these events, the dramatic social history of the era unfolds.

1977 CALENDAR OF APPLICATION DEADLINES

October 15	Education Programs – Cultural Institutions Grants, beginning after April 1978
October 17	Fellowships ^{1,2} – Summer Stipends, 1978
November 1	State Programs – Projects beginning after April 1, 1978
	Education Programs – Higher Education Curriculum Materials Grants, beginning after April 1978
	– Higher Education General Project Grants, beginning after April 1978
	– Elementary and Secondary Education General Project Grants, beginning after April 1978
	– Elementary and Secondary Education Extended Teacher Institutes Grants, beginning after April 1978
	– Regional Development Grants beginning after April 1978
November 7	Fellowships – Fellowships in Residence for College Teachers, 1978-79
November 15	Research Grants – Research Materials Grants beginning after October 1, 1978
	Youthgrants – Projects beginning after May 1, 1978
	Education Programs – Pilot Grants, beginning after April 1978
November 21	Public Programs – Programs beginning after April 1, 1978
December 1	Research Grants – Translation Grants, beginning after July 1, 1978
	– Publications Program Grants, beginning in June 1978
December 15	Education Programs – Consultants Grants, beginning after March 1978
	– Challenge Grants, beginning in June 1978

¹Fellowships and Stipends for the Professions. Application instructions will be disseminated widely to the professions concerned in December 1977.

²Fellowship Support to Centers for Advanced Study. Applications may be submitted at any time.



Russell Lee, FSA photographer, views Plattner exhibition



Photo by Ralph Duke, Amarillo Globe News

AMERICAN IMAGES

"One picture is worth more than ten thousand words," says the ancient Chinese proverb. In the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division are at least 70,000 affirmations of that oft-spoken gnome. Assembled there is the remarkable permanent collection of 70,000 Depression-era photographs by the Farm Security Administration, a collection thought by many to be, in toto, the most effective and complete photo-documentation of American life and culture ever made.

Think of the Thirties. The images conjured up by your mind's eye are likely to be those first framed by the FSA photographers. Spare, frank, poetic scenes: the careworn tenant farmer scratching meals from depleted soil; the displaced "Okie" family trekking west in dust-encrusted jalopy; under-employed migrant pickers idled and hungry along California roads. They are humbled people with anxious faces, their eyes brimmed with dignity, resilience and unexpected jokes. Photographed, these faces say to us, as one displaced sharecropper said to FSA photographer Dorothea Lange,

We ain't no paupers. We hold ourselves to be decent folks. We don't want no relief. But what we want is a chanst to make an honest living like what we was raised.

So effective were these early FSA photographs that viewing them (in particular Lange's migrant worker shots), John Steinbeck was moved to write the monumental Depression novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Most of us today know the FSA photo-documentation project for its classic works depicting rural deprivation in Depression/Dustbowl days. And indeed, though it later changed direction, it was for this purpose the project was begun.

Yet in recent years, it seems, publications and ex-

hibitions have repeatedly featured the same fine FSA pictures, lauding their art more than their documentary content. For all its humanistic range and impact, the FSA collection remains most famous for the artistry of these archetypes.

Thus it is that one exhibition currently touring U.S. museums is significant and unique. Entitled "American Images: Documentary Photographs by the Farm Security Administration, 1935-1942," it is a socio-historic survey of "images of extraordinarily high historical and artistic merit that have received little if any recognition in the past." The exhibition was designed and prepared by Steve Plattner, then a Macalester College senior, with funds from the Youthgrants program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Surely art by any standard, the FSA collection is more fully appreciated as a photo-documentary when viewed in its historical context. Thus, in mood and content, Plattner's "American Images" conveys the *purpose* behind the FSA project.

"Instead of merely focusing on downtrodden farmers," Plattner explains, "the photographers, working under the guidance of project chief Roy E. Stryker, documented the relationship between rural poverty and improper land use, the decline of the small farming community, manifestations of primitive and popular culture, and the growth of America's urban blight." Artistic as well as persuasive, these "government photographs aimed to demonstrate to all Americans that in a 'mismanaged rather than sick' nation, severe economic conditions were surmountable through a determined adherence to fundamental principles of dignity, courage, justice, pragmatism and cooperation."

Plattner, bewildered by the prospect of choosing



Wife of WPA worker living in Arkansas river bottom, near Webber Falls, Oklahoma, June 1939. Russell Lee

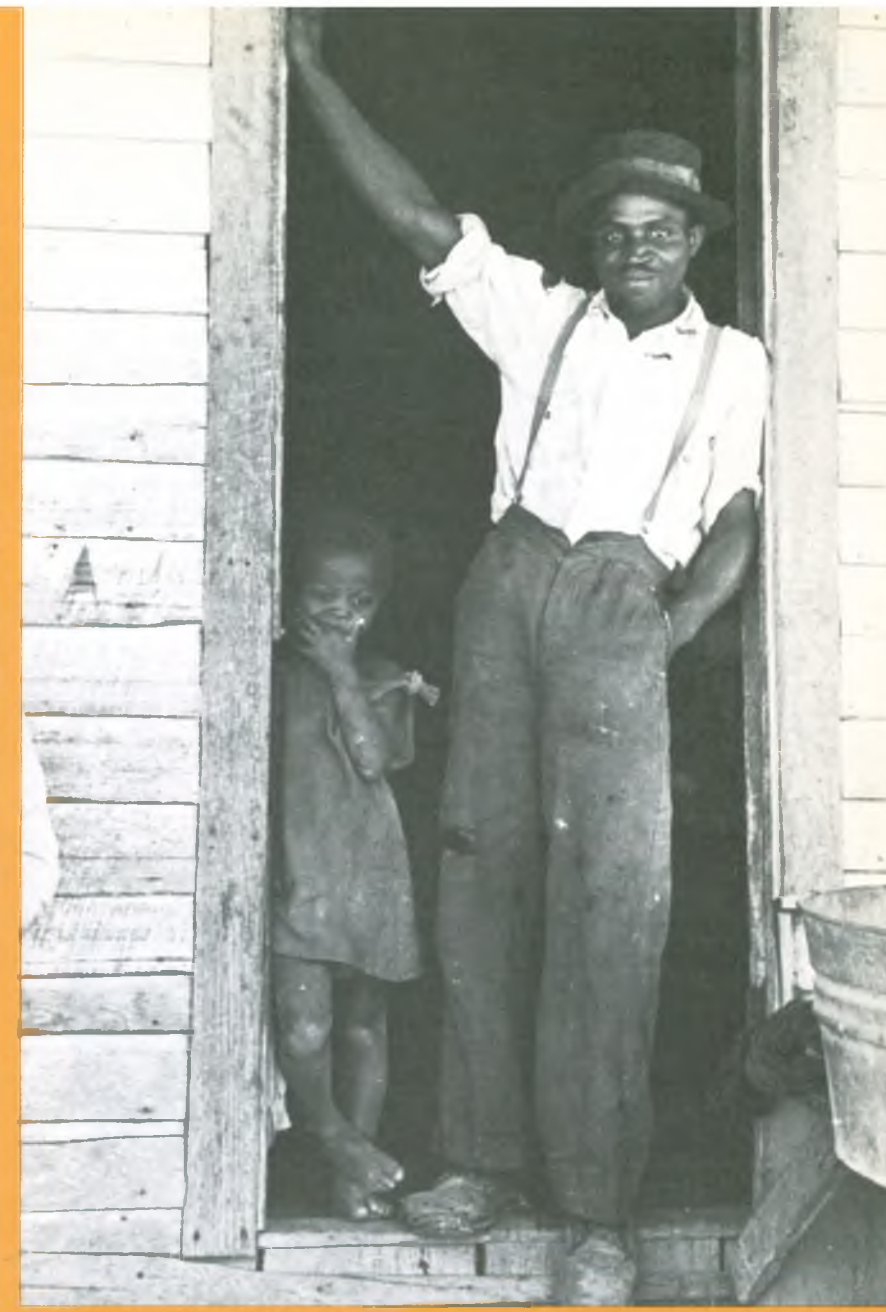


FSA photos from Library of Congress

Soil erosion in Mississippi, March 1936. Walker Evans



Son of an evicted sharecropper, New Madrid County, Missouri, January 1939. Arthur Rothstein



Sharecropper and his daughter in their doorway, New Madrid County, Missouri, May 1938. Russell Lee



Deserted farmhouse, Heard County, Georgia, May 1941. Jack Delano

126 representative samples from the 70,000, determined his exhibition selection must make sense, not be random, and avoid becoming amorphous.

"American Images" presents a rational, well-rounded overview of that era spanning the confused bottom of depression in 1935 to the patriotic umpah of 1942. The thematically arranged photographs represent two thirds of the 48 states and works by eleven of the FSA photographers.

Says Plattner in the exhibition brochure, "Collectively, the FSA photographs formed a mirror for Depression-era Americans. Today and in the future the photographs will undoubtedly help shape our perceptions of the period. (For) through the sensibilities of the FSA photographers, we are able to view and comprehend visual evidence of American life as it actually appeared."

America in 1935 was wallowing in the Great Depression. It was "Hard Times" then in the U.S.A., but few had it so bad as the nation's beleaguered farmers. Fifteen years of severe economic stagnation—beginning with the sudden collapse of farm commodity prices in 1920—had backed farmers into a treacherous overproduction/under-consumption market. Coincidentally, high production costs, credit denials, and high rates of tenant farming took their toll as desperate farmers recklessly abused their land for cash income.

The land gave out. Things got worse. Sidney Baldwin in *Politics and Poverty* summarized succinctly, "poor land made poor people and poor people made poor land." By 1930—just months after Black Friday and three years before the Great Drought's devastation—farm conditions had deteriorated to the point, Baldwin says, that

more than 25% of the nation's farmers, involving more than 7,700,000 people, were producing less than \$600 worth of farm products annually including the value of those products that the families themselves consumed. Approximately one third of all American farm families were living at a level that was comparable to that of urban slum families.

(Seven years would pass before President Roosevelt, in his second inaugural address, would make famous a similar assessment of "mainstream" America, "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.")

Despite persistent popular belief in the sanctity of the Agrarian Myth, by 1935 rural poverty was chronic. In April of that year the Resettlement Administration (renamed the Farm Security Administration in 1937) was established as an emergency measure to help farmers through radical land improvement programs. Dubbed "everybody else's headaches" by Director Rexford Guy Tugwell, the RA was an amalgam of New Deal efforts, including programs for: reforestation, rural and urban resettlement, communal farms, migrant labor camps, soil erosion, and farm loans and debt adjustment.

Tugwell, an original FDR "Brain Truster" and former professor of economics at Columbia University, knew

that many of the RA's programs would be controversial, for, amazingly, large proportions of the American public had succeeded in ignoring the desperate, if low-profile, plight of the rural poor.

What the RA needed, thought Tugwell, is "PR." And he called his friend and former pupil/colleague Roy Emerson Stryker to help him out. Stryker—an unorthodox, colorful Colorado rancher turned Columbia University economics teacher turned photophile—would be perfect for the task. Given the title, "Chief of the Historical Section," Stryker headed the embryonic photo-documentation project proposed by Tugwell

not only to bring the resources of government to the assistance of those who were distressed or starved out but to make certain that never again should Americans be exposed to such cruelties . . . It seemed important to record the incredible events of those years and the best way was to photograph them.

The idea of a government photo file was nothing new in 1935. There had been others, such as the Mathew Brady Civil War Collection. Roy Stryker and his hand-picked team of photographers—a changing group involving thirty photographers over a period of seven years, including: Walker Evans, Carl Mydans, Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, John Vachon, Jack Delano and Marion Post-Wolcott—realized the potential of photography used for documentary purposes. Said Stryker later,

Sure, we had a sense we were in on the beginning of something. In 1936 photography, which theretofore had been mostly a matter of landscapes and snapshots and family portraits, was fast being discovered as a serious tool for a thoughtful, creative person to make a statement.

Plattner, in the "American Images" brochure, explicitly credits project chief Stryker for his unit's consistently excellent, cohesive product. He notes that Stryker gave his team of two to six photographers (depending on his budget) great freedom in the field. But he expected them to file lucid, provocative pictures. Quite often he briefed them before an assignment with appropriate economic, historic and social studies, that they might "know enough about the subject matter to find its significance in itself and in relation to its surrounding, its time, and its function."

Says Plattner, "Under Stryker's brilliant direction, the photographers developed a unique aesthetic style with a point of view. The file emerged virtually free of sensationalism and denigration. Everyday American life was documented in an honest and dignified manner. The camera was used as a means for understanding American culture and the environment."

Thus what might have been just another dry, dusty record in a government file drawer, became under Stryker what historian F. Jack Hurley called "a portrait of a decade." Given the mandate to "introduce Americans to America" by unveiling the miseries wrought by a "mismanaged rather than sick" society, Stryker's

Historical Unit did just that. And more.

In 1937, the Resettlement Administration was absorbed by the Department of Agriculture and renamed the Farm Security Administration. At about the same time, Stryker began experimenting with ideas he'd discussed earlier with sociologist/author Robert Lynd, of *Middletown* fame. His was the "Historical Section"; they must be sure to document the passage of common, everyday life through those uncommon, unsettling times.

Now Stryker instructed his photographers, in detailed, inquisitive "shooting scripts," to picture such things as: where can people meet? show the highway drive-in culture. how do people look? In addition to promoting agency work, the unit tackled the larger task of documenting pictorially all aspects of American life and culture.

And so the project continued until the outbreak of the Second World War. Then, war effort "promotions" demonstrating the patriotism and productivity of America occupied the unit's time. Gradually it became the Office of War Information photographic project. In 1943, Roy Stryker resigned his position. The FSA photography project was ended; in seven years it had produced 270,000 photo-documents.

Though young and modest, Steve Plattner felt ideally suited for staging an ambitious FSA exhibit—and the exhibition bears him out.

In the five years preceding his Youthgrant application, the 21-year-old senior history major had indulged his passion for photography by working at jobs that sharpened his photographic skills: camp photography teacher; volunteer lighting director and "grip" for the Appalachian Film Workshop in Whitesburg, Ky.; intern in the Audio-Visual Division of the National Archives; and photographer for the Living History Museum Project of Macalester College in St. Paul.

But it was while in Washington, D.C., at the Archives—where he was assigned the task of assessing the condition of Eva Braun's (captured) personal photo-albums—that Plattner gained first-hand acquaintance with the FSA Collection housed at the Library of Congress. Unlike the fifty-odd people who browse the collection in a week, mostly to look at and order copies of the same famous prints, Steve Plattner wanted to absorb the whole collection.

Back in school in St. Paul, Plattner continued to study the history and uses of documentary photography. And he applied for a grant from the NEH Youthgrants in the Humanities Program, which supports humanities projects developed and conducted by students and other young people. As far as Plattner knew, there hadn't been a major FSA exhibition in the Midwest since the 1940s. It seemed high time. For "if the United States experiences economic hard times in the near future, how will people react?" Mightn't they learn from viewing provocative Depression-era profiles? The Youthgrants panel made up of young persons agreed that people might indeed learn from these profiles, and their conclusions were seconded by the National Council

on the Humanities, which recommended a grant.

When, in September 1975, the Youthgrant award came through, Plattner rushed to Washington and the Library of Congress, where he spent "5½ weeks with my nose in the 240 drawers of FSA file prints." Sadly, the day Plattner arrived in Washington, 82 year-old Roy Stryker died in Colorado. But later Steve had the good fortune of meeting photographers Russell Lee and Arthur Rothstein, "both of whom generously shared their recollections for several hours."

Rothstein had many tales to tell. Of his famous and rigorous Dust Storm assignment, he said, his car and his camera were ruined by penetrations of wind-driven dust. Then dirt clogged his right tear duct, causing a wicked infection. Temporarily blinded, the photographer was forced to shift from right-eyed to left-eyed picture shooting, a major adjustment that persisted even after corrective surgery.

Russell Lee remains in contact with Steve as a friend and mentor. His anecdotes revealed the charm behind what Jack Hurley called Lee's "uncanny ability to move into an area quietly and emerge a few days later with pictures that showed he had been completely accepted as a member of the community."

After months of working on "American Images," Plattner knew the show would be impressive—he was

Migrant child labor in cranberry bog, Burlington County, New Jersey, October 1938. Arthur Rothstein



working, after all, with rather impressive material. And he figured public reception would be good for the premiere at Macalester College's Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center, March 8-28, 1976. In addition to his distribution of handsome posters, the exhibit had received substantial local and national notice. In mid-February, it had been featured as the lead article in the Minneapolis Tribune Sunday Magazine.

But, even so, the exhibitor nouveau was surprised when, the day before the opening, as he set up the exhibition, several hundred people and a television news crew arrived for a sneak preview.

Opening night the gallery was filled—with people and music, sung on recordings by Woodie Guthrie, Jimmie Rodgers, and Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. Viewers spent one-to-two hours examining the exhibition. In three weeks, 3000 people lingered over the rarely seen documentary photographs and the accompanying brochure, captions and sample shooting script. One night, a tuxedoed, 12-piece swing band performed in the Music Hall nearby.

In the months since the premiere of "American Images," the exhibition has opened to receptive audiences in small towns and big towns throughout the Midwest. From Otter Tail to New Ulm, Wichita Falls, Beaumont, Amarillo, and Austin, museums have thrilled at the chance to borrow the NEH-funded exhibition. Before the year is out, the exhibition will also be seen in

Waco, Snyder, Abilene and Tyler, Texas. Designed for easy transport—the 126 matted photographs, Plexiglas covers and related materials pack into five crates for a total weight of 450 pounds—"American Images" is available on loan to interested parties free of cost but for the price of insured shipping.

It's unfortunate there have been so few opportunities in recent years to experience the breadth, diversity and artistry of the FSA documentary photographs. At the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, where the FSA collection is their number-one draw, they lament, "unless you come here, you really can't see the collection." Now, if you visit, the first thing you see is the handsome "American Images" poster. And you have the local option to arrange for the exhibition's showing in your own hometown.

It seemed important in the Thirties that we record the incredible events of those years. Today it is equally important we review them. For, "What's past is prologue," as Shakespeare said, a statement to which each FSA picture speaks ten thousand words.

—Sally Ferguson

For information about the Endowment's "Youthgrants" program, write: Youthgrants in the Humanities

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