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Oral history interview with Jack and Irene Delano, 1965 June 12

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Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jack and Irene Delano on June 12, 1965. The interview took place in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, and was conducted by Richard Doud for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

RICHARD DOUD: If you don't mind, I think I'll ask you about your background, what you were doing leading up to your association with the Farm Security Administration, and I think also if you would tell me how you became interested in photography because, as I understand, you didn't start out as a photographer primarily.

JACK DELANO: That's right. Well, I was living in Philadelphia where I was brought up, and I was studying drawing and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts. Before that, I had started studying music and I was going to both schools at the same time. I was at the Academy on a scholarship, an art scholarship, and studying mainly illustration. I got a traveling fellowship from the Academy of Fine Arts to go abroad one summer, Kresson traveling fellowship, which was the first chance I had to visit museums in Europe, and so forth. Also, coming from a poor family, it was the first time I had a little extra money in my pocket. And one of the first things I did when I got to Europe was buy a camera and start taking some pictures, and I got quite interested in photography as a result. When I came back, the National Youth Administration was going at that time and we had a project at the Academy which I participated in, so that, together with a little help that I got from my family, made it possible to get a little better camera and I kept on taking pictures. When I got out of the Academy of Fine Arts, it was very difficult to find work as an illustrator, painter, and so on, and since I had been working at the NYA I learned that the Federal Art Project was considering photography as part of their activities as well as painting. I applied for it and wrote up a project, a photographic project that I was interested in doing. It had to do with a study of coal mining conditions in Schuylkill County in Pennsylvania which is an anthracite coal area and conditions were pretty horrible at that time. It was one of the depressed areas even then and it still is. Bootleg mining was going on, there were a lot of abandoned mines and people were just . . . under cover of darkness, they would go down in these abandoned mines and bring up coal and sell it. This was strictly illegal but nobody could stop it because they were starving to death and this was the only way they could get a few pennies. Well, I managed to convince the Federal Art Project people that this was a worthwhile thing to be covered photographically. So I worked on that for several months, living in the anthracite area and photographing. The result of this study was a big show which they put on, the Federal Art Project people, in the museum in Philadelphia with these photographs, of which I had done a large amount. It was practically a one-man project. Also, I put together two photographic books which I made myself of original prints of this material. I have it here, by the way. It was just at this period that early Farm Security was getting going in Washington and producing very much the same kind of thing that I was working on, on my own, in Schuylkill County. Well, when I saw the first FSA photographs, this was a dream come true. Here was Washington, the government, the Federal government, actually doing this kind of thing which I had been struggling to do myself here in Schuylkill County. So I sent my coal mining photographs, these two books I had, to Roy Stryker in Washington, whom I didn't know, and applied for a job. I also had a friend from Philadelphia, Ed Rosskam, who was already working with Roy, not as a photographer primarily, but as an editor, a photo editor. Ed knew me and knew these coal mining books and had seen the bootleg coal mining show that I had done in Philadelphia, so he put in a good word for me with Roy. There was another photographer with whom I had a slight acquaintance who also saw the bootleg coal mining photographs and liked them very much and that was . . . what was her name?

RICHARD DOUD: Marian Post?

JACK DELANO: Marian Post, yes. So, between the two of them, they began working on Roy. And I, in the meantime, had moved from Philadelphia to New York where I was free-lancing as a photographer, not earning very much money, needing a job very badly, when one day I received a telegram from Roy Stryker saying that there was a job opening at $2,300 a year as photographer in FSA, would I be interested? Well, I was never more interested din anything in my life.

RICHARD DOUD: Silly question.

JACK DELANO: One of the conditions was that you had to have a car and you had to be able to drive and you had to provide your own transportation. I had neither a car nor did I know how to drive. I got a friend to teach me how to drive in New York, and we were always in traffic jams with me not knowing how to get the car out of high and all those kinds of things. But I finally learned how to drive, got a license and bought an old wreck of a car which I proceeded to drive on down to Washington. I had all kinds of traffic problems all the way and getting through the Holland Tunnel was quite a problem with this car which had almost no steering wheel, but I made it.

I got to Washington. And my first mentor really, the guy who looked after me, was Ed Rosskam. He had been living there, he had a house, he arranged for living quarters for me. I wasn't married yet, although I had known Irene for a long time. Irene stayed in New York. She was a painter and had a studio there. And very shortly after arriving in Washington I had a long talk with Roy, of course, and the law was laid down to me about what I could do and what I couldn't do and it frightened me to death. I didn't know Roy very well at the time. Then I was sent out on my first assignment with Ed Rosskam accompanying me, to brief me, and be my godfather, I guess, for these first few days. We went to Southern Virginia, driving around and talking a great deal about FSA and what we were trying to do and what Roy was trying to do. I did my first set of photographs, we came back and Roy was very pleased. Everybody liked what I was doing and from then on I was pretty much on my own. That's pretty much the way the thing started.

RICHARD DOUD: A question I wanted to ask -- it always interests me to know what your first impression of this Farm Security thing was when you first heard about it, first knew of its existence, and then whether or not this impression was sustained or whether the impression changed after you got there. Were things pretty much as you thought they would be in this operation when you went to Washington?

JACK DELANO: Well, I was a young, struggling photographer and very impressed with the names of the photographers who were involved in this -- people like Ben Shahn and Walker Evans, and so on, people whose work I admired very much and when I got there I was very wide-eyed and adoring all these heroes. And the first thing that happened was I never met any of them. Everybody was, as usual, in parts of the country, everybody was always out and you never saw anybody except by pure chance. I found everybody every helpful and everybody telling me that Roy Stryker was not a wolf, that he was not going to eat me up, and all that kind of stuff. Ben Shahn was living at that time in, I think Arlington -- no, he was in Washington. He had an apartment and he was painting, had his studio there and . . . he is distantly related to Irene, not very distantly, he's a second cousin, I think.

RICHARD DOUD: I didn't know that.

JACK DELANO: Yes. And she had met him once before under rather peculiar circumstances because she had wanted to study painting and her father remembered that "Oh, yes, we have a painter, a crazy painter, in the family. His name is Ben Shahn. I think we ought to go see him and ask his advice." And so as a sixteen-year-old girl she was taken by her father to meet Ben Shahn, and for Ben Shahn to tell her that she should not study painting. Well, of course, Ben didn't do anything of the sort. He was very friendly and didn't commit himself one way or the other, and spoke to her for a while and said that if she did want to study painting, one of the best places to go would be the Academy in Philadelphia which had a summer school in Rochester Springs. It was a very free place where you could work, or not work, and do all kinds of things. And she finally ended up going there. But this was her only previous contact with Ben, who was a family cousin. So when we went to Washington we looked him up and went to see him, partly because of Farm Security connections and partly because of the family. He had already seen some of the work that I had done and he liked it very much. We had many friendly talks and chats together and he was very helpful from then on. I couldn't really say whether it was what I expected when I got there because I didn't know what to expect. I had no idea what the structure of the thing was like, how it was organized or how it worked. I had also never been to Washington before and when I saw this ugly, red brick building and began wandering through the labyrinths of that place trying to find out where we were supposed to be, and so on, I was a little confused. But I must say I was very impressed with the laboratory setup. That had already been built and working, and since I had always done my own processing, my own developing under very primitive conditions, this seemed like heaven to have some very good equipment and some experts who knew how to process and develop your film, that you could just turn over to and not have to worry about it.

RICHARD DOUD: Were you concerned about other people processing your film, or were you that sensitive about this end of it?

JACK DELANO: No, I have never been very sensitive about print quality, nor very precious about it. I've always felt that photographs for me were primarily for reproduction and for mass distribution. A photograph is something for lots and lots of people to see. I respect people like Paul Strand and others who make beautiful prints for museums and exhibitions and I think there is . . . that kind of photography is one thing and my kind of photography is another thing. So that I never felt too concerned about print quality, except of course that it should be technically good.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, do you remember when you first went to Farm Security? When was it? Who was working then on the staff as photographers?

JACK DELANO: Well, Marian Post was working. Russell Lee. Arthur Rothstein, I think, had just left.

RICHARD DOUD: You were sort of a replacement for Arthur? That was the impression I had. I wasn't sure whether

or not that was correct.

JACK DELANO: That's right. Let's see who else -- Marian, Russell -- John Vachon had already started photographing . . . .

RICHARD DOUD: Finally.

JACK DELANO: Yes. Dorothea, of course, was working, but she was out on the West Coast. I never met her in all the days I was on Farm Security.

RICHARD DOUD: Oh really? Have you met her since?

JACK DELANO: No.

RICHARD DOUD: That's too bad. It's an experience.

JACK DELANO: I'd love to, of course. Ben was no longer photographing. Can't remember who else was there at the time.

RICHARD DOUD: This must have been when -- around '39?

JACK DELANO: 1939 and 1940; '41 is when I was there.

RICHARD DOUD: Would you care to go into some of this business about how you prepared for your field assignments? We get these stories about how Roy would give you all sorts of books to read, and give you personal lectures and shooting scripts, and all that sort of thing. How much of that is correct?

JACK DELANO: Well, that's basically correct. I think that's quite true. Roy gave you the feeling that he knew more about everything that you did and, above all, ha knew more about America that you did, by far. And that's one of the things that I loved about Roy and one of the things I got most from him was a feeling about the United States, about America. This enthusiasm and love for the detail and the deeper meaning of everything American was something that he must have transmitted to everybody. He certainly did to me. In preparing for an assignment he not only gave us books to read, and all kinds of other things, but would talk and talk and talk in great detail about what you will find up there, and what you must look for, and there is a certain drugstore on such and such a corner which has a certain thing in the window which you must be sure to find, and so on. And he almost always would end up in saying, "But, of course, if you don't find any of these things, you do what you want to anyway." This is the way it always ended and frequently, after lengthy and detailed instructions and shooting scripts that Roy would develop, if you got up there and found that there was something else that interested you, and something else that you felt was more important and more pertinent, you just went ahead and did it; and wrote to Roy and said, "Look, Roy, it isn't like you said." This was perfectly okay with him because he wasn't imposing his ideas on you; he was trying to get you stimulated enough so that you would find out what was really there.

RICHARD DOUD: There was no dictation, I mean in this whole business he was simply trying to get you started. He didn't care if you went off on your own and took a different slant?

JACK DELANO: Not at all. On the contrary, he was trying to stimulate you to do that. In some of his letters, which we will show you -- I'm sure we'll find them this afternoon -- he would write in longhand these long letters in which he would work out for you a complete shooting script on what you should be looking for in Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania or in Aroostook County, Maine. He would write in great detail about potato-picking, and what kind of shoes do they wear, and what kind of gloves do they wear, and where do they eat and sleep, and do all sorts of other things. But this was primarily a guide for you to open your eyes and be looking for these things. He wouldn't tell you what to photograph at all, ever.

RICHARD DOUD: That's very interesting that he would have that sort of faith in you that you could sort of take over.

JACK DELANO: Yes, he would. He always did this, and he expected the photographers to be much more than picture snappers as a result of this. He expected you to be studying and find out about all kinds of these things. As a matter of fact, we often talked about this in terms of the caption material that we would send. We would write brief captions for the pictures, yes, but he always wanted long letters in addition and extra material, background material, about what was going on, and what was this all about; partly for the files so that it would be available for writers who were using the pictures, and partly for himself because he wanted to know.

RICHARD DOUD: This is the type of thing that I wish very much we could find. These, most of these letters seem to have disappeared, and this would really give more meaning to the pictures even today than the brief captions which were submitted with them. To have the general background of the whole business would really make the

story worthwhile and would make it come alive.

JACK DELANO: Well, I'm sure we'll have some for you. We'll get it; it's here. Another thing I would add to that -- in these orientation talks, the briefings that he would give you -- forgot what I was going to say. Well, it will come to me later.

RICHARD DOUD: I'm concerned about how this project grew the way it did. When it started off in Resettlement Administration days, the Historical Section was set up more or less to keep the record of what Resettlement Administration was doing. Although photography was mentioned as a part of it, and I'm sure Tugwell conceived of photography as an important part of it, it seems to me that the whole thing got . . . well, in a sense, got out of hand. Although a certain amount of the record of Resettlement or Farm Security was kept, the problems faced by rural America, and how the organization was meeting these problems . . . . In other words, the good that this administration was doing for people, the thing that developed into essentially what John Collier has referred to as "a portrait of America," I'm concerned about how this happened. Who is responsible for this thing taking off on such a broad scale and becoming so far removed from what it was designed to be in the first place?

JACK DELANO: Yes. Well, you used the expression that it "got out of hand." I think you would more correctly say that it got into Roy Stryker's hands. I don't think that either Roy or -- I don't really know because we've never really discussed it directly -- either Roy or Tugwell ever thought of the Historical Section as being kind of a public relations outfit for the Resettlement Administration. We sometimes ran into this kind of feeling among the Farm Security people that we'd meet in the field, who were there ready and waiting for us to show us all the nice things that they were doing for us to take pictures of so that newspapers would print them and show what a good job Farm Security was doing. But I don't think that that was ever the idea that Roy had, nor Tugwell. I think both of them had the kind of historical sense of the period that we think of Churchill having a sense of history, and other people. They felt that the country was going through an important historical period, and one phase of it, one part of it, was what Resettlement was doing. But the Resettlement Administration really was a symptom of all that was going on in the country and many other kinds of things and, "If we do this, if we photograph that, if we document that, we have . . . we will have been documenting something which is symptomatic of everything that's happening in the whole country during this period." And Roy, as soon as he got his hands on this thing, felt that it wasn't enough to photograph the canning project in such and such a county in South Carolina, but everything that had to do with conditions in this particular county which created the conditions which made it necessary for Farm Security to come in and do this kind of job; everything that went before; the possibilities of what would come after; what kind of people live in this place; why do they need Farm Security here; what made the people they way they are, and everything began to be involved in this. An old woman, for example, an old Negro woman who had been awarded a blue ribbon, or some sort of prize in the county fair in which Farm Security was participating because she had produced so many hundreds and hundreds of cans of rutabaga, or whatever it might be, was not just an ordinary woman. She was a woman, perhaps, who was the daughter of an ex-slave who lived in this county, and this county had a history, and this county had an economy; and everything around this woman, everything that produced this woman with her three hundred cans was important and essential, including the kind of clothes she wore, including the kind of pictures that hung on the wall in her house, including the kind of church she went to, including the kind of school her children went to, and so on and so forth. Once you begin to examine her and her connection with Farm Security in this way, then it becomes a portrait of America in that sense.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think then maybe Roy subconsciously had this in mind from the very beginning? Although he might not have realized it at the time, this was sort of the way he wanted things to go, and do you think maybe he kept . . .

JACK DELANO: I'm sure of it.

RICHARD DOUD: . . . fudging a little all along to see how far he could go in this direction and it worked out that he could go as far as he wanted?

JACK DELANO: I'm sure of it. Yes. And it wasn't always easy for him to go that far. He was always having problems with the public relations boys who were always thinking more in terms of publicity and direct public relations for Farm Security, and felt that this other stuff was just way out of our field, we have no business doing this kind of thing, and all this kind of other stuff, and Roy was constantly having problems maintaining this much broader concept of what they should be doing. And he was having the problem not only in terms of his own personal public relations, but in budget hearings, and all the time these scandals started and all kinds of newspaper things about the famous skull.

RICHARD DOUD: That was a good one. Well, only one photographer has mentioned this business of, I think, the Information Division "picking the photographer's brains after they got back from the field trip." He made the remark that the photographers would be called across the hall and asked to give verbal reports on conditions across the country as sort of a supplement to their photographs. Can you substantiate that in any sense? Do you

think you were sort of fifth-column types for the Department of Agriculture?

JACK DELANO: Well, that never happened to me. I don't know whether it was because I was never in Washington long enough for anybody to get hold of me, or what the reason might be, but I never had that experience.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I was surprised when he mentioned it. Like I say, only one person has mentioned it, and I was just wondering if this was a common procedure, if you people were considered sort of -- not spies in a sense for the Department -- but people who would get into places and find out things that other people couldn't, perhaps, about local conditions.

JACK DELANO: No, I never had that happen. The only person who ever picked our brains was Roy, with me. And it was never in that sense, but rather just wanting to know more about the area in which we had been; we'd find things that he didn't know about, and stories, and for him to get more of a feeling of what the place was like from us personally. I think that I, as well as some of the others, probably pulled a lot of faux pas and put our foot in it every once in a while with the Information people in the field more than once. We were probably a little bit defiant of these people and felt that we weren't responsible to anybody except to Roy Stryker, and we were going to do anything we goddamned pleased and let Roy get us out of hot water.

RICHARD DOUD: And he was good at it, I'm sure.

JACK DELANO: He was good at it, but he would sure raise hell with us because of the mistakes that we made. I mean in this very wonderful way of his, he'd raise holy hell with us, but secretly and almost -- ". . . but you did all right."

RICHARD DOUD: Yes, I've head this from everyone, I think, that he was intensely loyal to the people who worked for him and would stand up under any conditions for you. Well, tell me, if you can, as you were going around taking pictures of America, what were the things you personally were looking for? You felt you had to do a job, I suppose, and you were given general guidelines by Roy, but did you have any particular social or political angle in mind when you were going to various parts of the country? What was there out there that you wanted to show, that you felt was important to preserve?

JACK DELANO: Well, as with any job that you really enjoy and like doing, it never seems like a job, and this was certainly true with us. I felt that I was learning and I was studying for myself what I wanted to find out, and it so happened that what I wanted to find out and what I was studying was just what my job expected of me, and I can't think of a better arrangement. When I would go to cover a county fair, for example, a county fair; well, I didn't know much about county fairs. I had always been a city boy and it was all great and new and wonderful to me. And Irene and I would sit down and work out shooting scripts after going the first day, and they would be the most detailed and, for us, exciting things that we could imagine. Not only what was displayed at the fair and all the products, and so on, but the people and what they wore, and how they looked, and what kind of tobacco they used, and the kids, and the language. And frequently we would get into things which were non-photographic but which were fascinating to us, such as the accent and the inclination and the songs and everything having to do with it, which to me was a revelation and was fascinating. And I was studying, I was learning from this and documenting everything I possibly could because I felt that this was what Roy would want also -- that it would be valuable for the file. I think that, aside from that, speaking for myself, I felt that I was part of an organization which was basically interested in the cultural values of America, which had nothing to do with politics but had to do with the American tradition, with the bad things, the good things, the difficulties, the problems, the joys and inspirations and everything that went with it. And it could be a tight little Jewish community someplace in Colchester, which we covered, including the synagogues and everything that went with it, or it could be a horse show at a county fair in New Hampshire somewhere. It was all part of what was making the United States and what the United states had come from, and this was the exciting thing for us. Through these travels and the photographs I got to love the United States more than I could have in any other way.

RICHARD DOUD: Almost a chauvinistic attitude. A couple of questions here -- I think I'd like to wait until Mrs. Delano gets back and I hope it will bring out sort of a free-for-all -- so I have a question here about the photographers you worked with. You mentioned that you were impressed by the big names of some of the people whose work you were familiar with and all. What characteristics of these people you worked with come to mind? What were the major contributions, do you feel, of some of these other photographers?

JACK DELANO: Well, I suppose that what I admired and what I liked about them was not anything having to do with technical aspects or photography, rather a way of looking at things, the eye of a photographer. I think one of the things that struck me so strongly about Walker Evans' work, for example, was how you can see something which might seem sordid, but see the beauty in it, and see it composed in a beautiful way, so that the kind of photograph is an artistic expression rather than merely a document of what happened to be in front of everybody.

RICHARD DOUD: He could certainly do it.

JACK DELANO: He certainly could. The same was true about Ben Shahn. I think those are the two people that I most admired.

RICHARD DOUD: These fellows worked, I would say, at sort of a polarity. I think Walker Evans's was a very studied and classic approach, and Ben Shahn's was more of a candid type, where he used a right-angle viewfinder and tried to catch people off-guard, and he was shooting for the moment, in a sense; where Walker Evans was sort of shooting for eternity, if that's the word. I was wondering which of these two approaches is more along the lines on which you would operate?

JACK DELANO: Well, I felt a kinship toward both, in a sense, because having studied painting myself, and having done sketches to record things that I couldn't record any other way, I understood Ben's attitude with a camera. He was using the camera like a sketch book and without thinking much about composition or anything else. Later the picture might be cropped in a certain way so that it would compose better, and so on, but he was looking at things as a painter, and he was looking at details as a painter and the camera to him was a quick and ready way of sketching things. Incidentally, there is a hilarious story about Ben Shahn and this right-angle finder; I don't know whether anybody ever told you, but we all knew about it. When flashbulbs first came into use Ben wouldn't have anything to do with them; they were terrible; this was an invention of the devil, you know; beautiful light is the most wonderful thing, you don't need any of that stuff. But somebody finally convinced him to try it. "After all, there were certain areas in which it might be very useful." So Ben said, "Okay." And they got him a flash attachment for his Leica and he put the flash bulb in, and of course he had this right-angle finder on it, and he pressed the button and the bulb went up right in his face.

RICHARD DOUD: No, I hadn't heard that.

DJ: Now, I also felt a kinship with what Walter Evans was doing partly because of my art training, which I felt . . . I'd always been basically trained that composition is important, the balance in the photograph, the relationship of masses, and whites and blacks and so on is the structure, the basic structure of the painting as it is with an etching, or an engraving or a photograph. As a matter of fact, later in my work I went through, I suppose, a period of very carefully setting up pictures in that sense and very carefully lighting them. And some of these first appeared in PM when PM got started in New York. And there was a whole series that I had done up in Rhode Island of a depressed area -- Portuguese fisherman and farmers and these were kind of family portraits, some of them, in which the wide angle lens would be used and people would be dispersed throughout the room very carefully placed in certain places. I had also felt that flash direct on the camera was not something that I'd like, so I put flash bulbs in ordinary lighting fixtures and let them go off, bounced light and so on, but these pictures were very formal in that sense, although they had to do with this depressed area and social conditions in this town. I also tried this kind of thing in the South very frequently. One of my favorite pictures is of a Negro girl standing in the doorway looking down a long, long hallway where her grandfather is sitting on the stoop in back and it's all very carefully composed, very formal, but it is as documentary and as direct as everything else that we were doing, so I suppose because of my background as a painter I had sympathy with both of these people and their approaches.

RICHARD DOUD: You mentioned composing people and putting people in certain places. Did you meet with much opposition on the part of people, depressed people having their pictures taken?

JACK DELANO: Very, very, very seldom. Very seldom. I can't remember any disagreeable incidents ever, except with police and that kind of thing, but not with people having their pictures taken. I don't know, but I suppose each one of us developed a technique for approaching people before we took any pictures. And I think it was very helpful to have Irene along. I think many photographers found this helpful, to have a companion along when you are working. It frees you a little bit with the camera. You're not doing both things at the same time, making contact and taking pictures. Frequently, after breaking the ice and getting friendly and the people understanding what you were doing, I was able to do a lot of things that I wouldn't have been able to do alone because Irene kept the conversation going and kept people interested while I was working away furiously. I can't remember ever having had any difficulty about people not wanting to have their picture taken.

IRENE DELANO: I do.

RICHARD DOUD: Are you ready to join us? Would you like to?

IRENE DELANO: I have to go to the airport to get my son, but we'll be back right after lunch. You'll be taking a break for lunch, I would imagine.

RICHARD DOUD: Oh, certainly.

IRENE DELANO: So you can have lunch here and I'm going to take the kids and have hamburgers and then we'll come home.

JACK DELANO: Okay, just tell us when you remember somebody objecting.

IRENE DELANO: When we went to that town where they were having a fair and a Life photographer had been there before us. And they just practically ran us out of town.

JACK DELANO: Oh yes. but that wasn't because of us, that was because of someone else.

IRENE DELANO: No, because . . . well, anyway that was one situation.

JACK DELANO: That was a peculiar kind of thing. We found that Life photographers were making trouble for us if they had been there before.

RICHARD DOUD: Oh, really? Accidentally or intentionally?

JACK DELANO: Accidentally. Not with any intention of doing us any harm, but coming in as photographers of this great national magazine and therefore demanding certain things and insisting on having things their own way, and sometimes making themselves quite obnoxious to people in the area, and leaving a bad taste in people's mouths so that when we came in -- "What, more photographers?" That's the incident Irene was talking about. We went to cover a county fair in Maine and found that we ran into that kind of situation. Life had been there recently with all kinds of special equipment to take color photographs and setting things up, and some of the meets had to be postponed because the light wasn't quite right, and all the arrangements were being messed up in order to accommodate these photographers. And, of course, everybody felt it was important to get into Life magazine, but everybody kept getting madder and madder all the time at photographers in general. So that when we came in, there was this resentment already built up about photographers and it took a little work for us to break this down before we were allowed to go ahead. Now that Irene mentions it, this was one place where we did have a little bit of misunderstanding. There was a freak show at this circus and some of the freaks wouldn't have their pictures taken -- not because they were freaks, but because one of them turned out to be an escaped convict.

RICHARD DOUD: There were reasons. I'd like to go a little bit more into some of the problems you had on the assignments and some of your experiences there when we can have your wife here with us, but I would like to ask you now about the influence that these other photographers had on your own photography, what they had to do with your development in Farm Security. You mentioned that you felt sort of a kinship to both the approach of Walker Evans and the approach of Ben Shahn because of your previous art training. Did any of these other people influence you as far as the idea of documentary photography goes, pictures, story idea, rather than just the individual composition?

JACK DELANO: I don't think so, I don't think so. I think I came with certain firm convictions of my own about that already.

RICHARD DOUD: You had had this early experience with the coal miner story . . . ?

JACK DELANO: Right. And it was that which got me interested in Farm Security because I found that other people were doing this also, and I thought that I had invented this. Well, of course, I hadn't, but I was certainly glad to see that this was something that other people were doing and other people were working on. And I felt that I already had very definite convictions about documentary photography as the kind of photography that I could do, and wanted to do, the only kind that interested me.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, what then do you think you contributed to the total project? You came in with a sense of photo-documentation, you had an art background. How was the project different, or how was it benefited by your being there, over and above what it would have been had you not been? I hope you won't be modest. If you feel that you did contribute something unique, of your own, then . . . ?

JACK DELANO: Well, I think one of the weaknesses of the project was that photographers very seldom saw each other, or very seldom got together to talk or to exchange opinions or ideas. We were always out in the field and when one came back, another one was out and we very seldom found any group together in Washington. Our only communication was with Roy, not to one another. So that any personal influences that might have come about through the exchange of ideas or talk or writing to one another I don't think really took place, certainly not with me. Any influences or any effects that one might have had would be purely through the work, through the photographs themselves. I told you in the car about my meeting with Steichen. Well, I was very pleased at a remark that he made when he met me, and embraced me, and all that. What he said was, "Oh well, you're the artist in the group!" Well, I think what he meant was something having to do with what I mentioned before about composing and about putting people in certain places and composing a picture. This didn't always work out. I didn't always move people around and put them where I wanted to because I thought it would make a good composition. But I think that I was always looking for compositions that already existed as such in shooting. There was a photograph in the "Bitter Years" show, for example, of three bedraggled children standing together

looking a little bit downcast, and it's a trinity, in a sense, it's kind of a triptych. Well, they just happened to be standing that way. Of course, there were eight or ten shots that I had taken before and after, but this was what I was looking for. I didn't place them that way but they were that way and I think that this was one of the things that I was doing more consciously than some of the other photographers. I think that it probably shows through the body of work that I left. I think that that is what Steichen meant.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes. Well, speaking of composition as you have been, how much of the composition of the photographs as we see them in the file was due to the planning on the part of the photographer, and how much was due to cropping in the darkroom or in the printing of these things?

JACK DELANO: Well, we usually indicated the cropping.

RICHARD DOUD: The photographers decided that themselves?

JACK DELANO: Yes. We would get contact prints on our work and we would kill the ones we didn't want, and the ones we did want kept we would indicate the cropping when we returned the prints.

RICHARD DOUD: I was wondering now much of the artistry of this thing was due to the people in the darkroom, if they had a hand in composing these things?

JACK DELANO: I think they were very careful not to do any original composition of their own in cropping. I mean I think they would have been given hell by Roy if they ever dared to do that, and I think they respected the indications of the photographer always. I never felt any compunction about moving people around and posing them in these documentary photographs. I don't agree with the idea that a documentary photograph has to be nature in the raw -- I mean just as it is. If I have to move somebody in order to make it composed better, I don't think that in any way detracts from the documentary value of the photograph because that isn't what "documentary" photograph means to me. It isn't something that you happen to see. But a documentary photograph is an expression of the essence of what you are seeing.

RICHARD DOUD: It's getting the most out of it even if you have to move people.

JACK DELANO: Of course.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I've often wondered when looking at these pictures, about this business of composition. It seemed almost miraculous that a photographer could so consistently shoot a finely-composed picture under certain, at times, disadvantageous conditions, and I was wondering how prevalent the practice of cropping photographs was. I suppose it was just a matter of course in getting the prints back and . . . ?

JACK DELANO: It was both cropping and shooting a lot of film. We would . . . I suppose the government would consider it an awful waste -- there were any number of negatives and film that were thrown out in order to keep one good one. But frequently the shooting was done that way and you just had to keep shooting around it until you got what you were looking for.

RICHARD DOUD: I know there were certain Congressmen who considered the whole thing a waste.

JACK DELANO: Right. We know that too.

RICHARD DOUD: You mentioned that one of the disadvantages of the project was the fact that the photographers didn't get together and didn't have an interchange of ideas and opinions, and all. Were there any other serious disadvantages to the operation that you remember? What should have been changed? What should have been done differently from the way it was done? It may not be a fair question. Someone said once that things that seemed of monumental importance then don't seem too important as you look back twenty-five years or so.

JACK DELANO: Right. When you asked me the question the only things that I could think of were rather unimportant, silly, bureaucratic problems like not being able to arrange for your per diem, and getting all balled up in paper work, involved in travel arrangements, and all those kinds of things. These were the things that came to my mind immediately when you asked the question.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, they were important, though. They must have been or they wouldn't have come to mind. Must have been very important.

JACK DELANO: I think life would have been a lot simpler for Roy and probably for the rest of us if there had been less stringent insistence, if there had been less insistence, on abiding by the letter of the law in all government procedures that had to be attended to for everything, because this was in a way a kind of unusual project and it needed a little bit of unusual treatment. For example, I found myself up in Aroostook County, Maine and I wanted to get some aerial shots of the great potato fields and this got to be a real serious problem. How did I

rent a plane for an hour? Telegraphs back and forth to Roy about what papers to fill out, what forms you need, and what kind of receipt to fill out, and what does the pilot have to sign, and all these things just in order for me to take a plane for an hour.

RICHARD DOUD: Did you manage?

JACK DELANO: Oh yes, I did it. I would have done it anyway and paid it out of my own pocket.

RICHARD DOUD: I don't know, I think maybe we should wait for most of these until Mrs. Delano is here because I think she has definite ideas to add to some of these, so if it's all right with you, we'll just shut this off until she gets back.

[Mrs. Delano is here]

RICHARD DOUD: Could you just tell me a little bit about your association with Mr. Delano -- how the two of you came to be sort of working with Farm Security, you in sort of an unofficial capacity; and how you became associated with Stryker and how you, I think, eventually went on to work for him at Standard Oil? Is that right?

IRENE DELANO: Yes. Well, Jack and I got married just shortly after he started to work for the Farm Security Administration and I don't know whether he told you that funny story about asking for permission for a day to get married and being denied it by Roy Stryker. But we met somewhere in Virginia, I guess, and got married and then I just continued to travel with him. I had known Jack for many years before because we went to the Academy of Fine Arts together and that's where I first met him. At any rate, Jack was on his first job for Roy and was following the migratory workers up the Eastern Shore when I met him in Virginia and we got married and then joined him and continued to travel with him on that trip. That was, I'm almost sure, his first or perhaps, second trip for Roy. He had been working a short period of time.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, your training, as I understand it, has been as an artist. In fact, you made a living as an artist prior to this. Did you have any interest in, or knowledge of photography when you married Jack?

IRENE DELANO: No, I didn't. I had a great interest in photography but I didn't know anything about it technically at all. Of course Jack was already working in photography and we had done a little film together -- he and a couple of other people and myself, just for fun, in New York. I was really still just going to school and studying in New York. I wasn't working at that point and it was just a crazy little film we did. We tried to do all the tricks we could possibly think of that movie cameras could do, but of course, Jack was already working as a photographer. But I was tremendously interested in it. I had always felt that it was . . . well, it was completely different from painting or drawing or sculpture -- the things I had been doing -- but it had such an immediate and close way of saying something fast, you know. And I felt that it was equal to any of the other arts. I never felt that it was any less an art because there was a mechanical process involved in it.

RICHARD DOUD: Had you heard of Farm Security? Were you aware of Farm Security before Jack started working for Stryker?

IRENE DELANO: In a very, very vague way. Just . . . no more than anybody else at the time. I had no particular interest in it. I really didn't know much about it. Of course, I had seen some of the great photographs. The Dorothea Lange pictures were already very famous even then, and some of the others. And they made, I think, a tremendous impact on anybody who was interested in that kind of thing. It was just at that time, I believe, the beginning of Life magazine also, and there was that tremendous interest in photography just as a medium, as a way of expressing yourself. So we were all interested in it from that point of view. I had also worked a little bit with Jack on some of his photographs. He had done quite a study in the coal country.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes, he mentioned that.

IRENE DELANO: We had worked on that together, putting together some books of photographs, and it was actually that material that he showed Roy, that Roy liked.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, what did you think of the Farm Security operation after you became acquainted with it? What was the heart and soul of this whole thing, and how might this have influenced your husband's work or helped shape his career or his outlook? Do you think that it influenced him in any way other than just giving him a job for a few years?

IRENE DELANO: You mean the Farm Security? Well, we always . . . I just don't think there was a time that we worked for Farm Security, or that Jack did, that he just wasn't completely absorbed in it, and felt -- as I know I did -- that we were performing a great mission. I mean we really thought it was terribly important, everything, every bit of it. We thought that it was such an important thing to do. We thought that it was a great opportunity to be doing this kind of thing and we really believed in it very much, I mean we believed in the value of it. I don't

think it was something that we later thought, "Oh, now that was a valuable thing to have done." We were quite aware of it right from the very beginning. Oh, I remember that very distinctly. We just thought every minute of it was a tremendous opportunity, you know.

RICHARD DOUD: What did you do when you went along with your husband on these trips? It's very interesting that a husband and wife team would sort of travel around like this.

IRENE DELANO: Well, I did an awful lot of criticizing, and of course, at the beginning I was terribly nervous, you know. I was always afraid that the stuff wasn't going to come out, as it didn't, and we didn't know Roy very well at all in the very early days. So we soon got to working in this system where I would write down after practically every shot what was taken so that we'd be able to check afterwards and make sure. So we worked out all the systems of what was exposed well and what wasn't. We worked on that kind of thing together most of the time and I kept all those records, pretty much.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, he mentioned earlier that there were times when you were along when you were helpful in sort of a public relations thing, in getting along with people. How did you go about putting people at ease who were in perhaps unfortunate circumstances?

IRENE DELANO: Well, I think that we had tremendous respect for the people that we were visiting, and we felt that they were doing us a great favor to let us be there, really. And we were also, I think, very aware of their poverty, in many cases, and their tough circumstances and so were terribly almost oversensitive, I think to that kind of thing. We tried to be as inconspicuous and innocuous as possible in the sense that we didn't want to interfere with them, and we just realized that nothing good could happen unless they understood that we were not doing it in any kind of mocking way, and this was very difficult at times. It was difficult to get it across. I don't know, I don't think it's anything special that we did, but rather what we tried not to do. We tried not to get in people's way; we tried to make them understand that we were tremendously sympathetic with their problem.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes, but what do you say to somebody who is really down and out? How do you justify taking a picture of somebody in that circumstance?

IRENE DELANO: Well, I think that for the most part people are tremendously friendly and I think that poor people are more friendly than other people.

RICHARD DOUD: Why not? What have they got to lose?

IRENE DELANO: And except in cases . . . for instance, when we first came to Puerto Rico there had been a tremendous amount of published material in the United States on poverty in Puerto Rico, and people here in many of the slums would say -- they rather resented taking photographs -- "You know, they're going to show us outside of the Island without shoes and that kind of thing." It was a tremendously important issue here. But in the States where that particular difference did not exist, it's true that we just didn't have that kind of problem. We would talk to people and they were perfectly willing always to explain their problems to us.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I'd like for you to tell me, if you can, some of the day-to-day problems you met on these trips. As a rule, the men who went out to take pictures don't remember the inconveniences, let's say, of field living and that sort of thing. Russell Lee's wife has given me more of an indication than anyone has so far. She went along with Russ a number of times and there were problems of daily living that she remembered that he sort of took for granted. How is it to live out of a car for weeks at a time?

IRENE DELANO: Well, of course, I was . . . I don't know . . . is twenty-one pretty young?

RICHARD DOUD: It is now, yes!

IRENE DELANO: To me it is. I was not bothered by that kind of thing. Everything was . . . I loved that part of it. I just loved it. I always have liked to travel around and we didn't ever seem to have . . . I mean we had problems like not being able to find a place at night, you know, that kind of thing, but I guess I was really too young to care about those kinds of comforts, you know. That didn't make much of an impression on me. Oh, sometimes we stayed in lousy places, and sometimes not, but I don't remember ever feeling that we were being put upon in any way in terms of our own living. As a matter of fact, I've always felt just the opposite. I felt so rich, and we were staying in hotels and motels and all these things all the time, and each night was a new experience, you know, what we were going to find. But coming back to the relations with the people that Jack was photographing, you know, it varied tremendously. We found for the most part that we did best when we were alone, that if we went, for instance, with an agent, a representative of one of the government agencies who had some dealings with the people wherever we were on one thing or another, if you had a very good person, a person who really cared about the people he was dealing with, it would be very helpful because it would be a natural way to go to visit them. If it was the kind of person that people didn't respect, or didn't like particularly, or felt uncomfortable with, then we just had a terrible time. We would give up and come back on our own. I

think, possibly, it helped to have a woman along on many of these things. Particularly when we'd just stop, we'd see something and we'd just stop, and just the mother and the children would be at home. Well, it was easier, I think, to have a woman to talk to her than if Jack had had to. Then she would immediately have felt a little more uncomfortable, or wondered if he was an inspector, or one thing and another. Whereas having a woman along, I think, helped in those situations. At other times I know that I just couldn't stand it and Jack had to push me. I mean times when I just felt so badly, particularly in the South when we would be in Negro communities, and there I . . . . The people many times didn't like it, but they just didn't know who we were and what we were trying to do, but they couldn't say no to us. I remember one time in particular we passed a little church out in the country and there was a service going on, and it just looked absolutely marvelous, you know. It was just a little tiny white church on a little hillside and we stopped and went and we could see the look of resentment in all those people, I mean the attitude, "You won't even leave us alone now." And I said, "Jack, let's get out of here. I'm not going in." And he said, "You are going in and you're going to take that flash right up to the front and you're going to do just what I tell you." Well, I'd never seen him get that way with me. I said, "You can't do it. Leave them alone, leave them alone. They don't want us here." And he gritted his teeth, you know, and said, "Take that flash up to the front and put it where I tell you. You don't like it now, but we've got to get it." And I'll never forget walking down that aisle. We had asked; they didn't answer. They didn't say we could come in, and of course they didn't say we could not come in. And I walked right up to the front of that church and shot the flash off and, you know, held it so that it would go off in one area of the church. I came out of that place just shaking, and so was Jack. But he thought that the use of the picture, I mean in that case what carried us was that we felt that the use of the pictures would warrant us acting that way in that particular circumstance. And that kind of thing did happen from time to time, but not in the majority of cases. I mean you couldn't stand to do it, you couldn't go and force yourself on people in that way, but of course, it is true that many of those pictures were used in Richard Wright's book, and we knew at the time that they were going to be -- or we were shooting for that -- so that that was another reason, I think, that we got the courage to do that kind of thing which we wouldn't have done normally.

RICHARD DOUD: You mentioned a moment ago that some of the local representatives of Farm Security were well-liked, or were good, and that some weren't -- in a sense were bad. What was the percentage of people, do you think, in Farm Security who were respected in the community in which they worked?

IRENE DELANO: Well, I wouldn't be able to give a percentage, but I think that there was an amazingly large percentage of people who really did care. I mean, we took the general attitude that all these people were dry people who were doing a job, and they didn't like the people the way we loved them, and that kind of thing. Of course, a great many of them were that way. I mean they were government workers who were doing this as a job and in some cases they were people who were . . . . Particularly in the South they were people who were really quite vicious, you know, and we just couldn't bear to be with them because of their whole attitude. Everything was just changed completely. You couldn't work under those circumstances really. But on the other hand, there were a tremendous number of dedicated people in that Farm Security thing. It varied tremendously from region to region, you know. Sometimes people were appointed for those jobs just because of pull, or because of being somebody in the community, and because at that time everybody needed jobs, you know. And in other places you would really find people who thought they were helping and they were usually good. Some of them were remarkably good.

RICHARD DOUD: The American Farm Bureau organization was sort of a bitter foe of the Farm Security Administration. Did you ever have any static from local Farm Bureau people about what you were doing? Do you remember anything?

IRENE DELANO: I don't remember that. Did Jack remember anything about that?

RICHARD DOUD: I didn't ask him. It just came to me.

IRENE DELANO: You know, Roy protected us tremendously. He protected the photographers in really the most wonderful way because he gave us the freedom to move. I mean, he knew that all these people weren't going to be great people; he knew that you couldn't get photographs under those conditions so that you could . . . . We didn't have to get in touch with them particularly, unless we either wanted to, or unless we had to get a specific kind of thing -- I mean there were always specific requests, I mean, after all, it was Farm Security and presumably we were with them.

RICHARD DOUD: Now and then you had to do some work for them.

IRENE DELANO: Exactly. And so in those cases we did. But we didn't really even contact the Farm Security people, at least half of the time; at least half.

RICHARD DOUD: Was the feeling that generally you enjoyed more the jobs were you didn't contact them?

IRENE DELANO: Oh yes. Oh, much more so. As soon as we contacted the Farm Security people then it became

canning, and it became all the dull projects that people were . . . that Farm Security were presumably doing, and housing, and those things which were terribly important but not very interesting to photograph. I don't know how many canning pictures we've taken but a tremendous number because that was a very important project. I remember one time we were so sick of canning pictures and we came to a house, this little house, and the whole floor was filled with cans, stuff that this woman had canned, you know. I remember that shot. Jack had the woman way in the background and these cans just coming at you, glass jars of vegetables and fruit. But naturally the Farm Security Administration projects and programs were on specific things, so that wherever you went they were the same thing. It was canning, it was housing, it was rehabilitation in one form or another and those kinds of things. There got to be a limit as to how many different ways you could photograph it, you know. So naturally those were the dullest jobs for the photographers.

RICHARD DOUD: Would you like to say something about how it happened that you did come under Roy's employ in Standard Oil after he left Farm Security?

IRENE DELANO: Well, after Farm Security became the OWI, Jack went into the Army and I went with him. He was stationed at Wright Field in Dayton. I had never had a job up to that point, and when Jack was in he was in charge of photography for the Air Service Command in the public relations office. And I got a job working in graphics also in Air Service command, producing technical orders and posters and all kinds of publications for the Air Force. I worked there all the time Jack was stationed in Dayton, and he was gone a great deal of the time. When he came back from one trip to the Pacific -- at that time Per Lorentz was working with the Air Transport Command and they requested that Jack be transferred to that outfit. Russ was working for Per and they requested Jack and he got that transfer, which meant he was going to be stationed in Washington. When Roy got wind of that, he evidently needed somebody at that time and he called me and asked if I'd like to come and work for him, as I'd becoming back to New York anyway. And of course I was delighted. It was wonderful. So at that point I went back to New York, and Jack went to Washington, and I worked for Roy at Standard Oil for, I don't know how long it was -- a year or two, a couple of years, I guess.

RICHARD DOUD: What were you doing specifically?

IRENE DELANO: Well, I was in charge of publications. At that time Roy was putting out a little magazine that was really for users of pictures, and the idea was to put together stories, photographic stories, which would give an indication of what the file contained. And it was supposed to be, although it never was, a monthly publication called Photo Memo. I was just putting together stories all the time and designing this little publication, which was then distributed, and also designing exhibitions for him, in other words, the use of the pictures. I did that mostly.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, you know Roy pretty well. What characteristics of his do you feel were most successful in creating the FSA file that did develop out of this whole experience?

IRENE DELANO: Well, I've thought about it a lot since because I've never met anybody who had the qualities that he had as an administrator, and to me he is the really ideal example of a creative administrator. You know, the fact is that he didn't do any of these things himself. He couldn't take the photographs himself. He didn't really have the art background or the background for composition or all that kind of thing that many of the photographers had, of course. But what he had was a tremendous determination to say something, to say something very specific and that he knew. He knew what he was trying to say. And he also knew, which is also very rare, that in order to get creative people to do it they had to have their freedom.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, why was it that most of the photographers who worked for Roy did have an art background? Was this just by accident?

IRENE DELANO: Well, no, they didn't actually. I mean Ben and Jack did but there were other people who didn't have an art background.

RICHARD DOUD: Russell Lee had been a painter, John Collier had worked on the WPA Federal Art Project; he was an assistant to a mural painter.

IRENE DELANO: Did he? I never knew that. Well, you see I didn't even realize that. I was thinking about Gordon and John Vachon.

RICHARD DOUD: There were a number of artists, or people who had had art experience, and I was wondering if this just was accident, or if Roy was really looking for the creative type.

IRENE DELANO: Well, I don't know. I think it might have had something to do with the fact that at that time there were these other projects going on in Washington. You know, the early project that Ben was really connected with more than he was with the Farm Security; I can't remember the names of them right now . . . .

RICHARD DOUD: Public Works of Art Project and . . . .

IRENE DELANO: Yes, and they were doing, oh, furniture design for the housing development, you know, and there was somebody by the name of Cahill, I think.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes, Holger Cahill. WPA Federal Art Project.

IRENE DELANO: That was the Federal Art Project, but there was a specific one that was quite closely related to, or at any rate with Roy and the people who were working there.

RICHARD DOUD: A Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration.

IRENE DELANO: That's right.

RICHARD DOUD: That's where Mr. Dornbush would come in, if I could only get hold of him,

IRENE DELANO: Oh, have you been trying?

RICHARD DOUD: Yes. We haven't gotten an answer. Well, I think if we could get your husband back in here, I'd like to ask some of these questions to you jointly and we can perhaps get a cross fire going. So if you don't mind, we'll call him in. One reason I wanted you both here, I was hoping you could recall some of the more significant experiences on Farm Security -- that is, the trips you took, the types of photographs you were taking, and some of the outstanding experiences you had while you were on the Project.

JACK DELANO: Well, I think one of the experiences and one of the assignments we had that was very significant for both Irene and me was being with Arthur Raper in Greene County for three months. This was the kind of thing which was not as colorful as some of the other things we did later. But in the first place it gave us a chance to know Arthur Raper, who was a remarkable man, and his family and also the opportunity, with his help and his understanding of Greene County, Georgia, to be able to get an understanding of the Southern county which we couldn't have done otherwise. We lived there in the county. Arthur was there a large part of the time, and, of course, the photographs we were taking were for Farm Security Administration, and a lot of the things we photographed were directly connected with FSA, but also a lot of the stuff was not directly connected, but it did have to do with material that Arthur was interested in for his book on Greene County. For example, FSA had nothing to do with the county jail, but it was only because Arthur Raper was there with us that we were able to get in the county jail as photographers to photograph the inside of that place and the prisoners and the way they lived, and so on. These photographs are now part of the FSA file. The same was true about meeting the people in the county seat in Greensboro -- the editor of the newspaper, the mayor, the deputy, the sheriff, all the various people who made up the community and were the opinion-making group of the community. I think both Irene and I learned a tremendous amount about what the South means, the attitudes in the South, from our few months' stay in Greene County during this project. I think I remember that as one of the significant things of our project that we were involved in.

IRENE DELANO: Well, Arthur had worked in that county for one or two years before we came and he just knew practically every individual in it. He had organized all the material for his books, so that by teaching us as we were working, we got, I mean not just little pieces that happened to interest us visually as we went through, as did happen in some places, but we were able to just kind of go through the whole community like a dose of salts, you know, and do every aspect of it.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, in this case, particularly with the county jail and this type of thing, were the people there -- what should I say -- candid about this whole thing or were they cooperative in what you were doing? Do you think you saw the true side of things there, or were things "dressed up?"

IRENE DELANO: No, you had to have your own opinion, you had to have an understanding of what the whole community was like, the whole social structure, because it varied tremendously. In the first place, Arthur himself was under tremendous attack at the time.

JACK DELANO: Well, it was always a very delicate kind of thing. Arthur was a Southerner himself. He was known as a progressive Southerner, however, not . . . that didn't go very well with some of the people in the South. They also knew he was writing a book. And writing a book about a county in the South is always suspect because you don't quite know what they're going to say in that book.

IRENE DELANO: True.

JACK DELANO: However, Arthur had very good relations with many people in the county and he was a very, personally, a very warm and sympathetic type of person and obviously a Southerner. I mean, you couldn't take him for anything but, so that he was able to accomplish a great deal; although, as I say, it was always a very delicate matter whether he was going to be able or not going to be able to do certain things. For example, it's true that we did get into the county jail and we did take the photographs. Somehow or other, Arthur wangled

that, but while we were there we had the feeling that we had better do this and do it fast because we didn't know whether they meant it or not in the first place. We got that same kind of feeling about some of the other aspects of life in the county that we covered. We knew that Arthur had gotten into trouble on occasion in Greene County. He had been indicted by the grand jury, as a matter of fact, for having been heard to address a Negro as "Mister."

IRENE DELANO: By Talmadge, who was governor at that time.

JACK DELANO: This was one of the difficulties that he got into. Also he was reported to have been seen shaking hands with a Negro. Various things of that sort.

IRENE DELANO: It was very tough and they had a very tough life there. They lived outside of the town in a great, rambling house and Arthur at that time was teaching Sunday school and they fired him. And there were several incidents where the children were stoned, his children. He had four beautiful little children at that time. They're all grown up now and married. But I remember them so well and I loved them very dearly, those little kids.

JACK DELANO: They had a rough time in school?

IRENE DELANO: They had a very rough time. But he was marvelous because he wouldn't give in and they stayed out his two or three years in that community and wrote two books about it.

JACK DELANO: Of course, another assignment which we will never forget was being sent to Puerto Rico.

RICHARD DOUD: That started a lot of things. How did that come about?

JACK DELANO: Well, it came about in a very roundabout way. And one of the things that I hope will show up in that bunch of papers which we're going to find today -- I know it's there -- is a letter from Harold Ickes to the governor of the Virgin Islands at that time. His name was Hapgood or Harwood, one or the other.

IRENE DELANO: Harwood.

JACK DELANO: Harwood was interested in having a photographer come to the Virgin Islands to do a report on social conditions there because he was requesting some money from Congress and he wanted some documents to support the thing, and so on. That was how the thing got started. We were in Georgia at the time, Irene and I.

IRENE DELANO: We were at Arthur Raper's house that night, I remember, when Roy called us up.

JACK DELANO: Roy called and said, "How would you like to go to Puerto Rico next week?" and we said, "Yes, where is it?"

IRENE DELANO: He said to you, not to me -- he said, "Irene has to stay home."

JACK DELANO: And he said something briefly about the Virgin Island and what I was supposed to do and a letter, of course, was to follow. So we packed up and went back to Washington and arranged to travel to the Virgin Islands right away. I came by boat on a little steamer called _____ and arrived here in late November and went almost immediately over to the Virgin Islands. But I stayed here. I was staying at the Palace Hotel for about a week or ten days and this was in 1941 when the war was already on in Europe, and everybody was listening to the radios because the Japanese Ambassador was meeting in Washington paying periodic visits, and one day I came down to the lobby of the hotel and there was a little circle of people around the radio and I heard President Roosevelt's voice saying that we were at war with Japan. This was Pearl Harbor Day. I had this assignment in the Virgin Islands and I packed up a couple of days later and I went over there and began working, met Governor Harwood and his assistant. And about two or three days after arriving there I received a cable which said, "I am at the Palace Hotel. What shall I do now? (Signed) Irene." I had no idea that she was coming or why she was suddenly there.

IRENE DELANO: Well, you know, I got on this freight boat and it was completely blacked out. It took ten days to get here from Baltimore. Ten days. When we arrived in the harbor here in San Juan, they were bringing in the survivors of other ships that had been torpedoed. I had no idea, I mean I was absolutely foolhardy. It didn't occur to me to be frightened. I couldn't believe any of this stuff anyway. I mean it's true the ship was blacked out and all that, and people were a little nervous, but I couldn't believe anything would happen to us. They just went all over the place, you see; they didn't come directly here, and they wouldn't tell us where we were going to land either, but we did land at San Juan.

JACK DELANO: Well, there was a Farm Security program in the Virgin Islands as well as in Puerto Rico at the time. I worked with a Farm Security agent in the Virgin Islands. We traveled around quite a bit, did a lot of photographing of all kinds of things, social conditions, and so on, and also background material, cultural heritage of the place. Some of the photographs were of the kind that governor Harwood wanted, and a lot of them were

not, but they are all in the file. I spent about three weeks there altogether and then came back to Puerto Rico to see about going back. Well, transportation was extremely difficult. I corresponded with Roy and told him, "Now that I am here in Puerto Rico I don't know whether we'll ever get back. There is a Farm Security program going on. While I'm waiting, why don't I do a coverage of Puerto Rico?" He said, "Fine." Well, this extended to three months then, in which Irene and I both traveled extensively in Puerto Rico and did a very large coverage of the Farm Security program and related material. We visited almost every town in Puerto Rico. Our guides here were the farm Security agents, the county agents, and various other people we met in the course of our work. We finally went back to Washington on an old Pan American sea plane.

IRENE DELANO: No, we didn't. We landed in Florida.

JACK DELANO: That's right, from here to Miami.

RICHARD DOUD: Was there a reason why you were picked to do this job in the Islands rather than somebody else?

IRENE DELANO: I think we were the closest.

JACK DELANO: Georgia was closer to Puerto Rico than Texas.

RICHARD DOUD: We were talking earlier about a special assignment you did on railroads. Did you do any of this type of thing before OWI on any type of industry or that sort of thing?

JACK DELANO: Yes, we did industrial coverages from time to time. For instance, in Greene County as part of the study of Greene County. This is an old textile center. So we visited textile mills and worked there as well as . . . there were some union strikes going on at the time.

IRENE DELANO: Oh, that's right. There was that strike.

JACK DELANO: That's right. Pickets and the union and all. I can't remember specifically other places, but wherever we were we certainly didn't limit ourselves to Farm Security agricultural and . . . .

IRENE DELANO: Well, for instance, remember Pittsburgh?

JACK DELANO: That was OWI.

RICHARD DOUD: That was, we'll say, the most . . . ?

JACK DELANO: When we were in New England . . . all through New England it was textile mills, iron foundries, machine shops. It was the same all throughout Connecticut and Rhode Island -- as well as fishing and the other things. I remember Danbury, Connecticut, for instance. There was a wonderful foundry that we did there and textile mills, but nothing as long and protracted as the railroad story.

IRENE DELANO: We spent about six months in New England. It was just a fantastic trip and we were in every state, just everywhere. We really covered New England and stayed out a very long period of time.

JACK DELANO: Well, this was part of Roy's idea, that somebody ought to cover the migrant agricultural worker trail from Florida to Aroostook County, Maine, right up the Coast. Which is what we did. We started in southern Georgia and covered the migrant workers' turpentine camps, tomato-picking, all kinds of other vegetable crops; we kept on going up the trail of the migrant workers from state to state, through Delaware -- where there was a lot of truck farming going on and they were bringing agricultural workers from the South, living in barracks-type buildings, barbed wire fences around. They looked very much like concentration camps.

RICHARD DOUD: Probably were a lot like them.

JACK DELANO: And on up through New England. Finally the last stop was up in northern Maine, close to the Canadian border in Aroostook County, where these same migratory workers had been brought in to pick potatoes.

RICHARD DOUD: We usually associate the migrants with the great plains and the Far West.

IRENE DELANO: I believe that's still true today. There are migratory workers on the Eastern Shore.

JACK DELANO: Well, many of these big truck farms had permanent living quarters established for seasonal use throughout the year, like these quasi-concentration camps in Delaware. These were closed in winter and in the spring when crops were beginning to come in and migratory workers were beginning to come in, these places were opened up. They're all up and down the Coast.

RICHARD DOUD: As a matter of fact, I believe "Green Giant" still has that type of thing in Delaware.

IRENE DELANO: I believe so. I know that in recent years Puerto Ricans were being used for that.

RICHARD DOUD: What's the most outstanding you learned about Americans as a people? I think this whole thing must have been quite a revealing experience about your country. What did you learn that surprised or pleased you most about people in general as you traveled in various areas?

IRENE DELANO: Well, one thing we were talking about before is about poor people being generally warm human people, and I think we found that to be true. That was a thing that unified people everywhere. And also to me it was a tremendous revelation of the tremendous variety of nationalities and the cultures within cultures -- the culture of a migratory worker as against someone from a New England town. All that kind of thing was completely new to me and just absolutely fascinating -- to see how much the environment of a particular community affected the kind of people who lived in it, that not all Americans are alike.

JACK DELANO: At one time we would be covering, for example, a Negro community revival church in a small town in Georgia, and several weeks later it might be the D.A.R. in a small Connecticut town organizing a July 4th celebration. These kinds of things at almost opposite poles.

RICHARD DOUD: It really showed you the polarity. Were there common characteristics other than the friendliness of the poor people?

IRENE DELANO: That's very difficult.

RICHARD DOUD: I mean is there anything that you could say is typically American about Americans? I don't . . . I doubt that there is, but I just wondered if you . . . ?

IRENE DELANO: I think you have to think about it a great deal to figure it out.

JACK DELANO: I don't think there is. I wouldn't say that there is.

IRENE DELANO: You don't? Oh, I think that when you are living outside of the United States, as we are here, you have a different . . . you think of Americans as a kind of people. Of course, it's not true -- from every part of the country they have different characteristics -- but there are qualities that are American qualities. Very definitely so.

JACK DELANO: I don't know. I remember being in Connecticut, which is just a small state, everything is kind of tightly packed, where within an area of a radius of five or ten miles we would be covering the Jewish community in Colchester, with their synagogue and . . . .

IRENE DELANO: Rural.

JACK DELANO: Yes, Jewish farmers, who would get up at the crack of dawn to look after their cows in their pastures, and we would be invited into the house where this patriarch with his long beard, looking very biblical with his wife and his skull cap, this same old man would go out and look after his crops, and so on, and would go to the little synagogue in Colchester, living a completely Jewish life. While within three miles of this same area . . . .

IRENE DELANO: Portuguese?

JACK DELANO: No, no, no. Oh darn, I forgot. If we had the captions here, it'd be just . . . .

IRENE DELANO: I know it, I know it. Well, anyway, go on.

JACK DELANO: Well, yes. Irene mentioned one -- right in this same area, near this town would be the Polish community, and just as with the Jewish community, many of them couldn't speak any English, or hardly any English. The Poles spoke nothing but Polish almost.

RICHARD DOUD: This you wouldn't expect in New England.

JACK DELANO: Very surprising, being so close to New Bedford, which is whaling tradition and what you would think of as American as American can be, and yet these other people consider themselves just as American as anybody else.

RICHARD DOUD: I think it is pretty true that we are sort of a melting pot. There really is nothing that typical.

IRENE DELANO: Well, going back to the States in recent years now I just find it so wealthy; I find the United

States so rich. For instance, in New England -- last summer I went all the way up to Vermont and through Massachusetts and northern New York State, and everywhere it just seemed so terribly rich to me, after living here, you know. In the years when we were traveling so intensively for Farm Security in New England it didn't seem to me that that was true. Of course, it wasn't true then.

RICHARD DOUD: It's very interesting. Mr. Shahn was telling about a trip he made into West Virginia for Roy, and commented that a few years ago he made almost the same trip. He traveled by train because he wanted to have the time to look around and see things. And it appalled him that conditions hadn't changed a bit as far as he could tell; West Virginia, that area he was in, was still really miserably poor.

IRENE DELANO: Well, that did not seem so to me when I went through New England, except in Vermont where things seemed very much the same as I had remembered them, except for the skiing and tourism. But for the most part most of those towns seemed much, much richer than I had remembered.

RICHARD DOUD: Could I ask you for some comments now on the value of the photographs that you were taking then? I think most people agree that essentially they were propaganda in a better sense, propagandizing even Farm Security was good propaganda, that is, the people who agreed with Farm Security would consider it good propaganda. Do you think they were utilized as much as they could have been, or should have been, at the time? Or that more could have been done with what you were doing?

IRENE DELANO: I don't think they've ever been utilized to the extent that they could be. I don't think they've been touched for the value that they have. I mean, I . . . having used them a little bit, and having used more extensively the Standard Oil file, which is a much more limited file, I just feel that there was never the opportunity to really use those pictures as they could be used. I mean they were used very extensively, it's true, but in a very disorganized sort of way; I mean just, you know, when somebody needed something for something. But with the exception of a few photographic exhibits, which were good, I mean really good-sized exhibits that would have some impact, they haven't been touched. There's so much material there that could be used in so many ways.

JACK DELANO: Well, one of the things that FSA was really . . . what we were doing and what Roy was doing, producing photographs, there wasn't really much emphasis on . . . we weren't doing anything about using them. We were expecting other people to use them and we would provide the service. A writer who was doing a book . . . well, fine, here are the pictures and use them all. Somebody wanted to do an exhibit, fine, here are the pictures. But it was never FSA's initiative, nor did FSA have a program for getting these things used except on a rather limited scale in some of the exhibits that Ed Rosskam had designed. Roy's outlook on the use of the photographs . . . he didn't have any specific plans about how these pictures ought to be pushed and used and made available, but in the back of his mind was the idea that somebody was going to do something with these things, and therefore we ought to have this, and we ought to have this, and we've got to have this, and we've got to have this. For instance, he would even talk about pictures of privies; we've got to have pictures of all kinds of privies -- two-story privies, one-story privies, brick ones, big ones, all kinds. Well, this attitude is symbolic of the kind of thing he was thinking about in every phase of the way our people lived, the kind of buttons -- we've got to have pictures of all the kinds of shoes, every imaginable kind of tool that people use in their work, every imaginable kind of clothes that people wear in the various parts of our country. Well, when he thinks in those terms he's thinking of utilization of the pictures. Now somebody ought to . . . somebody who is thinking of using the pictures -- already in Roy's mind things were being catalogued and organized for them.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think the Farm Security missed the boat by not having a program of utilization instead of just depending on people to use them?

IRENE DELANO: Well, I think it was more important to get the material at the time, because without it you couldn't do anything.

JACK DELANO: The other thing -- excuse me -- the other thing I was going to add was the popular image of FSA, because it's so dramatic, is, I suppose, symbolized by the "Bitter Years" show of Dorothea Lange's photographs. But this is only a part of the FSA file, the part of the FSA which perhaps made headlines in the newspapers, but is by no means representative of the bulk of the material that is in the FSA file as a whole.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you agree then with the criticism that has been made that the file since its inception has been characterized by a few so-called great pictures that have been used over and over and over?

IRENE DELANO: Oh, yes.

JACK DELANO: Yes, I think so.

IRENE DELANO: We never knew actually . . . we never knew how many of the pictures, and for what purpose they were being used because there were requests coming in all the time, but I think we would have known if there

had been any impact in their use.

JACK DELANO: I remember now what I was going to say when I was talking about the Jewish community in Colchester, Connecticut. Just a few miles from there we also discovered the Thanksgiving activities of what you would think of as a one-hundred-percent American family, the Scotch-Irish.

IRENE DELANO: That's right. That's one of those shots -- that Thanksgiving shot with the pies, that's a shot that neither Jack nor I particularly liked, but it just got used and used and used a million times. There were many better pictures in that particular series than that damn pie . . . .

JACK DELANO: Well, the point that I wanted to make before with this Colchester Jewish community was that within a few miles from there, we did this Scotch-Irish family with all their Thanksgiving activities, the family reunion, the pies, the pumpkin pies, the turkey, and all the things that go with it, which to this Jewish patriarch right there was as foreign as foreign could be.

RICHARD DOUD: That's right. That's a good comparison.

IRENE DELANO: That's a good example, too, that pie picture, because it happened very frequently to us. Not that a photographer is necessarily the best judge of his own picture, mostly isn't, but there were certain . . . many pictures that you knew would just be put into the file and never used. We knew them very well. And then all of a sudden something like that would for some reason or another start being used and would be used a million times and everything else would be forgotten. That happened over and over and over again, you know. I think it's just mostly the lack of use, really. The use of that file hasn't begun really, I'm convinced of that.

RICHARD DOUD: This brings up the question about these "great" pictures. Were they used a lot because they were exceptional pictures, or were they considered exceptional pictures because they appeared often? Were they convenient pictures to pull out of the file, to call for?

IRENE DELANO: I think some of them were exceptional pictures. I mean, I think that that picture of Dorothea Lange's is a great, great picture.

JACK DELANO: I think, as happens with most visual images, when somebody captures the essence of a thing or a feeling in the photograph that becomes it, it becomes representative of a bulk, a wealth, of material which has been done about this. Dorothea Lange's picture of that mother with the child says almost all that you want to say abut migratory workers in California and the dust bowl.

IRENE DELANO: And she worked a long time before it all congealed in that picture and that's true of all the photographers, I'm sure.

JACK DELANO: The same thing, I think, you can say about Arthur Rothstein's picture of the father and the little boy running through the dust storm. This is dust storm. Although he and lots of other people may have taken lots of pictures, this becomes a symbol of everything that you want to say about this. In the same way, lots of other "great" pictures became symbols and became representative of a lot of material in which there was also other excellent pictures. Because this seemed to capture the essence of the thing, it became the picture and very popular and . . . .

IRENE DELANO: I know in using these pictures, in putting together a story, you look for that, and I know that it happened to me many, many times. If I was trying to do a certain kind of a story, I would automatically go back to one or two pictures of a series because, in going through it, that always was the best one, that one always told it the best, you know. So I think there is a reason for some of these great pictures, I mean pictures that have been used so frequently, having been used in that way. I mean I don't think it was just a question of people getting used to it and that they were using that one over and over, because some of them really did become the essence of what those photographers did, and of what they were trying to tell about a specific thing.

JACK DELANO: Also, they became that because that's what the photographer himself was looking for -- to try to capture in one picture.

IRENE DELANO: And you keep trying and trying and trying and then you get it somewhere along the line.

RICHARD DOUD: The thing that bothers me, I'm wondering how much of this might be due to a conditioning on the part of the viewer. For example, if I think of dust storm I'll think of Rothstein's picture because I've seen it so often that this means a dust storm.

IRENE DELANO: No, as I say, I would have to do that similar kind of photographic story, choose pictures to tell a similar kind of story over and over again at Standard Oil and I was very conscious of it because I wanted to use the pictures, you know, and I would go through the whole thing looking for other things that would tell the story

as well as those one or two in that series. And I'd very frequently be forced back to using them. I did that over and over again. I did use others but there always seemed to be in any sequence of pictures taken by a photographer one or two that did it better than anything else, but that was only because it was about a specific . . . about dust storms, for example. But I don't think you could find more than five pictures in the whole FSA photograph file that were as good as that one of Arthur's of the dust storm. I doubt if you could. You could find loads of pictures on that same subject, but if you were just trying to say "dust storm," you probably would come back to those same five every time you went through the damn thing looking for it.

JACK DELANO: But it's also the result of the kind of coverage that the photographer would be doing, and the kind of thing that a designer would be thinking of in designing a show, for example. In designing an exhibit, you would probably look for a symbol picture plus others which would embellish and enrich this one, but there would be this one.

IRENE DELANO: Oh, I think that that is inevitable because I always was trying to break that. I didn't want to use the same ones, especially when you had so many photographs. But very frequently you'd be forced to do that because there was nothing that approached it; it just happened in that particular one. But that also depends on what you were trying to say. If you were trying to say other things, then all the other pictures took on a different meaning. And that's another thing that fascinates me about photography and that is that no picture is the same when it's put together with another one. As soon as you put two together you tell one thing. If you put another one with it, it's a completely different thing. And in terms of using photographs another great thing about that file, or any file like it, is that in order to be able to use it, you have to have that kind of variety. I don't know, Roy must have been aware of it because he did it, I mean I don't know whether Roy was so aware of it from the point of view of using them as he was from the historical point of view of getting it, you know. But whatever his idea was, the result was that you could do a million different things with those photographs. You could take them and by just putting two or three together you could tell one thing and change it and change it into infinity. You can't do that, you can't use photographs, unless you have that kind of file. I mean, you can't use them well, you can't do a good exhibit, you can't do a good photographic book. I mean you can't take a photographer and say, "Go out and get me a shot of this, and a shot of that, and a shot of the other because I'm doing a book." You can't do it.

RICHARD DOUD: What do you think makes the Farm security file, the pictures themselves, outstanding pictures, or are they outstanding pictures individually, for their time? Are these any better pictures individually than pictures that were being taken by other photographers who might have worked for Look or Life, or is it the fact of the file itself and the variety in the file that makes it a worthwhile project?

IRENE DELANO: Well, I think that that is a very important aspect of it. I think that the quality of pictures varies considerably and in that sense the file was the thing, that it was the general approach to putting the pictures together in this way. It was the idea of getting it down, getting all these different aspects of American life down, which no magazine, of course, was willing to do. They couldn't do that, of course. They were doing a different thing altogether.

JACK DELANO: But it's almost impossible to say that they were better pictures than other pictures taken at the same time. In a case like this it's almost impossible to define what is a good picture, because a lot of it has to do with what is the picture for. It may be excellent for what you need it for; it may be no good for something else. But, for example, there were some wonderful photographs being taken by photographers on Life and Look for the stories that they were being assigned to, and there were abstract photographs and all kinds of things being done at the time which were perfectly fine for what they were for. But I think the great thing about the Farm Security photographs, regardless of the artistic merit of any individual photograph, is that they were all being done in a search for the heart of the American people. This is what we were skirting all the time and feeling the pulse of the nation through its people.

RICHARD DOUD: I keep hearing the word used in connection with Farm Security -- the term "honesty" in photography. This is well and good; and I think this is wonderful that these photographers had this sense of honesty, and that Roy would insist upon honesty and an honest approach to these various problems. But it implies that maybe other photographers were dishonest.

IRENE DELANO: There is an important thing there, and that is that the magazine photographers for the most part -- not the photographers -- but the whole approach of the magazines as against the Farm Security file is that they had to have a punch. They had to have an angle. Therefore, many of the pictures that they took were with an angle because it was part of a magazine story. The magazine was not interested in photographing things for the sake of photographing them and having them and being part of a file. I mean they wanted them because they had to make a punchy story out of it. So a tremendous amount of that photography just goes down the drain because it is, oh, in those days there were an awful lot of these things -- "Johnny so and so goes to visit something," and then he's in every picture. You know, that kind of thing. There was a tremendous amount of photography of that kind because that was the angle.

JACK DELANO: There was a difference between what FSA was doing and photojournalism. We were not photojournalists in the sense that we were producing something that was going to appear in a newspaper or in a magazine. We were documentary photographers, which is quite different. It means that we were providing material for somebody to use in all kinds of ways that they might want to, or need to use them. Also, I can't remember too well the kind of photography that was being done in magazines at that time. But I do remember that within a short time after the Farm Security photography started to be used, its influence on the magazines was very fast. Pretty soon the influence of Farm Security's kind of photography was being felt in the newspapers and in the magazines.

IRENE DELANO: Especially in the early days I remember in Life particularly. No, I think that it's true that the Farm Security photography in general had a more honest feeling about it, and I think that it's more long-lived because of that. Not that there weren't great photographs taken by the magazines.

RICHARD DOUD: You feel that honesty was a common characteristic among you people who were photographing? Or is this something you didn't even think about?

JACK DELANO: It isn't anything that we thought about except that -- it's hard to say what you mean by being honest in your photographs -- except that it would never occur to any of us to fake anything.

RICHARD DOUD: That's what I mean.

JACK DELANO: And none of them were taken for effect.

IRENE DELANO: There wasn't any reason to do that.

JACK DELANO: On the contrary, there was every reason not to do that.

RICHARD DOUD: Are there any other characteristics that you would consider common to all photographers? I'm sure you were all excited about what you were doing and grateful for the opportunity to do what you were doing.

JACK DELANO: I think that in this approach we had toward our photographs we weren't only expressing our own attitudes but we were being influenced by other people. We were being influenced by what we had seen of Cartier Bresson and Robert Capa and works that other photographers were doing in Europe and everywhere else. We admired their work and were glad that there was this kind of kinship in approach.

IRENE DELANO: I think that you were influenced by each other.

JACK DELANO: Yes, we talked about that before, and one of the things I said was that I thought that one of the weaknesses was that we almost never saw each other, almost never got together.

IRENE DELANO: I know.

JACK DELANO: Did you feel that what you were doing at the time was having some effect for good as far as making the public aware? Did the public appreciate what you were doing? Did the press appreciate what you were doing?

IRENE DELANO: I don't think . . . I think that we thought we were doing good, but I don't think, at least I didn't feel, that there was . . . I just thought it was going to be good for something sometime. I personally didn't have a very strong feeling about that. Did you?

JACK DELANO: No. I mean we weren't working for posterity and we didn't have this in mind, although we thought that what we were doing was going to help some people somewhere for a long time to come.

RICHARD DOUD: I just wondered. A number of photographers mentioned that they felt that they were doing some good and they developed a sort of a social conscience, feeling that what they were doing was helping people at the time, helping some people realize the problems which in turn helped the people who were having the problems, and they were sort of striking a blow against unfortunate conditions, and I was wondering if you personally felt this way . . . that you were doing something meaningful at the time rather than just making a record.

IRENE DELANO: Oh yes, absolutely.

JACK DELANO: Yes, I think we all had that feeling basically, but I think there was another thing which was not as specific which we felt we were doing and which we hoped would be reflected in our photographs, and that is that I think we all had a respect for human beings and we were hoping that in our pictures we were saying something decent about the dignity of mankind, the dignity of human beings, and it didn't matter who they were And, although Congressmen and newspapers might get riled up about dirty little children with bare feet, and so on,

we felt that when we looked at the kids, we felt that they were wonderful human beings and that no matter who it was, this was a human being of great dignity and this we hoped would be reflected in all the pictures we did. And of course, people were the basic element in everything that we were doing.

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RICHARD DOUD: Mrs. Delano, you were mentioning that the file had never been utilized the way it should have been. What value do you, or Mr. Delano feel this file has as a file of pictures today? How could it be . . . how should it be used?

IRENE DELANO: Well, that's such a broad question because the uses of it are so infinite, really. I mean . . . well, without question just telling something about life in America in a million different aspects could be told in many different ways, either in exhibits or in books or whatnot. I think it is true that one of the weaknesses now is that not very much has been added since to bring it up-to-date. So that if you're telling a story of America, you have this big hole now. You would have to depend, I suppose, on newspapers and magazines for later material.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, one of the faults I've found with the way it's been used, and I think "The Bitter Years," in spite of the fact that it was really a fine exhibit, was that the emphasis has always been on really the down-and-out poverty, the misery of the country in the Thirties. As far as I'm concerned, this shows only one small aspect of the Farm Security file and I've always been interested in exhibits or publications of some kind that would show the diversity of the material, types of material. I think it is important, too, to show the multiplicity of certain types of evidence. I'm thinking in terms of numbers of photographers who have covered the same kinds of material. How often is one subject treated in the file? If it is treated a great number of times, perhaps then that gives this one aspect an outstanding importance in America in the 1930's -- a varied type of coverage like this. Not only the range but the various intensities of coverage of the photographs themselves. If there is any way that this could be reasonably done, I'd certainly like to get some ideas on it.

JACK DELANO: Well, I think it is a great shame that the project didn't continue, of course, because, as Irene said, there were a certain number of years during which we were all working, and then it all stopped. What in the files represents the work of those years. After that there isn't anything. But think of what has been happening in the United States since 1945, since the War, after the War, the transformation and all kinds of social movements that have been happening in the United States since the War. This would have driven Roy mad, insane to cover all this. I mean, our whole . . . if nothing more than our attitude toward science and space and the effect that it has had on the whole country, just as one symbolic thing, one example. What's been happening in education in the United States in ten years is another example of compete revolution in thinking about all these things which reflects itself in attitudes and human behavior; and in a way the industrial revolution in the United States after the War with plastics and transistor radios, computers, and all of these things. These are the things that have been changing in American life since the War. These are the kinds of things that properly would be fields in which the project would be working -- in which we would all be working. Well, nobody has been except as reflected in newspaper stories and other things which are in somebody's file somewhere about the country but never from this point of view of the project. I'm just saying this because I think it's tragic that the project did just simply cut off and stop when the country didn't stop and all the things that we were looking at didn't stop. They continued developing in an extraordinary way. But your question about how the file could be used . . . I remember Roy was not only a collector of photographs, but he collected all kinds of things, including people, and Alice collected buttons, but Roy -- this collector's attitude and this idea that everything is useful and you've got to have it, and if you don't need it now, you'll need it later, or somebody else is going to need it. This was something that he was always impressing on us, too. Roy had a great admiration for Sears, Roebuck catalogues, for example. He felt that they should be kept and that they were very valuable -- Sears, Roebuck or Montgomery Ward's catalogue of thirty or forty years ago is an extraordinary historical document of what dress was like at that time, and appliances, and automobiles and parts, and all kinds of things. In the same way, the file will be valuable as the years go by, in this same sense also. Even now it is valuable in that sense because of the material contained in it about social mores of the time, about . . . well, things have changed already considerably just in these twenty-odd years and the files gives us such a vivid picture of what things were like at that time, not only in the depressed areas but in all the other things we covered.

IRENE DELANO: Well, and talking about the depressed areas and all that, I think it is very important to say that if the file photographers had been equally interested in every aspect of American life, we would have had such a diverse thing that we wouldn't have had these great photographs. I think that it was important that the emphasis was on the problems of the time.

RICHARD DOUD: Sure.

IRENE DELANO: And the fact that the photographers did feel that they were doing something that maybe would

help these things. That's what makes good work. I mean if you're just going out with the idea that you're photographing American life in a broad sense, then -- and you don't have any personal commitment . . . . When somebody is in trouble, you have a personal commitment to help them and I think that that is the feeling that this file gives. It is true that it doesn't show every aspect of American life. It shows a great deal more of rural life than urban life because it was a Farm Security project. It shows more of problem areas than non-problem areas -- that's what we were trying to do.

JACK DELANO: It was the temper of the times.

IRENE DELANO: Temper of the times, and because it was the important thing and it was because of that . . . I mean, that is not a weakness of the file, that's the strength of the file. I don't agree with you. Unless you have that feeling of commitment to something that you're trying to make something better, no matter what it is, then you are not going to have a Farm Security file. The reason the Farm Security file is good is because the people thought they were making it better. They were trying to help something that was bad, and to me that's very important. I disagree with the attitude of criticism of the file because it was so one-sided. I don't think that it could have been as good a file if it had tried to show all aspects of every situation. I mean . . . .

JACK DELANO: It is true that we had this kind of dedication, but we also had another kind of dedication which is broader than that. We weren't thinking that we were making anything better or improving a lot of poor people when we were photographing those beautiful barns in New England or the beautiful picket fences or the rolling countryside or the county fairs or lots of these other things.

RICHARD DOUD: He is sort of pointing up what I was trying to say a minute ago. I don't feel that the Farm Security file is that one-sided, but I do think that that's the impression that has been given.

IRENE DELANO: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: It is one-sided in a sense that it is primarily rural or small town -- it is one-sided in that aspect. But it is not one-sided in the fact that it's a documentation, let's say, of human misery. It has human misery in it. There is no doubt. But it has a lot of things in it. I've gone through a good bit of it in the last few months and I keep thinking of things like -- you mentioned county fairs, the girlie shows and the gals are all out trying to attract customers and it would show political signs on the highway. There is one in Connecticut, a guy running for Congress, and he says, "I will vote no on any bill that calls for raising taxes." This type of thing. It's really a pretty broad statement and I don't think that we're given that impression by the way the file has been used. I think there must be a better way to do it. It is a tremendous group of photographs. I think in a way they are blaspheming the value by not using them properly. I would be interested in ideas on how to get more out of it. How to make people more aware of what's in it and encouraging people to use it. There is all sorts of sociological material there. Political material if you want to use it. Various types of cultural studies could use it just historically -- costume or customs.

IRENE DELANO: That's right.

RICHARD DOUD: This type of thing. There are things in there that people today even in their twenties have never seen and never heard of.

IRENE DELANO: I think it would be marvelous to do a . . . you could do from now until you die exhibits of all these different aspects of just what is in that file now, and booklets on all kinds of things.

JACK DELANO: That's what I was thinking of. I don't have any specific suggestions about projects with the files, but as with other museums and collections, I think sections of the file on different themes or certain subject matter would be wonderful things for booklets -- a series. You mentioned county fairs; well, there is a wealth of material there on county fairs from Maine to Southern California.

RICHARD DOUD: I'd like to see educational people use it more.

IRENE DELANO: Did you see that one thing?

RICHARD DOUD: I did. I was talking to Mr. Delano about that earlier and I thought it was . . . .

IRENE DELANO: It was just like a breath of fresh air to see.

RICHARD DOUD: Tremendously well-handled as far as I was concerned. Again, it showed agrarian distress, but it does show what can be done with still photography, this kind of material. So I'm all for any ideas on how this type of material could be used; but if the impressions persist that it is only this, then it will be very difficult to get people to use it.

JACK DELANO: Incidentally, there is a lot of humor in the file.

IRENE DELANO: Oh, yes.

RICHARD DOUD: That's what John Collier says.

IRENE DELANO: Yes, a tremendous amount, it's true.

RICHARD DOUD: But who would believe it after "The Bitter Years?"

JACK DELANO: I was just thinking of one of my own pictures, the one that Stryker used so much.

IRENE DELANO: That was in the . . . .

JACK DELANO: "Family of Man" show -- of the farmer hitching up his pants and laughing and his wife laughing. Do you remember that one?

IRENE DELANO: No, I don't believe I do. The tobacco farmer in Connecticut?

RICHARD DOUD: Well, we've sort of talked around a lot of things. Are there any points that we should cover that we haven't?

JACK DELANO: I think this might be an appropriate time to take a break and hunt for the . . . .

RICHARD DOUD: All right. We'll let you think about it some more.

IRENE DELANO: I wish to the devil we could find that . . . .

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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