LIFE Magazine and the Power of Photography

EDITED BY
Katherine A. Bussard
Kristen Gresh

WITH ESSAYS BY
Nadya Bair
Katherine A. Bussard
Erika Doss
Dolores Flamiano
Thierry Gervais
Kristen Gresh
Ellen Handy
Jason E. Hill
Liam Kennedy
Mary Panzer
Caitlin E. Ryan
Alissa Schapiro
Sally Stein

AND CONTRIBUTIONS BY
Jeremy Adelman
Meghan Angelos
Sharon Corwin
Rachael Z. DeLue
Michel Frizot
Thierry Gervais
Robert Hariman
James Leighton
Dalia Habib Linssen
John Louis Lucaites
Amanda Maddox
Paul Roth
Alissa Schapiro
Catherine Zuromskis

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Photo-Essays at *Life*

Nadya Bair

Life photographer W. Eugene Smith was going to miss his deadline, but he didn't care. He had just gotten his negatives back from *Life*'s photo lab. The lab technicians always washed out his prints. He was going to print them himself and get the tonality just right so that the blacks, grays, and whites drew readers to the most important details in each frame. Tomorrow he'd give his prints to the layout department and pray that they wouldn't ruin everything. He knew that his photo-essay on Dr. Albert Schweitzer needed two installments for a total of twenty-two pages, minimum. And his message about the not-so-saintly doctor in Africa was going to be complex: far more nuanced than what *Life*'s editorial board was likely to approve, since the magazine used photo-essays as mouthpieces for publisher Henry R. Luce's politics.[1]

Smith's plans fell apart a few days later. No breaking news story appeared to fill the pages allotted for one, so *Life* rushed the Schweitzer essay into publication for the November 15, 1954, issue.[2] Smith hated the layout, but *Life* approved it anyway. He was furious. Over the previous six years the photographer had single-handedly transformed the photographic essay genre by making it reflect his unique vision rather than *Life*'s staid shooting scripts. He had done more research than was necessary. He got inside his stories and became involved with his subjects. He showed the layout team how to showcase the pictures' aesthetic and narrative qualities and how to make them communicate his political and social vision. The Schweitzer mess-up was the last straw. He couldn't fight *Life*'s editorial process anymore, because the editors would never give photographers more control. And so, on November 2, 1954, Smith resigned from *Life*.

This is a well-rehearsed story about the struggle between a heroic photographer and a monolithic magazine. It is also about a particular type of photographic essay—one shot over a long period of time by one person, driven by a photographer's style and intended for the back of *Life*, which featured long photo-essays with a looser connection to current events than the newsy picture stories at the front. Descriptions of the *Life* photo-essay are often about this kind of singularity: the one talented photographer, the great photo feature, and for that matter, the all-important publisher, Luce, whose complex persona often overshadows the collective enterprise of the magazine.[3] But to understand the history and power of *Life*, we need to expand our understanding of what the magazine actually published and who was involved in that process.

For this reason, this essay is about plurality: about *Life*'s many photo-essays rather than the idea that there is a single, generic photo-essay. During its thirty-six-year history, *Life* published more than two hundred thousand pages of photo-essays of various lengths and formats. Its opening "Speaking of Pictures . . ." spread "[got] you into the issue like hors d'oeuvres get you into a meal," as Wilson Hicks, *Life*'s picture editor, once said.[4] The hors d'oeuvre was often surprising, making readers stop to examine, for instance, twenty-four portraits of Abraham Lincoln arranged in chronological order for the very first time by the renowned picture editor Stefan Lorant FIG. 88.[5] "The Big Newspicture of the Week" served as the magazine's first extensive photo-essay: a pictorial report on a significant piece of news that took up anywhere from four to twenty pages, uninterrupted by advertisements. Next came the shorter, time-sensitive picture sequences about the week's domestic and international events (for a while called "The Camera Overseas"). In the middle and back of the magazine, readers found film and theater reviews featuring sequences of celebrity portraits and production stills, another extensive photographic essay on one of any number of topics, and the scrapbook-style "*Life* Goes to a Party," offering a glimpse into high-class leisure and fun. All these photographic features were essential to *Life*.[6]

Skilled editorial staff, not individual photographers, produced those photo-essays.[7] Many of them spent decades on *Life*'s staff. Peggy Sargent, *Life*'s eagle-eyed film editor, worked at the magazine for its entire run, minus nine months. Both the award-winning art director Charles Tudor and the headline-chasing managing editor Edward K. Thompson were there for twenty-five years. Hicks's tenure as picture editor was shorter (fourteen years), but the systems he put into place in the 1930s and 1940s lasted until the magazine's end in 1972. These team members created important points of continuity at *Life* as the world changed before their eyes, and we cannot understand their contributions by looking only at the printed page. For this reason, this essay foregrounds production history, looking at the spaces in which *Life* was made on the thirtieth and thirty-first floors of the Time-Life Building in New York City. Understanding *Life*'s photo-essays means unpacking *Life*'s collaborative

1. Glenn Gardner Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith and the Photographic Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 179–232.
2. "A Man of Mercy: Africa's Misery Turns Saintly Albert Schweitzer into a Driving Taskmaster," *Life*, November 15, 1954, 161–72.
3. See, for instance, Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith*; John Loengard, ed., *Life Photographers: What They Saw* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998); and Chris Vials, "The Popular Front in the American Century: *Life* Magazine, Margaret Bourke-White, and Consumer Realism, 1936–1941," *American Periodicals* 16, no. 1 (2006): 74–102. Luce plays an important role in Vials's article as well as in Erika Doss, ed., *Looking at Life Magazine* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), and Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), all of which examine the contents of the magazine as a reflection of Luce's and Time Inc.'s editorial politics. See also Alan Brinkley's authoritative biography *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York: Random House, 2010).
4. Wilson Hicks, speech to AP, 1940, box 343, folder 21, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, New-York Historical Society (hereafter cited as NYHS). With thanks to Vanessa Schwartz.
5. Best known as the photo editor of the British illustrated magazine *Picture Post*, the Hungarian Jewish émigré Stefan Lorant produced multiple illustrated history books after seeking asylum in the United States in 1940. This *Life* feature served as publicitiy for Lorant's *Life of Abraham Lincoln: A Short, Illustrated Biography*, which had just been released in paperback by Signet Key Books.

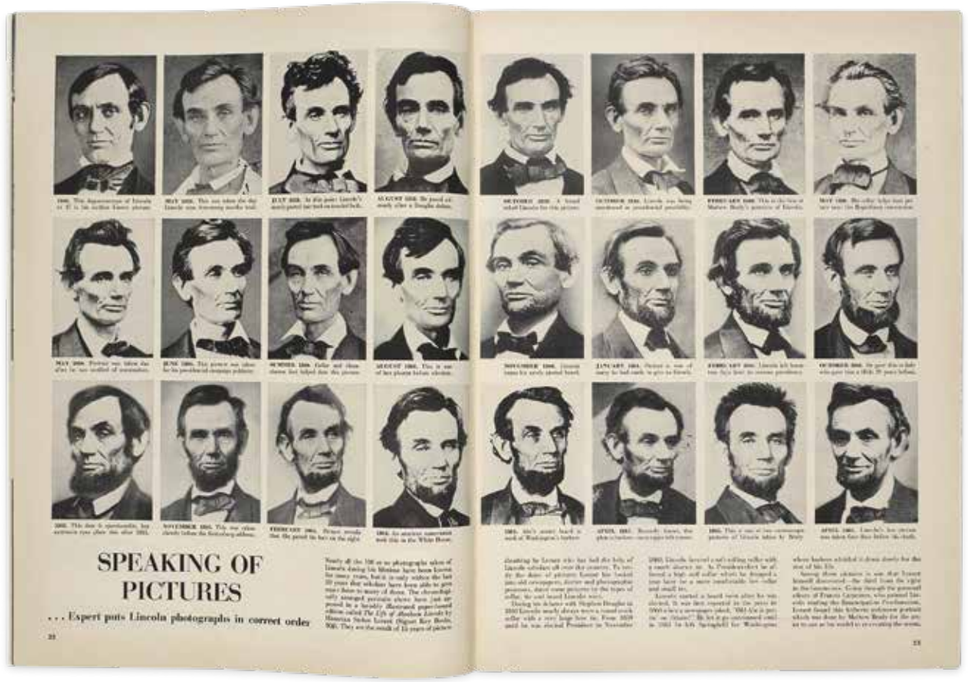


FIG. 88 **Spread from "Speaking of Pictures . . .," *Life*, February 14, 1955**

production process, because that is what shaped the form and the content of its photographic features and the magazine as a whole.

The "Photographic Essay" versus Photo-Essays

In the 1920s and 1930s publications in Germany, France, England, the United States, and the Soviet Union concurrently turned to photographic essays, commonly understood as visual narratives combining photographs, text, and graphic design.[8] (For more on this, see Thierry Gervais's essay "Making *Life* Possible" in this volume.) Such features were called by a variety of names, including picture or photo stories, photo sketches, and photo reportage. *Life* inaugurated the term *photographic essay* as such in the table of contents of its August 30, 1937, issue, and it published 1,292 features under the rubric "Photographic Essay."[9]

The numbers are concrete, but *Life*'s definition of the photographic essay was slippery. In a 1937 memo to his staff, Luce claimed that *Life*'s photographic essays would simply replace essays written with words. By relying on images, they would excel as a form of communication in the increasingly visual world of the 1930s.[10] After some revision Luce's memo reappeared in *Life* as a promotional feature titled "The Camera as Essayist," which has since become the most frequently cited source for scholars seeking to define the nature of *Life*'s photographic essays FIG. 89.[11] "When people think of the camera in journalism they think of it as a reporter," it began. "Actually, as *Life* has learned in its first few months, the camera . . . can also be a commentator."[12] True to its title, the ad said more about the camera than it did about the photographic essay. One has to read between the lines to learn that the latter is an incomplete but charming photographic treatment of a subject by a photographer with a unique vision.

But why promote the photographic essay at all, considering that *Life* was foremost an illustrated *news*-magazine? There are three possible answers, each true in its own way. First, Luce leaned on photographic essays in response to *Life*'s early critics, who claimed that the young magazine was too salacious to be respectable. Serious photographic reportage, then, was supposed to

6. Such features had different life spans and publication frequencies. For instance, "The Camera Overseas" appeared in the first issue, November 23, 1936, but disappeared by 1939, at which point all of the time-sensitive stories were grouped under the table of contents category "The Week's Events." "The Big Newspicture of the Week," so-called by Henry Luce, was the longest photographic story illustrating "The Week's Events." In 1961 *Life* renamed this feature "The Story of the Week." The "Speaking of Pictures . . ." feature ran weekly for twenty-nine years beginning with the magazine's second issue. "*Life* Goes to a Party" appeared in the first issue and ran frequently, though not every week, for twenty-five years. *Life* published features under the rubric "Photographic Essay" from 1937 until 1961 and used the "Pictorial Essay" rubric eighty-eight times between 1947 and 1961 to describe features on art, history, and culture. Thierry Gervais with Gaëlle Morel, *The Making of Visual News: A History of Photography in the Press*, trans. John Tittenson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 143.

7. The independent masterpiece narrative persists today despite the range of publications that suggest otherwise. Insider histories of *Life* that recount the depth and range of its activities include Wilson Hicks, *Words and Pictures: An Introduction to Photojournalism* (New York: Harper, 1952); Jane Dora Hamblin, *That Was the Life* (New York: Norton, 1978); Loudon Wainwright, *The Great American Magazine: An Inside History of "Life"* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Edward K. Thompson, *A Love Affair with Life and Smithsonian* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press,

convince readers that *Life* could do more than nudes and crashes.[13] Second, it showed that *Life* was developing a new kind of investigative reporter who told stories with the camera. Words were still more respected than pictures within the news industry of the 1930s, but *Life* would lead the way, nurturing a new kind of journalism and a new kind of professional.[14] Photographic essays would help make the photojournalist and pictorial journalism integral to *Life*'s brand. Finally, a third scenario: Luce's memos to his staff were often critical, explaining how different areas of the magazine should improve. But the editor in chief was quite happy with the "Photographic Essay" in the first months, and he felt that this feature set *Life* apart from the other two magazines published by Time Inc.: *Time* (which covered the news primarily through text) and *Fortune* (which had many illustrations but was less driven by current events).[15] So Luce hung his hat on the photographic essay, using it to promote *Life*; to draw readers into the exciting, behind-the-scenes thinking of the magazine (a tactic *Life* returned to frequently in its advertisements and editors' notes); and to sell subscriptions.

From that point onward, the magazine's definition of the photographic essay changed every decade, often in conversation with larger shifts in photography and the media landscape. In the 1930s and 1940s *Life* defined it as "a unique type of detailed study . . . by *Life*'s photo reporters."[16] By the mid-1950s the single-author narrative had disappeared. Amid the popularity of the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) photographic exhibition *The Family of Man* (1955)—compiled, in part, from *Life*'s own picture archives—the magazine adopted the show's humanist language. *Life* publisher Andrew Heiskell wrote that photographic essays reframed the familiar and stirred up universal emotions by showing "people and places you might have run into yourself . . . commonplace subjects made exciting by uncommonly descriptive photography."[17] The definition changed again in the 1960s as *Life*, now an established institution of American journalism, faced competition from television and struggled to remain fresh and current.[18] A 1965 subscription ad told readers, "Photo essays are bonuses. You enjoy them in addition to *Life*'s brisk, urgent reporting in color of each week's news."[19] One *could* learn about the world from black-and-white television, to which the ad alludes with its mention of "reporting in color." But the grainy screen was never as enjoyable or memorable as a photographic essay: *Life*'s "invention," as managing editor George P. Hunt called it in 1964, its masterful contribution to picture journalism.[20]

The photographic essay was always central to *Life*'s brand. During the magazine's existence, it was strategically promoted in end-of-year reviews (in the spirit of, Let's remember all the wonderful photographic essays we brought you this year), in *Life*'s amateur photography contests (Can you shoot a great photographic essay?), and in subscription advertisements. Those are precisely the contexts in which Heiskell and Hunt defined the photographic essay above. This rhetoric helped promote *Life*, but it was mostly that: the promotional language of a publishing company looking to increase sales and publicize its name with the help of one feature.

A heading in the table of contents meant that the "Photographic Essay" fit into a specific place in the production schedule, not that it was a privileged category. If there was one privileged category from a production standpoint, "The Big Newspicture of the Week" was it. Overseen by *Life*'s news and managing editors, it was produced last and then printed separately, just before *Life* hit newsstands. You could always identify the news insert because it repeated the *Life* logo, date, and number on its leading page. *Life*'s Chicago-based printer, R. R. Donnelley & Sons, worked on a staggered printing schedule. In the 1950s color stories generally closed six to eight weeks in advance of publication, while black-and-white sections closed from three weeks to forty-eight hours in advance. Time-sensitive sections closed every day of the week in the lead-up to Sunday.[21] Finishing "The Big Newspicture" was the editorial climax of *Life*'s weekly production. As the top editors finalized the pages, the New York editorial offices sent editorial copy and instructions via teletype to the printers in Chicago. (For more on Donnelley, see Ellen Handy's essay in this volume. On *Life*'s deadlines and news cycle, see Jason Hill's essay in this volume.) Picture layouts were sent by air express or special delivery on the limited trains connecting the two cities.[22] Under the direction of Edward K. Thompson, who in 1949 moved from news editor to managing editor (a position he held until 1961), staff often waited until the last minute for a news scoop and then worked into the night to close the issue. Less urgent stories were trashed, and the entire section could be reconfigured in a matter of minutes. In extreme cases

1995); Robert T. Elson, *Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise*, vol. 1, *1923–1941* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); and Elson, *Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise*, vol. 2, *1941–1960* (New York: Atheneum, 1973). Photojournalism textbooks that discuss the collaborative nature of the photojournalistic enterprise include Daniel D. Mich and Edwin Eberman, *The Technique of the Picture Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1945); and R. Smith Schuneman, *Photographic Communication: Principles, Problems and the Challenges of Photojournalism* (New York: Hastings House, 1972). Art history has had a long-standing interest in social history, production history, and networks of artistic exchange that should help challenge the artist-centered narrative prevalent in the case of *Life*. Jason E. Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), is noteworthy for its range of methods for studying photojournalism.

8. Michael Jennings, "Agriculture, Industry and the Birth of the Photo Essay in the Late Weimar Republic," *October*, no. 93 (Summer 2000): 23–56; Daniel H. Magilow, *The Photography of Crisis: The Photo Essays of Weimar Germany* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); Erica Wolf, "When Photographs Speak, to Whom Do They Talk? The Origins and Audience of SSSR na stroike (USSR in Construction)," *Left History* 6, no. 2 (2000): 53–82; Michael Hallett, *Stefan Lorant: Godfather of Photojournalism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006); Michel Frizot and Cédric de Veigny, *VU: The Story of a Magazine That Made an Era* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009);

FIG. 89 **"The Camera as Essayist," *Life*, April 26, 1937. Photographs by Alfred Eisenstaedt**

VASSAR: AN ESSAY

THE CAMERA AS ESSAYIST

WHEN people think of the camera in journalism they think of it as a reporter—the best of reporters: the most accurate of reporters: the most convincing of reporters.

Actually, as LIFE has learned in its first few months, the camera is not merely a reporter. It can also be a commentator. It can comment as it reports. It can interpret as it presents. It can picture the world as a seventeenth century essayist or a twentieth century columnist would picture it.

A photographer has his style as an essayist has his. He will select his subjects with equal individuality. He will present them with equal manner. The sum total of what he has to say will be equally his own.

Above in sharp reduction is Alfred Eisenstaedt's essay on Vassar as it appeared in LIFE for February 1, 1937. Together these twenty-four pictures give an impression of that college as personal and as homogeneous as any thousand words of Joseph Addison.

The panoramic background is by Fairchild Aerial Surveys; the picture of President MacCracken by Edward Steichen; all others by Alfred Eisenstaedt.

Listed herewith are some of the Photographic Essays LIFE's readers have seen in the first issues of LIFE:

MONTANA ON RELIEF
PITTSBURGH BOOM
MILITARY AVIATION
THE OXFORD GROUP
STEEL
THE CHAIN GANG
AMERICA GOES DANCING
AMERICA SITS DOWN
BRAZIL—CIVILIZED AND PRIMITIVE
THE PHOTOGENIC MAYOR
THE JAPANESE SOLDIER
ARGENTINE ARISTOCRACY
CORONATION NONSENSE
SUN VALLEY
STEVE HANNAGAN'S GIRLS
THE PARACHUTE
THE CARDINALS (OF ROME)
THE CARDINALS (OF ST. LOUIS)
MOTHER OF PARLIAMENTS

the entire editorial team went to Chicago and worked at the Donnelley plant to close the time gap between layout, the writing of a story, and the start of the presses.[23]

The photographic essay at the back of the magazine, also called "the feature," could be produced by any of *Life*'s other departments and was the result of a much longer process. At weekly department meetings, writers, researchers, and department editors presented their story ideas to the managing editor, the producer who oversaw all of *Life*'s departments and who had the final word on which stories to run.[24] A little-known fact is that *Life* staff photographers could also pitch their ideas. In the 1940s and 1950s John Phillips and W. Eugene Smith frequently wrote to Hicks and Thompson with long lists of subjects they wanted to cover, including Tito, whom Phillips photographed for decades, and life in Spain, which was published as Smith's "Spanish Village" on April 9, 1951.[25] If the managing editor approved the story, department editors and researchers developed a shooting script and a set of written instructions given to photographers about their assignments, including background research, story angle, proposed page count, layout ideas, and specific image requests.

But photographic essays assigned to one photographer could take weeks or months to complete. This production timeline did not keep up with *Life*'s weekly appearance. More than two-thirds of what *Life* labeled photographic essays combined images from multiple authors or collections, brought together by subject matter, layout, and editorial angle rather than an individual photographer's style.[26] A sampling of photographic essays from across the decades affirms this time and again, bringing into focus the kind of essays readers learned to expect. "War Planes" (September 11, 1939) surveyed fighter jets with pictures from five sources. Each of the "Three Little Movie Girls" of February 26, 1945—Margaret O'Brien, Elizabeth Taylor, and Peggy Ann Garner—got her own photographer. And "Common Bonds of Man" (February 14, 1955) served as promotion for the exhibition *The Family of Man* with twenty pictures by eight photographers. The "Photographic Essay," then, was usually a hybrid product drawn from many image sources. It testified to *Life*'s commitment to pictorial journalism and testified to the importance of image supply and picture editing to *Life*'s operations.

Picture Supply and Picture Editing

As the mass-market picture magazine of the Time Inc. empire, *Life* aimed to make use of photography, broadly defined, to inform and educate readers about their world. Photographs were not new to Luce or his publishing empire. Its eponymous newsmagazine, *Time*, launched in 1923, often used photographs as illustrations and experimented with picture sequences on several occasions. *Fortune* magazine, founded in 1929 to cover industry and business for the upper echelons of American society, was known as Time Inc.'s "most beautiful magazine"—purposeful in its typography and design, illustrated by the top artists of the day, and highly invested in photographic reporting. Luce had instructed *Fortune*'s first staff photographer, Margaret Bourke-White, that "the camera should explore every corner of industry, showing everything . . . from the steam shovel to the board of directors." Rehearsing the key tropes that reappeared in *Life*, he continued: "The camera would act as interpreter, recording what modern civilization is, how it looks, how it meshes."[27]

Life's first editors—Luce, John Shaw Billings, and Daniel Longwell—thought of *Life* as a much better version of the rotogravure section of the Sunday newspaper. Since the 1910s American papers had been publishing special inserts featuring high-quality photographs, printed using gravure cylinders. The technology allowed for a much larger range of tones than the newspaper's usual halftone print, and while the pictures illustrated the week's events, they were often unrelated to one another. *Life* was also going to be printed beautifully, on large sheets of glossy paper, but it would cover the world through sequences of images. These images acted like words, arranged into picture sentences and paragraphs by *Life* editors. Time Inc. repeated the idea over the decades. "The editors 'read' pictures as critically as a newspaperman reads a column of type because *Life*'s language is pictures," it stated in 1950. Editors evaluated pictures for "story advancing factors" and "pictorial value," including composition, but photography "was not art as far as *Life* is concerned. Pictures are simply words out of a camera with which stories can be told."[28]

Luce himself pinned the magazine's success not on the quality of its photographs but rather on the scale of *Life*'s picture supply and the work of its editors. The photographs appearing in *Life* photo-essays came from many sources. The first point of contact was often a *Life* staff photographer who was called on to produce stories initiated by the magazine. Staff photographers traveled where directed and shot assigned stories, working in ways that suited *Life*. They knew, for instance, to overshoot so that editors could have a variety of pictures to choose from. They also knew that not every story would appear in print. For every picture assignment that *Life* published, an estimated four or five never ran.[29] (These were filed away in Time Inc.'s picture collection and sometimes repurposed in later *Life* features or the extensive line of Time-Life Books.)[30] Photographers may have been personally disappointed to see their stories scrapped, but they still enjoyed stable salaries with plentiful job perks.[31] *Life* paid travel expenses around the world, purchased photographic equipment, and supplied assistants—including researchers, reporters, and translators—when photographers were working in the field. The magazine also opened doors. Because of *Life*'s international reputation, common citizens, celebrities, and world leaders alike welcomed its staff photographers with the hopes of being featured in the magazine.

Over the course of their careers, *Life* photographers took on a variety of assignments, but many developed expertise in niche fields and were assigned to the types of stories that best fit their skill sets. Bourke-White, previously a *Fortune* photographer, began by working on industrial projects before concentrating on human-interest stories around the world. Fritz Goro was often selected for stories about science and technology. A master of color photography, Dmitri Kessel excelled in art, architecture, and industrial assignments. Others—including Robert Capa, Carl Mydans, George Rodger, George Silk, and George Strock—became known for their war coverage. And other photographers were regional experts, as in the case of John Phillips in the Middle East and David Douglas Duncan, who worked in the Pacific well after World War II.

At its height in the 1950s *Life*'s photographic staff included more than forty photographers stationed around the world, yet this team could not keep up with all the news or with *Life*'s weekly picture needs. The magazine's remaining photographs came from other sources, including independent freelance photographers and amateurs. News picture agencies such as Associated Press, Acme, International, and Wide World provided *Life* with individual pictures on a spot-news basis, while photo agencies—including Black Star, PIX Publishing, and Magnum Photos—specialized in longer-form photo-essays.[32] *Life* editors looked at a dizzying number of images each week from these sources: sixteen thousand in 1941, twenty thousand in 1942, and so on.[33] But even more importantly, they came up with the departments and processes to winnow down and keep track of all those pictures.

Life's picture editors oversaw the flow of photographs in and out of editorial offices and the magazine, which meant that a lot of their work came down to money and legal technicalities. They supervised the work and the assignments of *Life* photographers (including recruiting and hiring photographers to the staff) and managed contracts with picture agencies and freelancers. *Life*'s first picture editor, Wilson Hicks, streamlined or reorganized many of these core responsibilities, paving the way for more efficient photo-essay production and creating best practices adopted by other illustrated magazines.[34] Hicks worked out day and page rates for paying nonstaff photographers and developed the policy that *Life* pictures were exclusive, that is, that they could be used neither in other publications nor for advertising purposes. He also made the use of shooting scripts a standard practice at *Life*.

Of all Hicks's innovations, the shooting script is the most misunderstood, in large part because photographers later claimed that these instructions hampered their creative process.[35] Before it went to the photographer in the field, the script helped department editors convince the picture editor that a story required original photographs. Hicks was notoriously parsimonious when it came to assigning photographers, and he was not a great team player either.[36] Shooting scripts grated on the nerves of department editors. Bad script? No photographer. For the people behind the camera, however, these instructions helped to focus their attention. Photographers kept a close eye on the details of their scripts even while approaching their subject matter with creativity and a personal sense of style. On finishing an assignment, Smith even went back and staged certain scenes to make sure that each piece of the script had a correlating image. For his "Nurse Midwife" photo-essay FIGS. 90–95, for example, Smith drove its protagonist, Maude Callen, around Berkeley County, South Carolina, and photographed her crossing "varied terrain" to get to

and Gervais, *Making of Visual News*. While these scholars suggest that the photo-essay emerged in large part to show the experiences of everyday people for the purpose of enacting social change, new scholarship on photography and visual culture on the right is showing how authoritarian regimes used this form to very different ends. See Olivier Lugon, "Photo-Inflation: Image Profusion in German Photography, 1925–1945," *History of Photography* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 219–34; and Julia Adeney Thomas and Geoff Eley, eds., *Visualizing Fascism: The Twentieth-Century Rise of the Global Right* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

9. The category was discontinued in 1961. Gervais, *Making of Visual News*, 6, 131.

10. Henry R. Luce, "Redefinition of the editorial contents and purpose of *Life*," February 1937, box 58, folder 2, Henry R. Luce Papers, MS3014, NYHS. Of course, Luce himself was contributing to the increasingly visual world through various media, including the *March of Time* newsreels. See Raymond Fielding, *The March of Time, 1935–1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

11. See, for instance, Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith*, 16–17, and Gervais, *Making of Visual News*, 6.

12. "The Camera as Essayist," *Life*, April 26, 1937, 62–63.

13. Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith*, 16; and Wainwright, *Great American Magazine*, 44–45.

14. Hicks, speech to AP, 1940, NYHS. On journalism's resistance to photography, see Barbie Zelizer, "Journalism's 'Last' Stand: Wirephoto and the Discourse of Resistance," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 78–92.

15. Luce, "Redefinition," NYHS.

16. Facts about *Life*, June 30, 1941, box 519, folder 5, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS.

17. "Your Chance for $10,000," *Life*, June 20, 1955, 145. Compare this to Edward Steichen, who reveled in humanist "photography with a tender simplicity, a sly humor, a warm earthiness, the 'everydayness' of the familiar." Museum of Modern Art, "Postwar European Photography to Be Shown at the Museum," news release no. 530522-45, May 27, 1953, https://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/1720/releases/MOMA_1953_0050_45.pdf?2010.

18. The term *photographic essay* was capitalized until 1961, when the label disappeared from the table of contents.

19. *Life*, May 14, 1965, 153.

20. "*Life* Editor's Note," *Life*, July 31, 1964, 3. With thanks to Katherine Bussard.

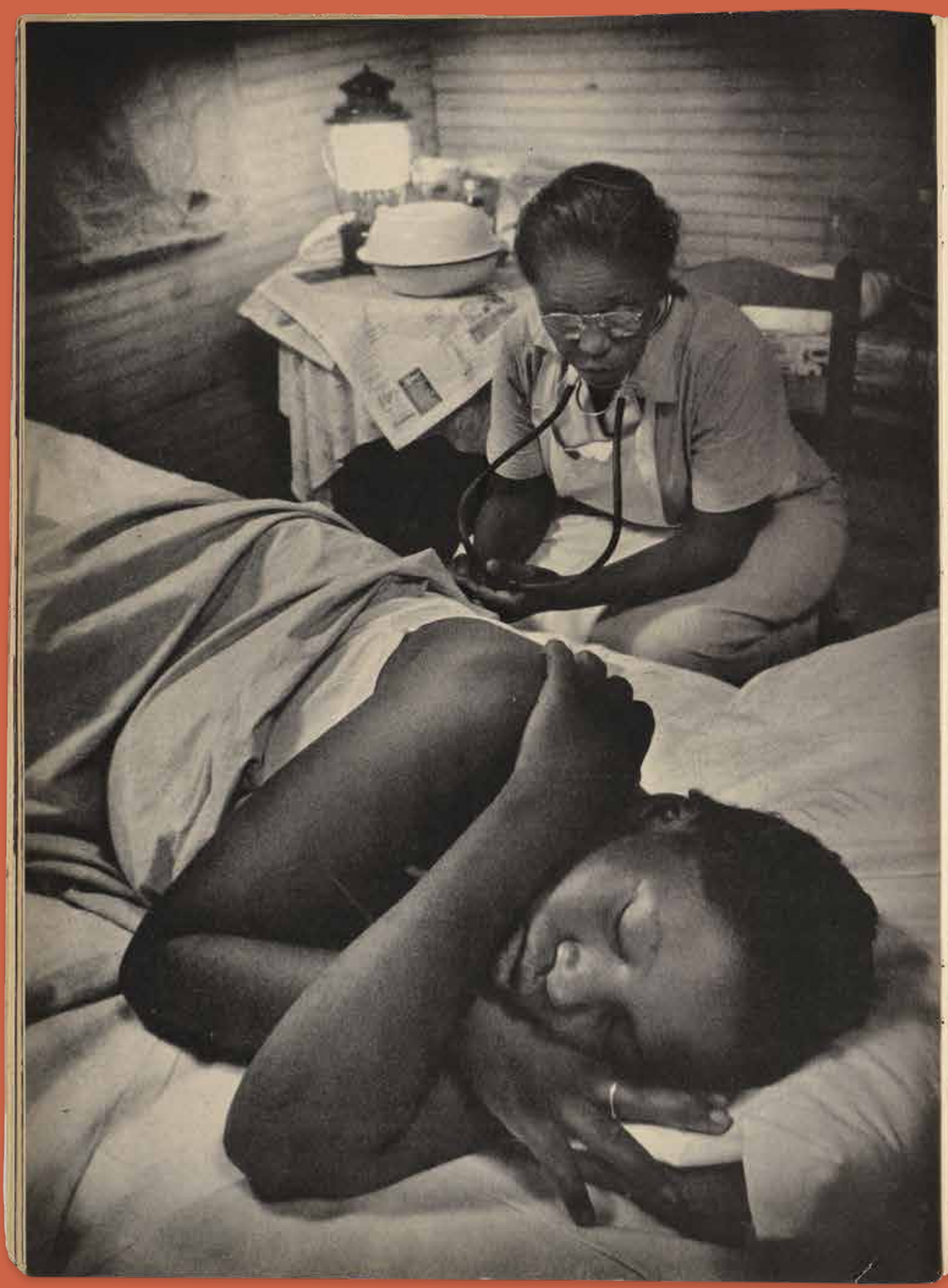
21. Elson, *Time Inc.*, 2:417.

22. Facts about *Life*, June 30, 1941, box 519, folder 5, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS.

23. Sugarman notes on interview with William Gallagher, May 16, 1956, box 331, folder 14, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS, and Elson, *Time Inc.*, 1:419.

24. Hicks describes this in his chapter "*Life* Lays Out a Picture Story," in *Words and Pictures*, 63–80.

25. John Phillips correspondence with *Life*, 1940s–1960s, box 382, folder 41, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS; and Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith*, 90–91.



WAITING, the young mother leans forlornly against the window, ignoring sympathy and looking for Maude's car.

Nurse Midwife

MAUDE CALLEN EASES PAIN OF BIRTH, LIFE AND DEATH

PHOTOGRAPHED FOR LIFE BY W. EUGENE SMITH

Some weeks ago in the South Carolina village of Pineville, in Berkeley County on the edge of Hell Hole Swamp, the time arrived for Alice Cooper to have a baby and she sent for the midwife. At first it seemed that everything was all right, but soon the midwife noticed signs of trouble. Hastily she sent for a woman named Maude Callen to come and take over.

After Maude Callen arrived at 6 p.m., Alice Cooper's labor grew more severe. It lasted through the night until dawn. But at the end (*next page*) she was safely delivered of a healthy son. The new midwife had succeeded in a situation where the fast-disappearing "granny" midwife of the South, armed with superstition and a pair of rusty scissors, might have killed both mother and child.

Maude Callen is a member of a unique group, the nurse midwife. Although there are perhaps 20,000 common midwives practicing, trained nurse midwives are rare. There are only nine in South Carolina, 300 in the nation. Their education includes the full course required of all registered nurses, training in public health and at least six months' classes in obstetrics. As professionals they are far ahead of the common midwife, and as far removed from the granny as aureomycin is from asafetida.

Maude Callen has delivered countless babies in her career, but obstetrics is only part of her work. To 10,000 people in a thickly populated rural area of some 400 square miles veined with muddy roads, she must try to be "doctor," dietician, psychologist, bail-goer and friend (*pp. 140, 141*). To those who think that a middle-aged Negro without a medical degree has no business meddling in affairs such as these, Dr. William Fishburne, director of the Berkeley County health department, has a ready answer. When he was asked whether he thought Maude Callen could be spared to do some teaching for the state board of health, he replied, "If you have to take her, I can only ask you to join me in prayer for the people left here."

←WEARY BUT WATCHFUL. MAUDE SITS BY AS MOTHER DOZES

FRIGHTENED AND SICK, the nervous mother is helped by Phoebe Gadsden, the first midwife she called. Mrs. Gadsden, a practicing midwife who attended Maude's classes (*pp. 144, 145*), has helped at several deliveries but felt that this one needed special attention and so decided to ask Maude to come and supervise.

MAUDE GETS READY in the kitchen by lamplight. In addition to the stethoscope and gloves, her equipment consists of about $5 worth of such items as clean cloths, bits of cotton, scissors, cord ties, Lysol, surgical gown and mask and a blood-pressure gauge. Her deliveries are always made under aseptic conditions.

IN DEEP PAIN, the 17-year-old mother writhes, mumbling prayers while Mrs. Gadsden holds her hand. She could do little to relieve pain because she is not permitted to administer any drugs. The mother was worn out and weak even at the beginning of her ordeal, having previously gone through a period of false labor.

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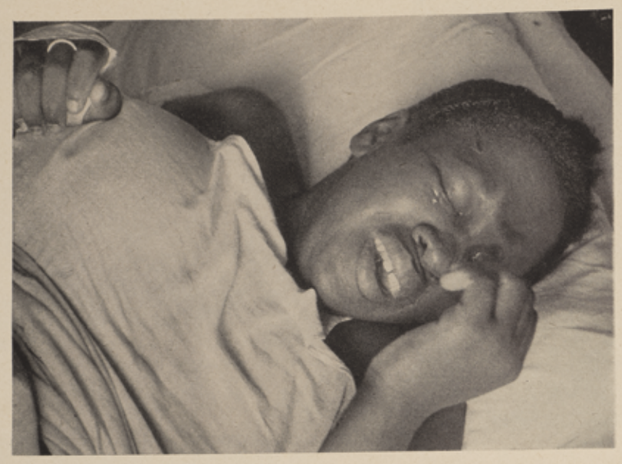
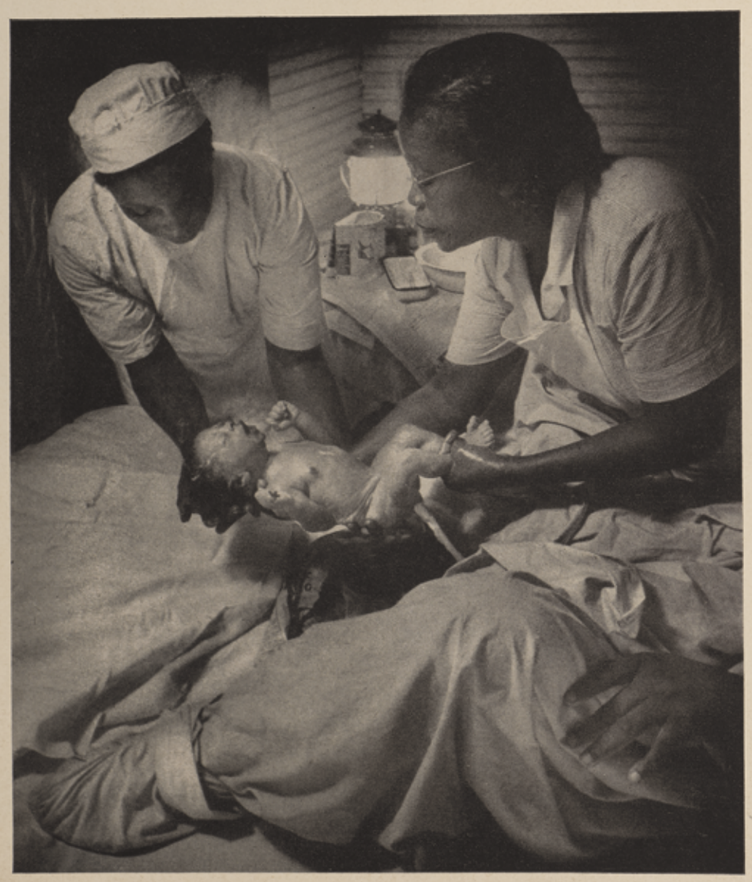
Nurse Midwife CONTINUED

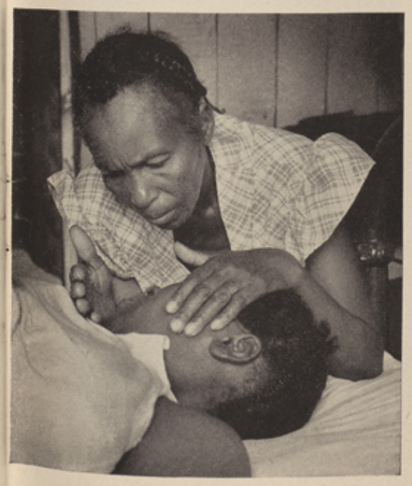


4 A.M. As hard labor begins, the face of Alice Cooper seems to sum up all the suffering of every woman who has ever borne a child.



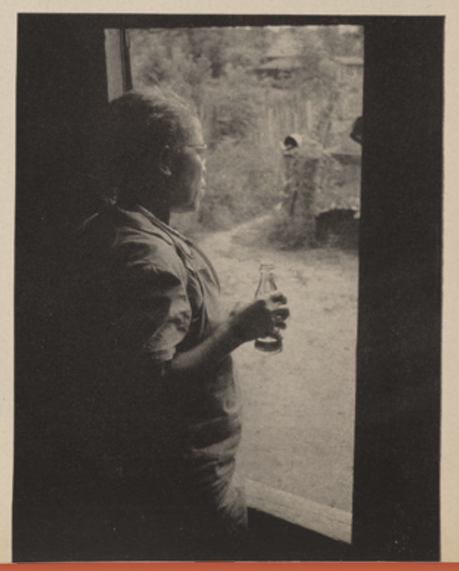
5:30 A.M. A few seconds after the normal delivery, Maude Callen holds the healthy child as he fills his lungs and begins to cry.

5:45 A.M. The mother's aunt, Catherine Prileau, tries to soothe her so that she will go to sleep and begin to forget her misery. →



5:40 A.M. The long suffering over, the mother first sees her son. She had no name for him, but a week later she chose Harris Lee. ↑

6:20 A.M. Her work over at last, Nurse Midwife Callen quietly takes the first nourishment that she has had for more than 27 hours.



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MAUDE AT 51 has a thoughtful, weary face that reflects the fury of her life. Orphaned at 7, she was brought up by an uncle in Florida, studied at Georgia Infirmary in Savannah, became a nurse at 21.

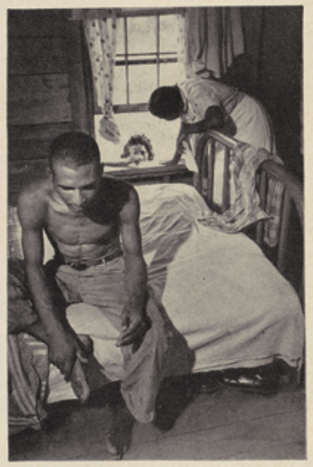
MAUDE'S 16-HOUR DAY

Maude's duties as midwife are no more important than those as nurse. On her daily rounds she sees dozens of patients suffering from countless diseases and injuries. She visits the nine schools in her district to check vaccinations, eyes and teeth. She tries to keep birth records straight, patiently coping with parents who say, "We name him John Herbert but we gonna call him Louie." She tries to keep diseases isolated and when she locates a case of contagious illness like tuberculosis she must comb through her territory like a detective, tracking down all the people with whom the patient may have been in contact. She arranges for seriously ill men like Leon Snipe (*right*) to go to state hospitals, and she keeps an eye on currently healthy babies to see that they remain that way. Whenever she is home—she is childless and her husband, a retired custom-house employe, sees her only at odd hours—she throws open a clinic in her house to take care of anyone who wanders in. And sometimes patients like Annabelle McCray Fuller (*below, right*) will travel all the way from Charleston, 50 miles away.

Maude drives 36,000 miles within the county each year, is reimbursed for part of this by the state and must buy her own cars, which last her 18 months. Her work day is often as long as 16 hours, her salary $225 a month. She has taken only two vacations and has now become so vital to the people of the community that it is almost impossible for her to take another.

AFTER ANOTHER DELIVERY Maude departs at 4:30 a.m., leaving the case in charge of another midwife. Since she is already up, she is likely not to go to bed but to continue through rest of morning.

HEALTHY TWINS, who were delivered a day apart last year by Maude, get a quick once-over when she stops in to see them and to pump herself a drink of water. Only about 2% of her patients are white.



TUBERCULOSIS CASE. 33-year-old Leon Snipe, sits morosely on bed while Maude arranges with his sister for him to go to state sanatorium. Maude had met him on road, noticed he was thin, wan and sickly.

ACCIDENT CASE is brought to Maude's door one night. Annabelle Fuller was seriously cut in an auto accident and Maude had given her first aid. Now the girl returns to have her dressings changed.

CRIPPLED GIRL greets Maude at her door. Last summer Maude arranged for her to go to a state camp for crippled children which had strict entrance requirements —each child had to have two dresses and one pair of pajamas. The girl could not meet these, but after Maude got her one dress and one pair of pajamas, she could.

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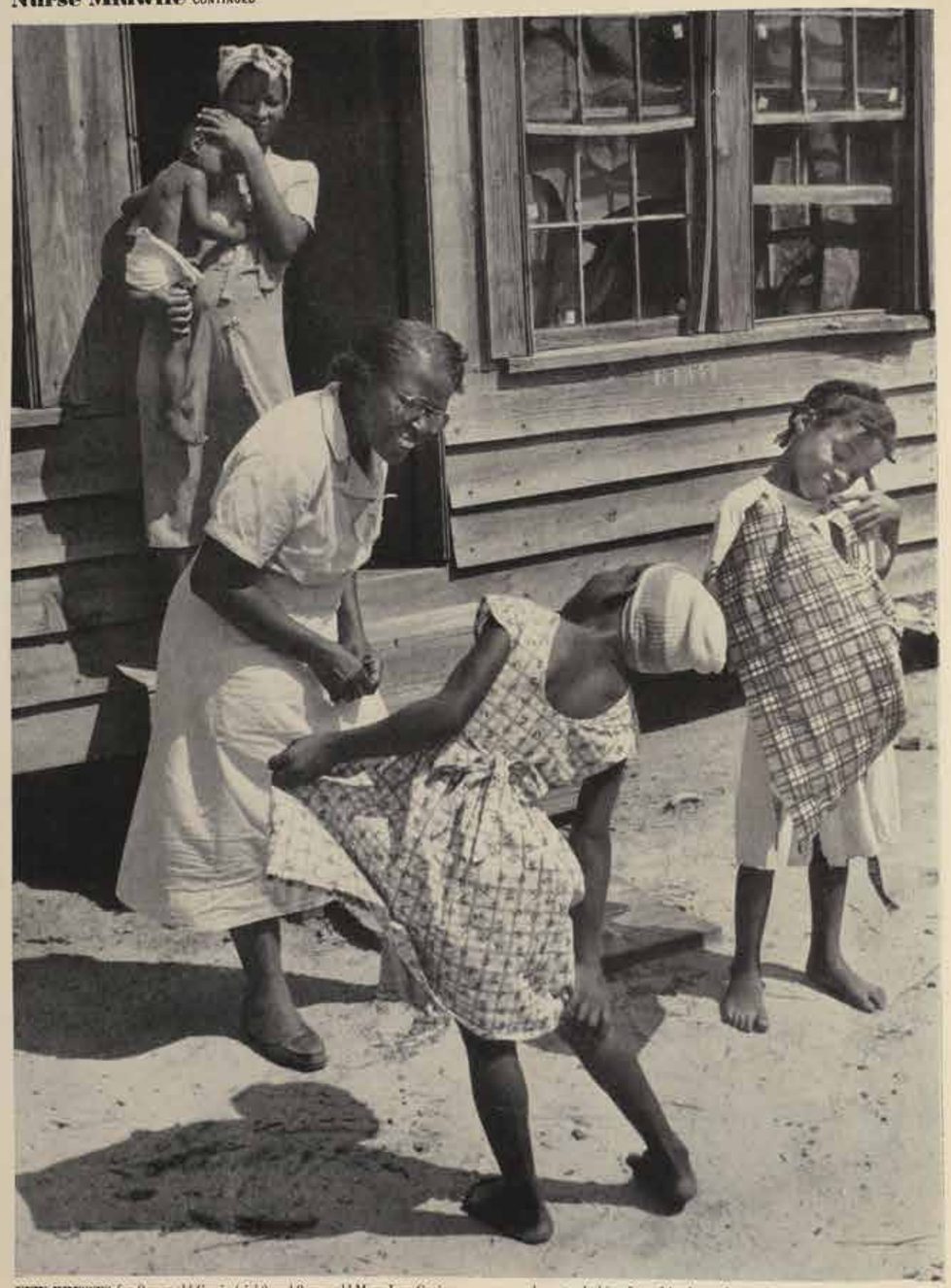
Nurse Midwife CONTINUED



NEW DRESSES for 9-year-old Carrie (*right*) and 8-year-old Mary Jane Covington were dropped off by Maude on her way to a patient. Occasionally, as in this case, she gets clothing from friends or charitable organizations and distributes it where she thinks it is most needed. But sometimes she buys the clothes herself.

SIMPLE KINDNESS overwhelms an old man. Frank McCray had a headache one day in 1927, soon was paralyzed, and has been in this chair ever since. He broke down and wept when Maude stopped in.

EXTRA DUTY assumed by Maude includes cashing of relief checks and dealing with storekeepers for several people who are mentally incompetent or, like this man, blind. She paid his bills for him and counted out change so he could buy some tobacco.

STORE-BOUGHT FOOD donated by Maude fascinates youngsters outside log cabin. She frequently finds families with only two or three items on their diet, recently found this one living entirely on corn.

AFTER A CALL she wades back to her car. Roads like this are not unusual. At the end of some of them in the '20s, she "found people who did not know the use of forks and spoons."

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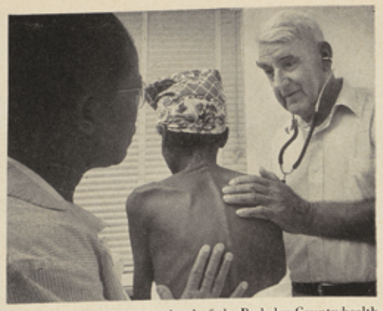


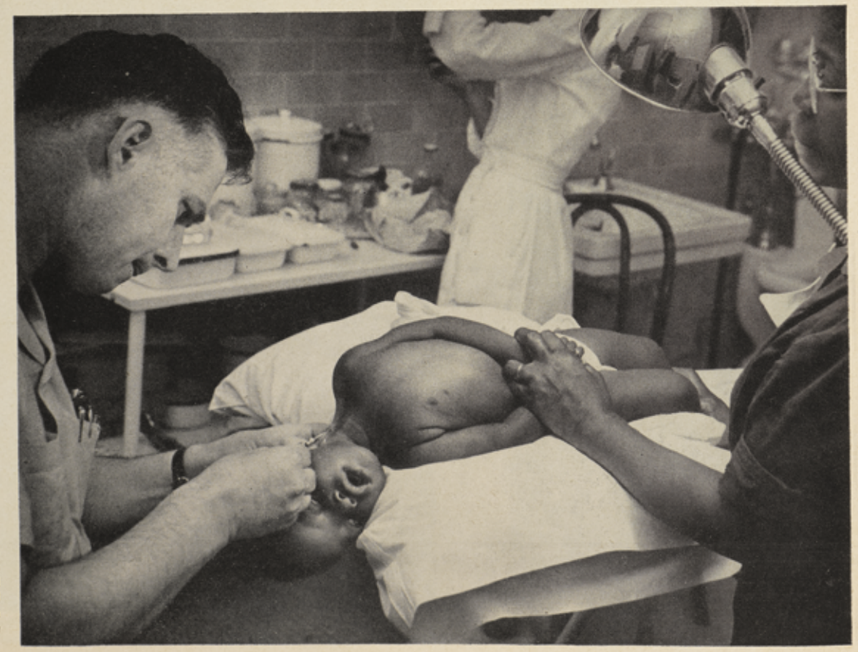
DR. W. K. FISHBURNE, head of the Berkeley County health department, examines a patient brought to hospital by Maude.

MAUDE AND M.D.

When she is not visiting her patients in their homes, Maude holds clinics in churches, school buildings and backwoods shanties throughout her district. Some are for a single purpose—inoculations, classes for midwives or expectant mothers, examinations for venereal disease. Others are open to all comers with all ills. All are part of the activities of the South Carolina State Board of Health, Maude's ultimate employer, which has perhaps the best state midwife-education program in the U.S., although a recent budget cut seriously threatens it.

At her clinics Maude does not compete with doctors. There are not enough M.D.s in any case to cover the territory, and whenever her patients are in need of treatment that Maude is incompetent or unauthorized to give, she takes them to the health department clinic or the county hospital. There she works under the direction of Dr. William K. Fishburne (*above*), from whose shoulders she has taken an enormous amount of work.

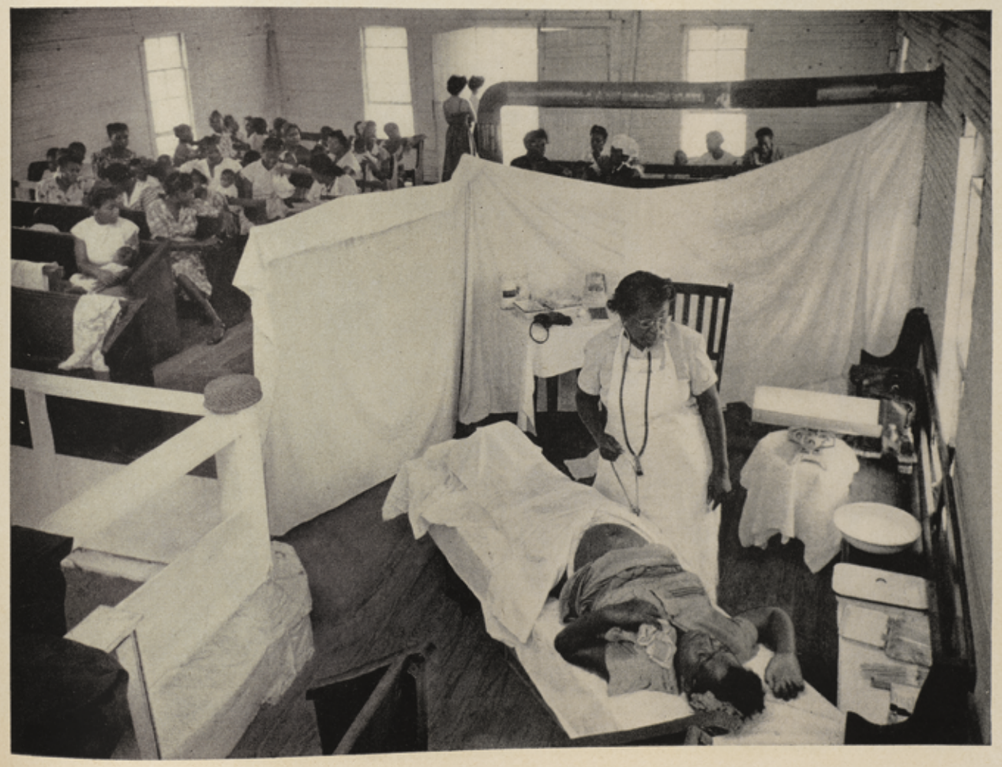
DYING BABY who is suffering from acute enteritis is rushed to hospital. Mother brought her to Maude, who took her temperature (105°) and raced 27 miles in hope of saving her life.



TRANSFUSION was almost impossible because fever's dehydration had affected arm veins and doctor had to try one in neck. Baby died before he could get blood flowing.

OUTSIDE A CLINIC held in school, crowd waits to see Maude. On one afternoon, with one assistant, she gave 810 typhoid shots, later went out and delivered another baby.

INSIDE A CHURCH, Maude inspects a patient behind a bedsheet screen. She dreams of having a well-supplied clinic but has small hope of getting the $7,000 it might cost.



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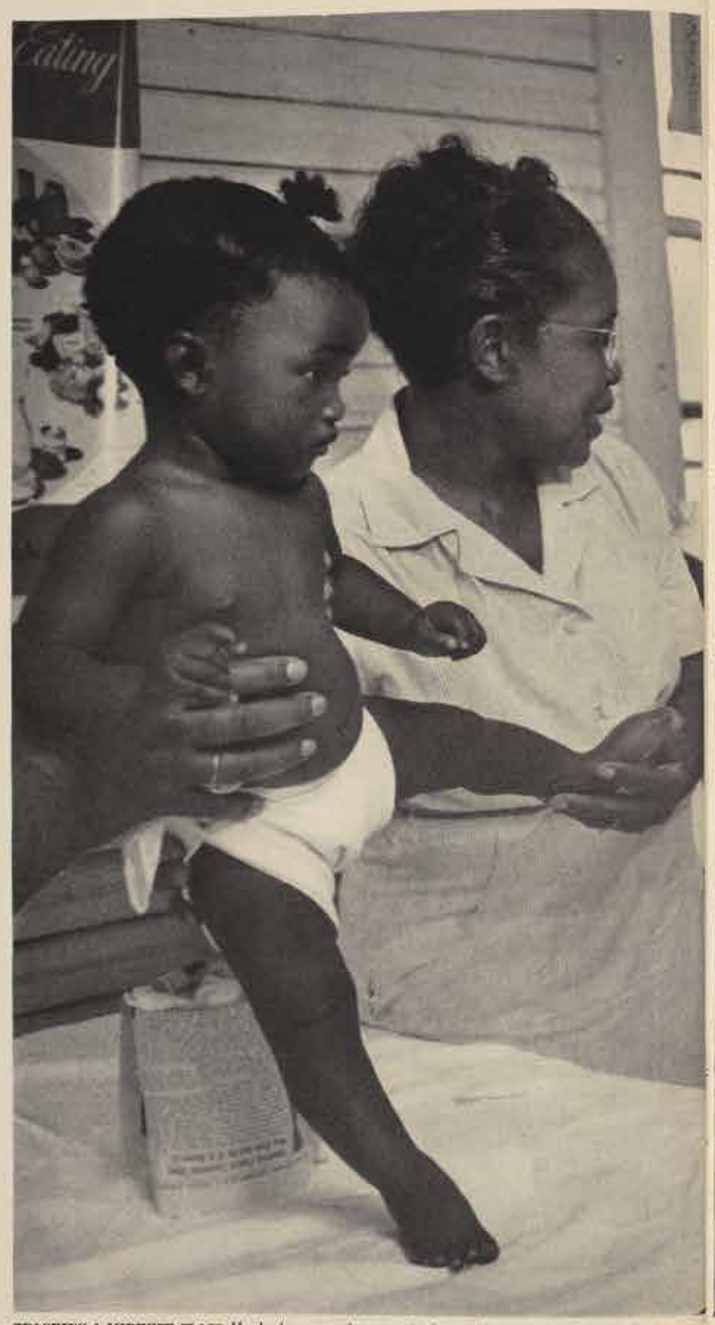
Nurse Midwife CONTINUED

MAKING A DELIVERY PAD in patient's home according to classroom method, Maude crimps together the edges of several pieces of newspaper. Her materials must be makeshift; even paper is scarce.

INCUBATOR is made of box and whisky bottles full of warm water. The bottles are placed at foot and sides of box, then covered with layers of cloth. This will sometimes work for as long as two or three hours.

CRIB is made of an old fruit crate propped near a cold stove. Maude must demonstrate even this simple idea—she has seen newborn babies thrown into bed with older children where they might suffocate.



TEACHING A MIDWIFE CLASS, Maude shows how to examine a baby for abnormalities. She conducts some 84 classes, helps coach about 12 new midwives each year. These midwives, who are already practicing, return to Maude for monthly refresher courses which open and close with a hymn. Few have more than fourth-grade education but are trained for two weeks at the state midwife institute and are very proud of their calling. Unlike Maude, they get fees for deliveries, set at $25 but often paid in produce.

her patients to make the picture that appeared on the eighth page of the article (see page 143).[37]

During extended shooting assignments, staff photographers sent *Life* batches of film so that the picture editor could see how a story was progressing and send feedback on the pictures' technical quality. Smith did this regularly while producing both the "Country Doctor" and "Nurse Midwife" photo-essays.[38] Freelance photographers envied this setup because it ensured that *Life* photographers could quickly fix their technical mistakes—underexposed film, a misaligned lens—while nonstaffers could spend weeks shooting a story only to find out afterward that most of the film was ruined.[39] When time was of the essence—because news editors *also* sent photographers scripts—photographers were wise to adhere to their instructions in one go. Henri Cartier-Bresson followed *Life*'s scripts with precision after World War II, when he was still new to photojournalism. He later admitted, "It was only in the process of working for [magazines] that I eventually learned—bit by bit—how to make reportage with a camera, how to make a picture story."[40]

Cartier-Bresson paid the editorial team an even higher compliment when he reprinted a number of his *Life* photographs in his acclaimed photo book *The Decisive Moment*. In the late 1940s he had spent three years working in remote locations without proper facilities to print and edit his images. *Life* editors were the ones who identified the "decisive moments" in his contact sheets from India and China, and their reappearance in Cartier-Bresson's book in 1952 shows that the photographer agreed with their decisions.

Or rather Cartier-Bresson agreed with *her* decision, because the person who saw all of *Life*'s incoming films beginning in 1947 was Peggy Sargent. Between 1937 and 1947 the technicians in *Life*'s photo lab had been responsible for going through all the film that came to *Life* on news and photo-essay assignments. They printed all the negatives they found technically sufficient. But because similar pictures were often good, the technicians tended to overprint and flood editors with repetitive pictures. At the same time mediocre frames with key details could easily be discarded because lab staff did not look at shooting scripts, story texts, or captions. Thus in 1947 Hicks created a new film-editing department to manage the number of pictures that the lab printed and that the editors needed to sift through. Reporting to the picture editor, the department was headed by Sargent, previously an assistant to Bourke-White. Sargent started at *Life* in 1936 and (the story goes) identified the photograph of the Fort Peck Dam that made the first cover of *Life* (see figs. 86, 87). She joined the production process at the story conference, where photographers were given their assignments. As films came in, they were turned into contact sheets. Sargent examined these with a magnifying glass and selected frames for enlargement based on the story concept and image quality. Respected by photographers for her keen eye, Sargent looked at more images than any other person on the *Life* staff. Her eyes filled in for those of the editors, decreasing their pictorial load from twenty thousand a week in 1942 to ten thousand in 1948 and seven thousand in 1949.[41] Sargent's office became the unofficial headquarters for *Life* photographers, who came in to watch, and in some cases plead for mercy, as she edited their film.[42] Over the course of her thirty-six-year career, Sargent single-handedly shaped the pool of pictures from which *Life* editors made their final selections.

People like Sargent made *Life* the envy of the publishing world. Magnum Photos may have taken pride in its independence from *Life* (its photographers could theoretically veto editorial assignments they did not like or refuse a sale if they did not agree with the payment or terms), but they had profound respect for its skilled editors. Magnum photographers Cartier-Bresson and Cornell Capa often praised Sargent for her film editing and Thompson for his layouts and picture sense.[43] Magnum's executive editor, John Morris—who himself had learned to edit pictures at *Life* before coming to Magnum—was in particular awe of the scale of *Life*'s editorial team. In late 1953 he calculated that the magazine had more than 250 editorial staff for about fifty staff photographers. Magnum's New York editorial staff of no more than five people had to deal with the film of twenty-three photographers. The photo agency was swimming in material, and it had a difficult time distributing anything that wasn't breaking news.[44] In one memo Morris reminded photographers that Magnum had only "gotten by" because so many rolls of film were edited at *Life*, bypassing Magnum's overworked staff altogether.[45] Far from hampering creativity, *Life*'s editorial process allowed great Magnum photographs to be seen.[46]

26. According to the new calculations in Gervais, *Making of Visual News*, 130–31.
27. Elson, *Time Inc.*, 1:136.
28. "*Life* Is Like This," ca. 1950, box 519, folder 7, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS.
29. Loengard, *Life Photographers*, 10. Sometimes a news story came along and stole the allotted pages, but often the essay simply did not cohere with the rest of the issue. A science editor's story on a veterinary college may appeal to a managing editor in one editorial meeting, but the next week pictures from a horse show could materialize for the "Speaking of Pictures . . ." feature. Now, "you can't have too many horses in one issue," sagely explained Wilson Hicks, "so the science man has to have an astronomy and maybe a plastic glass piece lying around handy too." Hicks, speech to AP, 1940, NYHS.
30. In 1950 Time Inc. began using *Life*'s printing resources and staff to publish photographic books, which were marketed to *Time* and *Life* subscribers. In 1961 the company created a separate division for book publishing, later renamed Time-Life Books, which sold by the millions and proved highly profitable. Elson, *Time Inc.*, 2:480.
31. Freelance photographers, by contrast, were paid by the page, so a rejected story carried financial repercussions.
32. For an insightful analysis of wire and photo agency supply, see Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, *Image Brokers: Visualizing World News in the Age of Digital Circulation* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2016), 47–63. During World War II, *Life*'s images came from the Still Photographic War Pool. Consisting of the Associated Press, Newspictures, International News Photo, and *Life*, the pool supplied photographers to every front of the war and made its photographs accessible to all publications in the United States. Susan Moeler, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 181–83.
33. Facts about *Life*, June 30, 1941, and Some Facts about *Life*, ca. 1942, box 519, folder 5, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS.
34. Scripts, day rates, and exclusive pictures all became industry standards following *Life*.
35. See, for instance, Claude Cookman, "Henri Cartier-Bresson Reinterprets His Career," *History of Photography* 32, no. 1 (2008): 59–73.
36. See Wainwright, *Great American Magazine*, 109, and Loengard, *Life Photographers*, 52, 78, 138, 171–72, 213.
37. Willumson, *W. Eugene Smith*, 157.
38. "Country Doctor," *Life*, September 20, 1948, 115–25; and "Nurse Midwife," *Life*, December 3, 1951, 134–45.
39. The Magnum photographer Werner Bischof wrote to Robert Capa in 1951: "It drives me crazy when David Douglas Duncan can take thirty test films and Horace Bristol develops them that same day, so that the further exposures are sure to be good. I have to wait and after months I receive a message saying that they were perhaps underexposed or that something else has happened." Quoted in Marco Bischof and Tania Samara Kuhn, eds., *Werner Bischof: Backstory* (New York: Aperture, 2016), unpaged.

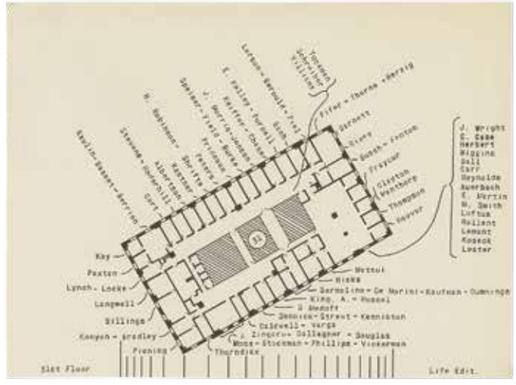


FIG. 96 (LEFT) *Life*'s editorial offices, thirty-first floor, Time-Life Building, New York City, ca. 1940. New-York Historical Society. Time Inc. Archive FIG. 97 (RIGHT) Page from *FYI*, July 27, 1951, showing how a *Life* layout is made. New-York Historical Society. Time Inc. Archive

The Layout Department and the Form of the Magazine

Life's leadership took pride in the spirit of exchange permeating its editorial offices FIG. 96, where department editors, picture researchers, and layout artists worked around large conference tables, putting together stories and issues.[47] The layout department was the primary site of collaboration and creativity at *Life*, known as the "town pump" for the stream of professionals who went in and out of its doors each day. At its helm was the art director, the renowned Charles Tudor from 1936 to 1961, who oversaw the graphic design of the entire magazine.[48] Tudor acted as a creative adviser rather than an executive, since all layout decisions were approved by the managing editor. Thompson took a particularly hands-on approach to story layouts during his tenure in that role, but his relationship with Tudor was synergistic rather than hierarchical or antagonistic. Their race-against-the-clock collaborations became legendary at Time Inc.[49] At other times Tudor and Thompson worked slowly and diligently, staying at the office well into the night to finalize the right cropping and placement of pictures FIG. 97.

Yet *Life*'s art director hardly had the time to work on each story. Much of the work was delegated to the assistant art directors. One oversaw layouts for news and entertainment features (in the 1940s and 1950s the post was occupied by Michael Phillips). The second handled the modern living, culture, and text pieces (from 1941 to 1961 Bernard Quint occupied the job). All three attended editorial meetings and listened as stories were planned, often sketching out layouts before a photographer was even assigned. When pictures were selected, they worked with department editors, the picture editor, and the managing editor to compose layouts. Under them, half a dozen artists took charge of specific layout tasks. Some resized and copied photographs. In the 1940s and 1950s two artists made maps, charts, and diagrams as a team. A couple of artists alternated between designing covers and retouching photographs. One "Buddy" Bloodgood worked the night shift, designing last-minute features. A separate traffic, production, and schedule team scaled the layouts and, above all, got them to Donnelley on time.[50]

Although many of these artists spent their entire careers in *Life*'s layout department, the form of *Life*'s photographic features changed over the years. These transformations reflected the magazine's production process as well as larger shifts in photography and journalism. Its early picture stories were experiments in design. Layouts played with diagonal lines and circles, and images were frequently manipulated to achieve the desired effect FIG. 98. In the first issue a spread from Bourke-White's essay on Montana was organized

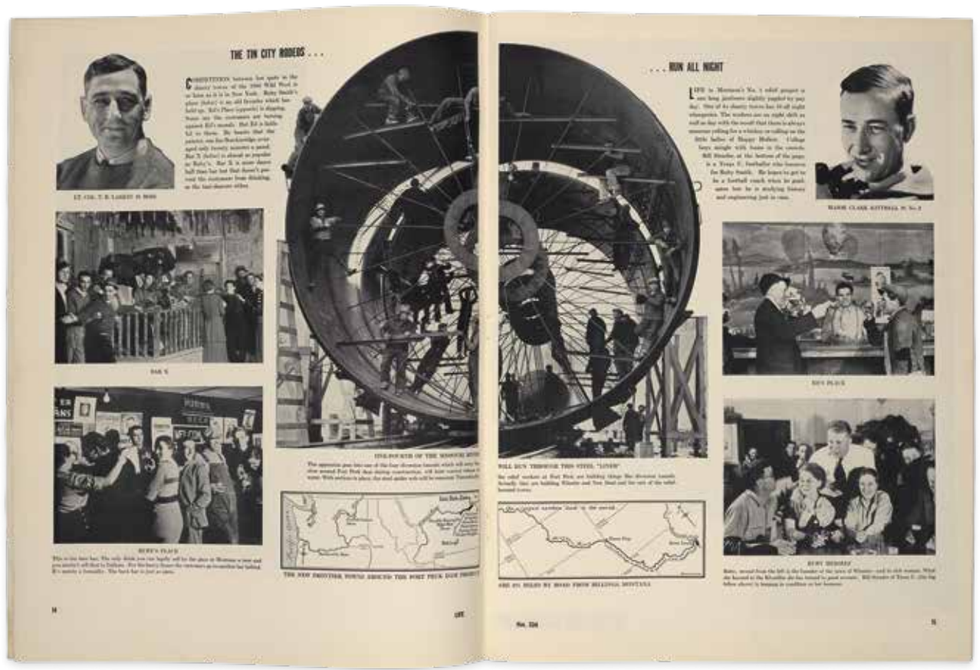


FIG. 98 **Spread from "Franklin Roosevelt Has a Wild West," *Life*, November 23, 1936. Photographs by Margaret Bourke-White**

FIG. 99 **Spread with first page of "Hitler on High," *Life*, December 7, 1936. Photograph by Roger Schall (right page, top)** FIG. 100 **Page from "Adolf Hitler's Rise to Power," *Life*, August 19, 1940. Photograph by Heinrich Hoffmann (top)**

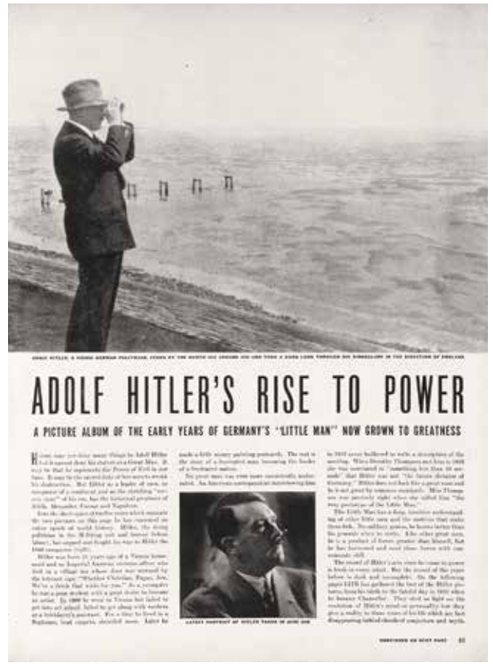
entirely around the circular shape of a steel liner used to divert water in the Fort Peck Dam. The sheer magnitude of the apparatus—operated by dozens—was accentuated through the picture's massive scale and the ample white space around it. Descriptive text wrapped around the photo on the top left and the right. The background was whitewashed so that the geometric patterns popped, captivating the reader with dark concentric circles and the crisscrossing of wiry spokes. A few weeks later, backstage photographs of Noel Howard were cut freely and arranged around the edges of a page spread to suggest the thick, velvety curtains of a theatrical stage. Other features layered photographs in the cramped style of a family photo album or arranged them off-kilter.

Alexey Brodovitch, the famed art director of *Harper's Bazaar*, once explained that a "layout man should be simple with good photographs, [but] he should perform acrobatics when the pictures are bad."[51] Most likely *Life*'s early acrobatics resulted from a combination of the magazine's youthfulness and the relatively limited picture supply available to it. (*Relative* is key here: tens of thousands of available images became hundreds of thousands of images a decade later.) But picture supply aside, shooting well-rounded picture stories was difficult, even for the best-known photojournalists.[52] Page design could create a cohesive idea when the images did not do it alone, but these "arty layouts" bothered photographers and editors alike. No doubt Cartier-Bresson's famous demand that magazine editors not crop any part of his photographs came in part from *Life*'s early tendency to "twist [photographs] into odd shapes [and] cut them up in cookie shapes."[53]

Given the pace of work at *Life*, editors and designers became exhausted from reinventing layout forms each week. Over time layouts became cleaner and more transparent, resulting by the late 1930s in what Hicks called "the inviolability of the rectangle."[54] Such layouts increasingly asked readers to look at the pictures instead of the page design.[55] Tudor explained that the time pressure of putting out a new issue each week necessitated "a simple, geometric format" that would "make it easy for editors to visualize layouts and pix in terms of simple shapes," especially when it came to the news stories at the front of the magazine.[56]

Consider the magazine's first feature on the dictator, "Hitler on High," from December 7, 1936 FIG. 99, compared to the picture biography of Hitler published four years later. In the earlier iteration, the figure of the führer was silhouetted against a stark white sheet, occupying two-thirds of the page. The layout strategy accentuated the photographer's view from below, turning Hitler into the visual opposite of the bird's-eye view of London on the left. True to *Life*'s early, gee-whiz approach to graphic design, this layout drew more attention to camera angles than to the troubling ascent of the Nazi leader. By 1940 such shenanigans disappeared as the magazine moved toward more traditional storytelling. Its feature on Hitler opened with a simple, horizontally oriented picture of the leader at the North Sea, "taking a good look," as the caption said, at Britain through his binoculars FIG. 100. The image bled to the edges, while the three short columns of text below it were interrupted only by a rectangular portrait of Hitler taken not long before the issue's publication. This exact layout became the template for most of *Life*'s features on individual world leaders, providing one source of formal continuity within the magazine.[57]

News features aimed to give readers an exhaustive visual account of the news through what Tudor called the "newspaper handling" of pictures—that is, printing photographs closely with text. For most of *Life*'s existence, each "Big Newspicture" opened with a large, vertically oriented photograph that encapsulated the story, as seen in "A Last Look at Peiping" (January 1949)



40. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952), unpaged. On Cartier-Bresson's adherence to *Life*'s shooting script in China, see Nadya Bair, "The Decisive Network: Producing Henri Cartier-Bresson at Mid-Century," *History of Photography* 40, no. 2 (May 2016): 146–66.
41. Facts about *Life*, 1942, box 519, folder 5, and transcript of speech by Andrew Heiskell, February 5, 1948, box 519, folder 6, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS; and profile on Dorothy Hoover in *FYI*, June 10, 1949, box 345, folder 57, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
42. *FYI*, April 7, 1947, and *FYI*, January 8, 1960, box 389, folder 42, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS; "Film Editor for the World," Editor's Note, *Life*, October 9, 1964, 3; and Wainwright, *Great American Magazine*, 242–43. At pivotal moments in *Life*'s coverage, Sargent also turned into a mobile film-editing operation, traveling to the Tokyo Olympics or the site of the NASA landing to do her work on the spot and thus narrow the time gap between picture selection and publication.
43. Maria Eisner to Henri Cartier-Bresson, January 20, 1949, Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson (hereafter cited as FHCB); and Cornell Capa to Magnum, September 8, 1955, Archive of John G. Morris (hereafter cited as AJGM).
44. John G. Morris to Robert Capa, December 17, 1953; "Where's Magnum?," September 10, 1953, AJGM.
45. "Developing a Magnum System," December 1956, AJGM.
46. On Magnum's relationship with *Life*, see Nadya Bair, *The Decisive Network: Magnum Photos and the Postwar Image Market* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2020).
47. Its group journalism, according to Hicks, was "an editing process in which everybody, even the office boy if he has a good hunch, can and does have a say. No one man sits in a closed and austere sanctum and makes the decisions as to what the magazine shall be each week. Writer, art director, executive, picture editor, researcher, all throw in their thirty cents worth." Hicks, speech to AP, 1940, NYHS.
48. Tudor also designed a special font for *Life* called Tudor Gothic, which made its debut in the February 14, 1955, issue. *FYI*, December 2, 1955, box 402, folder 1, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
49. Elson, *Time Inc.*, 2:418.
50. "*Life* Layout," *FYI*, April 15, 1949, box 531, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS. On July 22, 1959, R. R. Donnelley & Sons opened an additional plant in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, to print *Life* closer to the magazine's editorial offices. By 1963 the Connecticut plant was used to distribute *Life* to the Northeast while a Los Angeles plant distributed *Life* on the West Coast. Boxes 193 and 256, R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company Archive, University of Chicago. With thanks to Vanessa Schwartz.
51. Charles Reynolds, "Focus on Alexey Brodovitch," *Popular Photography*, December 1961, 80, quoted in Kerry William Purcell, *Alexey Brodovitch* (London: Phaidon, 2011), 69.
52. Robert Capa told his Magnum colleagues that too often "they shoot pictures instead of stories." Capa, Magnum Stockholder Report, February 15, 1952, AJGM.

FIG. 101. These pictures beckoned readers to pause for a moment before delving into the details of the story on the subsequent pages FIG. 102. Cartier-Bresson's pictures alternated between group and individual portraits and between stillness and motion, creating a peaceful portrait of the city, just days before the communist revolution.

While adhering to a relatively standard formula in its treatment of news stories, the layout department tried to vary the form of the photo feature essays at the back of the magazine when it had the time to do so. Pages were "opened up," meaning that photographs were framed by ample white space when possible, and pictures were reproduced in very large scale, occupying an entire page or spread.[58] Canonical *Life* photo-essays such as Smith's "Country Doctor" and "Spanish Village" are often praised for their large photographs and minimal text. These were standard design elements, however, applied across the board once the magazine had graduated from its experimental phase. Even Cartier-Bresson came to love *Life*'s layouts over time. "I can't wait to see your lay out," he wrote to Thompson on finishing an assignment in Rome in 1952. "It is always such a wonderful surprise, you know so well how to bring up the significant picture and give an harmony to the whole material."[59]

Life's photographic essays developed a reputation for paying attention to a photographer's individual style, but the stories that attained iconic status within *Life*'s history and its photographers' careers included both news and feature essays. Formally these categories were permeable, which makes sense for a magazine that took great care in its selection and layout of photographs. Were it not for the *Life* logo demarcating a news essay as such, it might be difficult to distinguish one from the other. Werner Bischof's photo-essay on the famine in India appeared in the news section of the May 28, 1951, issue under the headline "U.S. Heeds India's Plea for Food," yet the pictures had very little to do with American intervention FIG. 103. Instead the photographs showed extreme human suffering: the gaunt, strained faces of women; their papery skin, draped over their bones like cloth; and the skeleton-like bodies of men lying on the street, unable to walk. The story was unlike a typical news assignment, handed out and turned over quickly, in that Bischof (a freelance photographer and Magnum member) spent weeks covering the story before it was in the headlines.[60] The quality of his pictures encouraged him to bring them to *Life*, whose editors knew they would have a strong emotional effect—so strong, in fact, that the story suggested that Bischof's images prompted US aid. "Everyone was terribly excited about it," Bischof recalled. MoMA director of photography Edward Steichen even called Bischof to suggest a larger exhibition on the subject. Since then the India photographs have been exhibited countless times around the world.[61] By contrast, the same week's "Photographic Essay" by *Life* staff photographer Hank Walker was very forgettable: a visual analysis of the war that the United States might fight against the Soviet Union and how the American military-industrial complex would fare in comparison to that of the Soviets.

By the 1960s *Life* had become keenly aware of the need to create a visual experience for readers that differed from that offered by other media—one that stayed in their minds while other fleeting images came and went. *Life*'s layout department committed itself to longer features with large, bold photographs. According to Bernard Quint, who replaced Tudor as art director in 1961, such design principles were necessary in a world filled with more images than ever before. "Every day the average individual, I am told, receives about two thousand visual images in terms of magazine, newspaper, TV or even personal photographs."[62] Having once promoted its ability to set the bar for magazine photography by making great editing decisions and getting the best pictures, *Life* now embraced the curatorial responsibility of filtering out picture noise for its readers. Single photographs took over entire page spreads, and color reigned supreme as the magazine printed the hues and glosses not available to television viewers. The "Photographic Essay" label disappeared from *Life*'s table of contents in 1961, replaced by "The Color Spectacle."[63] The magazine arranged for more ambitious and visually stunning image portfolios such as "Monsoon" by Magnum's Brian Brake.[64] Whereas photo-essays used to span eight or ten pages, with four to six images per page spread, by the 1960s such portfolios had double the pages and roughly half the pictures. Perhaps in a nod to the influence of *Playboy* (launched in 1953), colorful vertically oriented centerfolds became especially popular. These spreads asked readers to turn the magazine in their hands to take in images like the aerial view of a stormy

53. Daniel Longwell, quoted in *FYI*, April 15, 1949, box 531, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS.
54. Sugarman notes on Miami interview with Wilson Hicks, June 16, 1956, box 343, folder 2, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
55. Transcript of Sterling McIlhaney radio interview with Bernard Quint, August 23, 1962, box 386, folder 37, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
56. Charlie Tudor biography, April 1949, box 402, folders 1–2, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
57. "Glubb Tells How Our Mid-East Enemies Work," *Life*, April 16, 1956, 145–56, and "Peril for Polish Leader," *Life*, November 26, 1956, 171–86.
58. Charlie Tudor bio, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
59. Henri Cartier-Bresson to Ed Thompson, October 2, 1952, box 310, folder 41, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
60. Capa, Magnum Stockholder Report, AJGM.
61. Marco Bischof and Rene Burri, *Werner Bischof, 1916–1954: His Life and Work* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 103.
62. Transcript of McIlhaney interview with Quint, NYHS.
63. Both "The Color Spectacle" and the "Story of the Week" disappeared by 1963 as "the photographic essay evolved into a general concept embracing all the magazine's photographic series." Gervais, *Making of Visual News*, 148.
64. "Monsoon," *Life*, September 8, 1961, 62–81. Similar layout strategies can be seen in "The Sea," *Life*, December 21, 1962, 16–35, by *Life* staffer Leonard McCombe, and "The U.S. Coast Guard," *Life*, July 7, 1967, 30–47, by *Life*'s George Silk.

FIG. 101 Page from of "A Last Look at Peiping," *Life*, January 3, 1949. Photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson

LIFE

Vol. 26, No. 1 January 3, 1949

A LAST LOOK AT PEIPING

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR LIFE BY HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

By the Yellow Calendar of China, 1948 was a Year of the Rat, and the month of December came in the Eleventh Moon. By any calendar they use, both East and West will probably long remember that in this time—when ice was decking the lakes which mirror the gold roofs of the old Ming palaces—Communist armies drove Peiping's defenders behind the city's high gray walls, and surrounded China's ancient and incomparable northern capital.

As complete isolation drew near, LIFE asked the famous French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson to fly from Burma to Peiping for a last look at a city which is known the world over for its gracious way of life. He spent 10 days there, working when dust storms (*right*) darkened the December skies and when the sheen of frost made clear days brighter. He got away on Dec. 14, on one of the last civilian planes to leave the last airfield open for normal use. In the middle of war he brought out a warming record of a city and a people whose deep equanimity is still a light in dark times, a nostalgic reminder of a China which has lived through many conquests. The Peiping he saw had known the legions of the barbarian Genghis Khan, the architectural triumphs of the Ming Dynasty (LIFE, April 29, 1946) and the extravagant decay of the Manchus in the long reign of a mighty woman, Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi.

Peiping was not a city of heroes; the people expected the Communists would take the city and they preferred that to seeing it damaged by battle. They were not especially craven: everywhere the desire for peace, no matter what the price, was doing almost as much as the Communists to destroy Chiang Kai-shek's China. The people, who put great faith in lore, remembered last week that the Yellow Calendar says, "If it is fine on the day of Tung Chih (Dec. 22) and the sun is bright, in the next year the people will sing peaceful songs." All across north China the day of Tung Chih was fine and bright.

THE FORBIDDEN CITY, a 15th Century group of golden-roofed imperial palaces, finally opened to public in 1924, is nearly obscured by a dust storm. Passing scholar protects nose and mouth with mask.

ON A FAIR MORNING A PEIPING TEAHOUSE IS FILLED WITH THOUGHTFUL MEN WHO BRING THEIR BIRDS AND CRICKETS AND NIBBLE WATERMELON SEEDS

BIRD-WARMER, a covered cage in old man's hand, shields pet on strolls.

WHITE PIGEONS delight an owner. Tail whistles give a musical flight.

GRAY THRUSH goes along for ride as a Peiping newsboy peddles papers.

BIRD MERCHANT offers for sale goose, small thrush perched on twig.

BOXERS, who relax by exercising and never hit anybody, are a common sight in palace courtyards. Here a class practices beside the Temple of Imperial Ancestors. The supple scholar at left demonstrates defense called "All Directions."

OLD FRIENDS meet in Peiping street and visit while clasping hands. The elderly Chinese at the left is a seller of patent medicine who peddles his panaceas from a cloth which is spread out before him on the street, but since he has age, he has respect and dignity.

CITY FINDS SERENITY IN BIRDS AND BOXING

Every Chinese aspires to long life, happiness and—at least until Marx began defying Confucian views—nobility of the mind and spirit. These virtues found their finest expression in the salubrious northern air of Peiping, in the shadows of palaces and temples and China's greatest universities, where the scholar class rose to an intellectual nobility which outlived the emperors. The scholars' traits, often adopted by other men, came to include a deep serenity that still characterizes the daily life of Peiping. It is common to see long-gowned professors flying kites or riding bicycles decorated with bright whirligigs. Professors and clerks practice Chinese boxing, an unbelligerent mixture of queer ballet and shadowboxing which relaxes mind and body. But Peiping's serenity is best seen in the gentlemanly habit of carrying pet birds and singing crickets as companions. Cartier-Bresson wrote about a teahouse. "The fumes of centuries gone float on the rays of the winter sun. One man flies a bird on a string as he would a kite or toy. Another comes in with his bird covered against the cold. One stirs his cricket with a horsehair and the cricket sings. Now the room is full of hip noises of tea sipping and of bird songs and cricket chirps and smiles."

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FIG. 103 (LEFT) Page from "U.S. Heeds India's Plea for Food," *Life*, May 28, 1951. Photograph by Werner Bischof FIG. 104 (RIGHT) Spread from "Monsoon," *Life*, September 8, 1961. Photograph by Brian Brake

sky over the Ganges River in the opening pages of the monsoon essay FIG. 104.[65]

Picture Wizards and Photographic Tricks: *Life*'s Picture Collection

Where was Henry Luce in all of this? Much of the time he was in his office, writing lengthy memos to Time Inc. staff about the communist menace and encouraging editors to take a firm stance on international affairs. He was also cozying up to American officials in Washington, DC, and to world leaders during his trips abroad.[66] But there was another Luce missing from the authoritative biographies, and that is the Luce who loved vintage photographs. "Especially we should get and use more *old* pictures," he wrote to his staff in 1937, proposing that each issue of *Life* include a photo-essay made entirely from historical photographs.[67] It was an ambitious and challenging request, and Luce knew that *Life*'s picture editor—the person responsible for the flow of pictures in and out of the magazine—could not manifest this vision alone. So Luce told the editor to hire two assistants: the first to handle the logistical aspect of dealing with new pictures and the second to serve as "a picture-memory wizard" with an uncanny sense of the pictures in the magazine's library.[68] In just a few years one wizard grew into an entire department: *Life*'s picture bureau. For the duration of the magazine, its staff worked with the *Life* picture collection (about which more below) to produce most of *Life*'s picture biographies and narrative picture sequences. Relying heavily on archival images, these photo-essays were visual history lessons, helping readers to understand the present—and often *Life*'s own editorial stance—with more clarity by seeing a course of events unfold. And quite purposefully, they familiarized readers with historical photographs at a time when such images were not readily accessible.

At *Life* the job of pulling pictures out of drawers was undeniably gendered FIG. 105. The picture bureau never received a byline in the magazine for its meticulous work, but it is fair to estimate that its female staff

65. The sinking of the *Andrea Doria* was one of the first vertical centerfolds, August 6, 1956, though in black-and-white and part of a news story. With thanks to Jason Hill.
66. See Brinkley, *Publisher.*
67. Luce, "Redefinition." While scholars have started to look into *Life*'s ambitious program of promoting American art and bringing art to the masses through color reproductions, the magazine as a site for telling the history of photography is ripe for study.
68. Henry R. Luce, "Confidential: Organization of Editorial Staff of the Picture Magazine," September 8, 1936, box 58, folder 2, Henry R. Luce Papers, MS3014, NYHS.
69. This is a conservative estimate since the majority of *Life*'s photo-essays used pictures from multiple sources. Gervais, *Making of Visual News*, 130–31.
70. They also recorded all of the pictures created by *Life* photographers on assignment once Sargent and the lab selected them.
71. "*Life* Is Like This," ca. 1950, box 519, folder 7, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS.
72. *FYI*, February 17, 1956; *FYI*, June 10, 1949; and Sugarman notes on interview with Natalie Kosek, May 29, 1956, box 356, folder 38, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
73. As *Life* built up what was considered in 1979 the largest indexed collection of photographs in the world, Gallagher and Young created a system that was subsequently studied and

FIG. 105 Detail of a page from *FYI*, March 3, 1947. Photograph by Frank Bauer. New-York Historical Society. Time Inc. Archive

produced nearly two-thirds of the magazine's editorial content, including all the historical photo features.[69] On the technical side, *Life*'s picture bureau checked the rights and credits of incoming images, recorded what came in, paid for pictures (frequently haggling with freelancers and agents over prices), secured rights, cross-indexed images that were not already in *Life*'s files, and returned the ones that didn't belong to *Life*.[70] Yet the heart of the picture bureau's operation centered on picture research. Just as editorial researchers hunted down written facts for editors and writers, the picture bureau staff assembled the widest possible pictorial coverage for all *Life* news stories and department features.[71] Some assignments were relatively concrete—that is, illustrating every bill proposed in Congress—but at other times researchers were challenged to illustrate more abstract concepts, such as "The Glory of Venice" (August 4, 1947) or "The Pursuit of Happiness" (July 12, 1948) FIG. 106.[72] The labor that went into such seemingly straightforward picture sequences is difficult to appreciate. Picture researchers contacted news picture and specialized agencies and searched picture collections at museums, universities, and archives. They might have searched farther afield, cabling correspondents through *Life*'s news bureaus. But their best resources were often in front of them, in the hundreds of file cabinets in Time Inc.'s own picture collection.

The *Life* picture collection, known as the picture morgue until 1951, grew each day, its millions of photographs managed through a system of indexing and cross-referencing developed by its original staff, Margaret Gallagher and Grace Young.[73] A 1947 group photograph of the morgue staff shows Young at bottom right and Gallagher at top center, both sporting restrained pompadours and intense expressions FIG. 107. True to its name, this collection was used primarily by the staff of *Life*, though all Time Inc. publications regularly turned to it for images.[74] And the picture collection's staff (94 percent female) did more than "just" file and refile photographs in drawers and cabinets. The collection's picture librarians were attuned to *Life*'s editorial demands. They kept up with the news, devising new files and picture categories in response to the most urgent issues of the day. When editors were ready to publish a story, a picture file already existed on the topic. This was the kind of efficiency that *Life* prided itself on regularly in its company newsletters and annual reports to advertisers. One tells of how "the girls in the Morgue," watching postwar developments, filed certain photographs of Greece under "greece—POSTWAR—opinion. Then as the news developed, the growing collection was switched to GREECE—POLITICS—RIOTS. When hostilities began, LIFE's editors immediately called for pictures. All ready for them was a comprehensive collection under a new heading, WARS—GREECE—CIVIL."[75]

This kind of background research and ability to illustrate just about any tidbit with photographs is what "put that spark in *Life* [that kept] millions of readers coming back for more."[76] One such feature was the picture biography of great, often evil world leaders, which *Life* published with some regularity.[77] Today one may be underwhelmed by such stories' formulaic layouts, with pictures scaled evenly and arranged in a numbered grid. Readers at the time, though, would have seen them differently.

copied by other institutions, including the *New York Times*, Curtis Publishing, the American Broadcasting Company, and the US Armed Forces. "Where All Good Pictures Go," *FYI*, March 3, 1947, 1–2, and "Wanted: An Explosion Like Tallulah," *FYI*, April 20, 1951, 4, box 517, folder 1, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3; and Robert R. Littman, *Life: The First Decade, 1936–1945* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1980).
74. Thus in 1947, *FYI* reported that "*Life*'s Morgue submits 12,000 pictures a week to Time Inc.—*Time*, *Life* & *Fortune* edit, all advertising and promotion departments, Mary Alves' Courtesy Department and Tom Malby's Photographic Exhibitions being its main customers." "Where All Good Pictures Go," *FYI*.
75. "*Life* Is Like This."
76. "How a *Life* Story Is Put Together," *Lakeside News*, December 1947, 369, box 193, Donnelley Archive, University of Chicago. With thanks to Vanessa Schwartz.
77. In addition to the Hitler features discussed in the text, see also Douglas Reed, "Göring," *Life*, September 11, 1939, 52–57, and on Stalin, Edward Crankshaw, "False God Dies, Crisis Is Born," *Life*, March 16, 1953, 24–29.

FIG. 106 Spread from "The Pursuit of Happiness," *Life*, July 12, 1948. Photographs by Alfred Eisenstaedt

A Life Round Table
on

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Eighteen prominent Americans reinterpret in modern terms a great Jeffersonian Right

It is asserted in the Declaration of Independence that men are endowed with three "unalienable" rights—Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. The first two terms of this remarkable formula are familiar enough; but the third term, the Pursuit of Happiness, is much more difficult to grasp. Not only is it unique with the American system, it has received relatively little attention from political theorists. So the question arises: What does the Third Right mean? Few really know.

But this question is of necessity woven into another. The right was formulated by Thomas Jefferson 172 years ago, and there is a wide gap between Jefferson's age and ours. Can the Third Right really be applied in our time? Do we know how to use it? Are we exercising it in such a way as to build a better society? Or are we, through carelessness or selfishness, pursuing happiness so as to corrupt and undermine the great heritage that Jefferson left us when he helped found our democracy?

There is much evidence that Americans are not doing so well with the Third Right. It is not merely a question of whether we are happy, or think we are happy. The real question is whether we are pursuing happiness in such a way as to promote the fulfillment of our own lives and of our democracy. It is a political question, not merely a personal one. In the present crisis, with the fate of the democratic world dependent upon American leadership, the importance of this question is self-evident. The LIFE Round Table on the Pursuit of Happiness, presented herewith, is an attempt to shed light upon it.

Some happy moments that LIFE's Alfred Eisenstaedt has photographed over a number of years are shown at left. In a casual way they illustrate the great scope of the American pursuit of happiness—ranging from religious dedication and honors on the college campus to beauty contests and touchdowns.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE 95

FIG. 107 **Detail of a page from *FYI*, March 3, 1947. Photograph by Frank Bauer. New-York Historical Society. Time Inc. Archive**

The features went on for pages, giving the impression of a lengthy newsreel of significant moments, each caught in a rare photograph, hunted down especially for *Life*.[78] "Adolf Hitler's Rise to Power" (August 19, 1940), for example, included sixty-eight photographs from sixteen different sources, ranging from intimate views of the führer at home shot by his official photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, to key moments of his public life in the holdings of the Associated Press and Keystone agencies. American readers did not have ready and regular access to such images. *Life* used the essay to show a dictator in the making for decades, relying on the pictures to show glimpses of history readers had missed while revealing the extent to which favorable and exultant images had helped Hitler in his rise. And by bringing together a variety of difficult-to-find photographs, it cultivated readers' interest in photography broadly defined—in portraits and historical pictures as well as the contemporary street and color photographs found in other parts of the magazine.[79]

Life's historical picture stories were also entertaining. This was important, because *Life* always wanted to do more than inform. Sequences showing the passage of time were fun and engrossing to read, pulling readers in. Luce recognized this early on when he told staff: "There is a new trick in the world which pleases people . . . the strip of photographs in a narrative sequence. One-two-three. One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight. We ought to make more use of this than we do."[80] Editors turned to this format many times to illustrate events as they unfolded, from the stages of a person's life to the escapades of its own photographers. In the summer of 1942, for instance, *Life* celebrated George Rodger for undertaking the "longest continuous trek by a war correspondent" in an extensive one-two-three feature titled "75,000 Miles."[81] Leading with a portrait of the handsome young photographer in military uniform below a map of his journey, the story went on for eight continuous pages and included seventy-six photographs and captions highlighting different moments from Rodger's incredible wartime journey through the Cameroons, Equatorial Africa, the Sahara, Transjordan, and Burma.

These "tricks" never got old for Luce, who considered *Life*'s picture histories one of its fundamental contributions to journalism. When *Life* published a

78. The newsreel format employed here was not coincidental. In the 1930s Luce instructed *Life* staff to produce picture essays that would complement the stories and visual material featured in the *March of Time* newsreels. "If the March of Time is well aimed (or if *Life* is)," wrote Luce, "our Feature once a month might well be based on a March of Time sequence. Not necessarily just blow-ups from March of Time but simultaneous future development." Luce, "Redefinition."

79. Significantly, *Life* devoted its thirtieth anniversary double issue (December 23, 1966) to "the history of photography." Its efforts here also open onto the Time-Life books on historical events such as its series on World War II, produced in the 1980s. *Life* was constantly involved in visual history lessons through books and its own pages and in defining what history looks like, even after it ceased publication.

80. Luce, "Redefinition."

81. George Rodger, "75,000 Miles," *Life*, August 10, 1942, 61. Some of the images had already appeared in the magazine as part of its wartime coverage, including "Emir Abdullah," *Life*, December 1, 1941, 67–70, and "Flight from Burma," *Life*, June 8, 1942, 30–32.

September 1962 editorial that urged the White House to block the Soviet arms buildup in Cuba by invoking the Monroe Doctrine, Luce weighed in.[82] The editorial was "very good," he said, but *Life* could have printed "a spread (or three-page) pictorial historical resume of the Monroe Doctrine, in about 12 pictures." Perhaps Luce imagined that a photo of Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders would have upped the ante, reminding readers of how the United States had helped Cuba win independence from Spain in the Spanish-American War. *Life* had the picture collection and staff to produce it, and its "pictorial-historical background to the news" needed to keep setting the magazine apart from other publications, including *Time*.[83] But another way to interpret Luce's comment is that at *Life*, every person needed to think and communicate photographically. In each scenario, they needed to ask, could this idea be turned into a photo-essay, since we have so many pictures and essay templates at our disposal?

Remembering and Forgetting *Life*'s Photo-Essays

Life's historical features attest to the extraordinary heterogeneity and malleability of the word-and-picture genre and the various people who produced it. Yet during the magazine's decline in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a monolithic notion emerged: the photo-essay as an in-depth series of images shot by one photographer that represented *Life*'s signature feature. With advertising dollars redirected toward television, magazines had smaller budgets for hiring photographers and buying images, while the growth of the photojournalism profession after World War II meant that there were many more photographers competing to get into *Life*. Photographers earned a living thanks to industrial and advertising commissions. They also published photo books and showed their work in museums—settings that gained the reputation of being better suited to showing many photographs and communicating a photographer's personal vision.[84]

In this transitional moment MoMA premiered *The Photo Essay*, "an exhibition reviewing the results of four decades of experiment in a new medium." Although the medium *was* still relatively new when the show opened in the spring of 1965, for MoMA's photography curator John Szarkowski, the photo-essay's "golden age" had already come and gone with the 1950s.[85] The previous decade, according to Szarkowski, had seen *Life*'s monopoly on visual storytelling in America as well as efforts to tell very specific, unified narratives using press photographs, such as *The Family of Man*. Szarkowski rejected this collaborative narrative of photography's power and possibility. He defined the medium as an art form that captured one photographer's unique vision, choices, and perspective. Photographs were symbols, not narratives, and they should not be arranged to communicate a curator's or editor's idea. Szarkowski pushed his own understanding of photography in *The Photo Essay*, writing in the museum's press release that the real question to ask in 1965 was whether "the picture should be judged for its intrinsic meaning and not just as one element in a unified statement."[86]

Yet Szarkowski's insistence on authorship made him oddly attuned to the collaborative nature of photo-essay production. In the show each essay label listed a minimum of three contributors: the photographer who took the pictures, the art director who produced the layout, and the editor directing the magazine. *The Photo Essay* itself was a collaboration with numerous advisers, including photo editors John G. Morris (formerly of *Life* and Magnum) and Wilson Hicks and *Life* art director Bernard Quint. These men knew the magazine industry inside out, and they did not get caught up in Szarkowski's battles over the essence of photography. Instead they selected and helped MoMA canonize one hundred photo-essays as outstanding examples of the genre. *Life* stole the show with forty-four separate essays whose iconic status endures today, including Smith's "Country Doctor," "Spanish Village," and "Nurse Midwife" and Cartier-Bresson's "Last Look at Peiping," "People in Russia," and "Everything Goes On in a Roman Piazza."[87]

Life in turn began to use the MoMA exhibition as proof of its ingenuity and leadership in magazine publishing. And, ironically, after decades of promoting its teamwork in memos, company newsletters, and *Life*'s own editorial pages, Time Inc. overlooked MoMA's emphasis on collaboration. Instead it put forward a new idea: before the book publishers and museum curators, *Life* had given photographers a unique platform for expression, and it allowed them to create a medium that had never existed before. When it folded in 1972, *Life* claimed that its staff photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt

82. "What Should Monroe Doctrine Mean? Blockade" (editorial), *Life*, September 21, 1962, 4.

83. Henry R. Luce to George Hunt, September 19, 1962, box 457, folder 44, Time Inc. Subject Files, MS 3009-RG 1, NYHS.

84. Yet photographers often worked for the mass media while publishing books and participating in exhibitions, seeing all three as important platforms for their pictures well before the decline of magazine publishing in the 1970s. See John Raeburn, *A Staggering Revolution: A Cultural History of Thirties Photography* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Jason E. Hill, *Artist as Reporter: Weegee, Ad Reinhardt, and the PM News Picture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); and Bair, *Decisive Network*.

85. Mary Panzer, *Things as They Are: Photojournalism in Context since 1955* (New York: World Press Photo, 2005), 8.

86. Museum of Modern Art, news release no. 23, March 16, 1965, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/3450/releases/MOMA_1965_0026_23.pdf.

87. *The Photo Essay* checklist, March 16–May 16, 1965, Museum of Modern Art, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/3450/releases/MOMA_1965_0026_23.pdf.

“pioneered the development of what the Museum of Modern Art in 1965 presented as a distinct art form: The Photo Essay.”[88] *Life*’s former employees issued a host of commemorative books that continued to pare down the magazine’s thousands of picture stories into a manageable canon. The language of *Life*’s “best,” “greatest,” and “most important” photo-essays became institutionalized at this time, with Time Inc. leaning heavily on the dozen or so picture stories commonly known today.

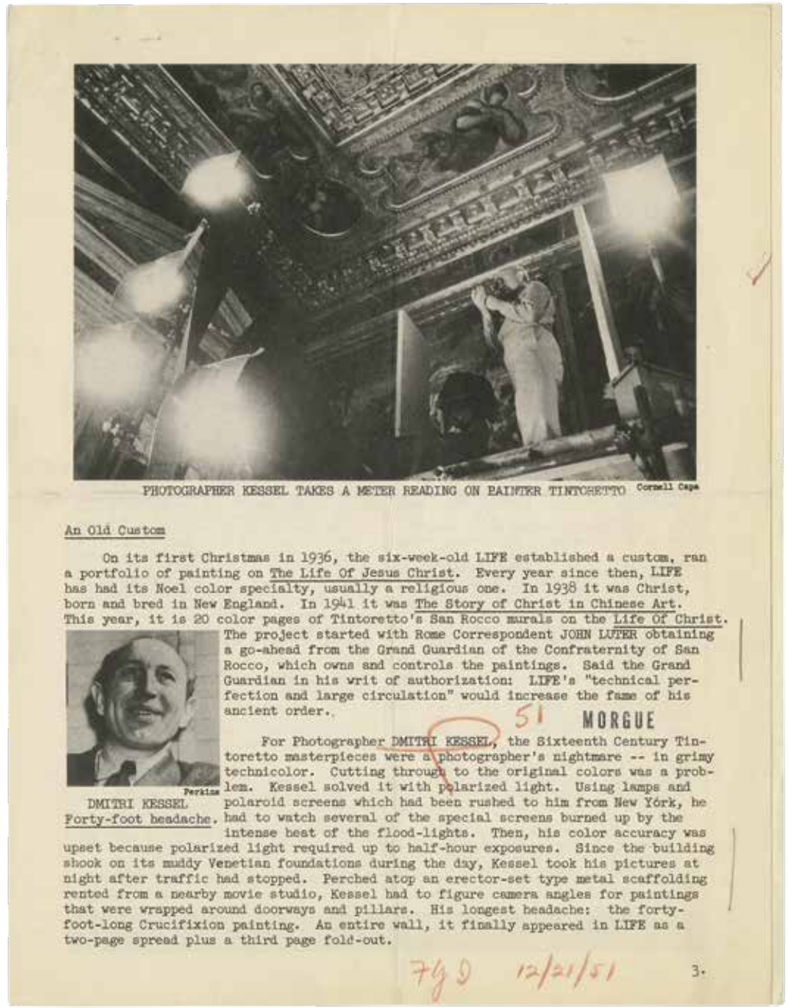
Before its demise, *Life* had measured its “important” stories in terms of reception, judged from issues sold and letters received from readers. Fans of Smith and Cartier-Bresson might be disheartened to learn that in 1954 no picture essay received more applause from readers than a color feature on the world’s most valuable stamps: photographed by god-knows-who and laid out in the form of a stamp album that, if it actually existed, would have been worth $1 million. The article included a tantalizing, three-page foldout of old envelopes with the stamps still affixed (which increased the stamps’ value), eliciting from readers “delight with requests for evaluations of stamps in their possession,” noted *Life*’s letters department.[89] (Surprised? “You just don’t know what stamps can do to a man,” another page explained.)

Photo-essays resulting from technical feats of photography and printing also gained ample attention in their day, both from readers and from *Life*’s editorial board. Each Christmas readers were floored by *Life*’s multipage color reproductions of in situ artworks from around the world. Beginning in 1947 such features were called “Pictorial Essays” in *Life*’s table of contents—a category that included color stories on art, history, and culture. Appearing at the back of the magazine and spanning anywhere from twelve to twenty pages, these features required thorough editorial research and technical precision on the part of the photographer. Before leaving for Italy to photograph Tintoretto’s San Rocco murals on the Life of Christ for the December 24, 1951, issue FIG. 108, staff photographer Dmitri Kessel received a complete layout and cover to use as his shooting script. The challenge was execution rather than interpretation: how to deliver twenty pages of color despite the dirt-caked walls and bad lighting.[90] Thompson and other editors praised Kessel for his tirelessness and ingenuity in producing *Life*’s most ambitious pictorial essays,

FIG. 108 **Cover of *Life*, December 24, 1951. Photograph by Dmitri Kessel**

which could take months to shoot FIG. 109.[91] In print, pictorial essays by Kessel and others also displayed the unmatched color-printing capabilities of Donnelley, which had capitalized on innovations in ink and paper, developing a high-speed rotary press that could print and instantly dry color ink on both sides of a coated sheet of paper. This technology made *Life* the first affordable weekly in the 1930s, and it also enabled the magazine’s ambitious and highly acclaimed program of bringing color reproductions of art to its readers.[92]

The closure of *Life* has often been called the end of the golden era of photojournalism and the death of the photo-essay. Yet in retrospect it is remarkable that *Life* and its photo-essays were produced for quite so long. Between 1936 and 1972 countless magazines launched by experienced editors and publishers came on the market and quickly folded (think, for instance, of the collaboration between art directors Frank Zachary and Alexey Brodovitch on *Portfolio*). Producing photo-essays that appealed to a mass readership, week in and week out, was incredibly difficult work. It required an army of


PHOTOGRAPHER KESSEL TAKES A METER READING ON PAINTER TINTORETTO Cornell Capa

An Old Custom

On its first Christmas in 1936, the six-week-old LIFE established a custom, ran a portfolio of painting on The Life Of Jesus Christ. Every year since then, LIFE has had its Noel color specialty, usually a religious one. In 1938 it was Christ, born and bred in New England. In 1941 it was The Story of Christ in Chinese Art. This year, it is 20 color pages of Tintoretto's San Rocco murals on the Life Of Christ.

Perkins

DMITRI KESSEL
Forty-foot headache.

The project started with Rome Correspondent JOHN LUTER obtaining a go-ahead from the Grand Guardian of the Confraternity of San Rocco, which owns and controls the paintings. Said the Grand Guardian in his writ of authorization: LIFE's "technical perfection and large circulation" would increase the fame of his ancient order.

51 MORGUE

For Photographer DMITRI KESSEL, the Sixteenth Century Tintoretto masterpieces were a photographer's nightmare -- in grimy technicolor. Cutting through to the original colors was a problem. Kessel solved it with polarized light. Using lamps and polaroid screens which had been rushed to him from New York, he had to watch several of the special screens burned up by the intense heat of the flood-lights. Then, his color accuracy was upset because polarized light required up to half-hour exposures. Since the building shook on its muddy Venetian foundations during the day, Kessel took his pictures at night after traffic had stopped. Perched atop an erector-set type metal scaffolding rented from a nearby movie studio, Kessel had to figure camera angles for paintings that were wrapped around doorways and pillars. His longest headache: the forty-foot-long Crucifixion painting. An entire wall, it finally appeared in LIFE as a two-page spread plus a third page fold-out.

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FIG. 109 **Page from *FYI*, December 21, 1951. Photographs by Cornell Capa (top) and Hy Peskin (bottom). New-York Historical Society. Time Inc. Archive**

people to prevent the template from becoming stale—many more people than even fit in Time-Life’s editorial offices. “Listed on *Life*’s masthead are the names of 250 members of the editorial staff,” noted a 1963 report by Donnelley. “Yet . . . the process by which the words and pictures . . . become printed pages in your copy of *Life* involves thousands of people beyond the masthead. From darkroom technician to handler in the bindery, all are dedicated to reproducing and routing every week, in a matter of days, 7,200,000 copies of the magazine.”[93] The significance of *Life*’s photo-essays extended well beyond the pictures, layouts, and people mentioned in this essay. With this exhibition and publication about *Life* magazine comes a new challenge to continue digging into the magazine’s history: to deal more fully with the massive number of pages and images it has left behind, to learn about the people who occupied its offices, and to better understand its influence on a host of industries and professions in magazine publishing.

88. “Highlights from *Life* Magazine,” December 7, 1972, box 519, folder 7, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS; and David Scherman, ed., *The Best of Life* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1973).
89. “*Life*’s Top Stories,” box 518, folder 15, Time Inc. Reference Files, MS 3009-RG 3, NYHS.
90. The Story behind the Stories in *Life*, no. 4856 (December 24, 1951), and The Story behind the Stories in *Life*, no. 6339 (December 28, 1953), box 355, folder 5, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
91. Edward Thompson to Dmitri Kessel, September 21, 1951, box 355, folder 5, Time Inc. Bio Files, MS 3009-RG 2, NYHS.
92. See Melissa Renn, “*Life* in Color: *Life* Magazine and the Color Reproduction of Works of Art,” in *Bright Modernity: Color, Commerce, and Consumer Culture*, ed. Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Uwe Spiekermann (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 167–226, and Renn, “Within Their Walls: *Life* Magazine’s ‘Illuminations,’” *Archives of American Art Journal* 53, no. 1–2 (Spring 2014): 30–51.
93. “The Making of *Life*—a production and distribution story unique in publishing” (1963), box 256, Donnelley Archive, University of Chicago. With thanks to Vanessa Schwartz.