

THAT DREAD CLICHÉ

A hackneyed photograph can strike more fear in a travel editor's heart than a blown deadline. The following experts have strong opinions on what NOT to bring back:

IRWIN GLUSKER, art director, *Gourmet*: "The triumphant chef—arms folded, toque on his head—behind a groaning board of fish and produce. This always looks like a Dutch still life with a chef's hat."

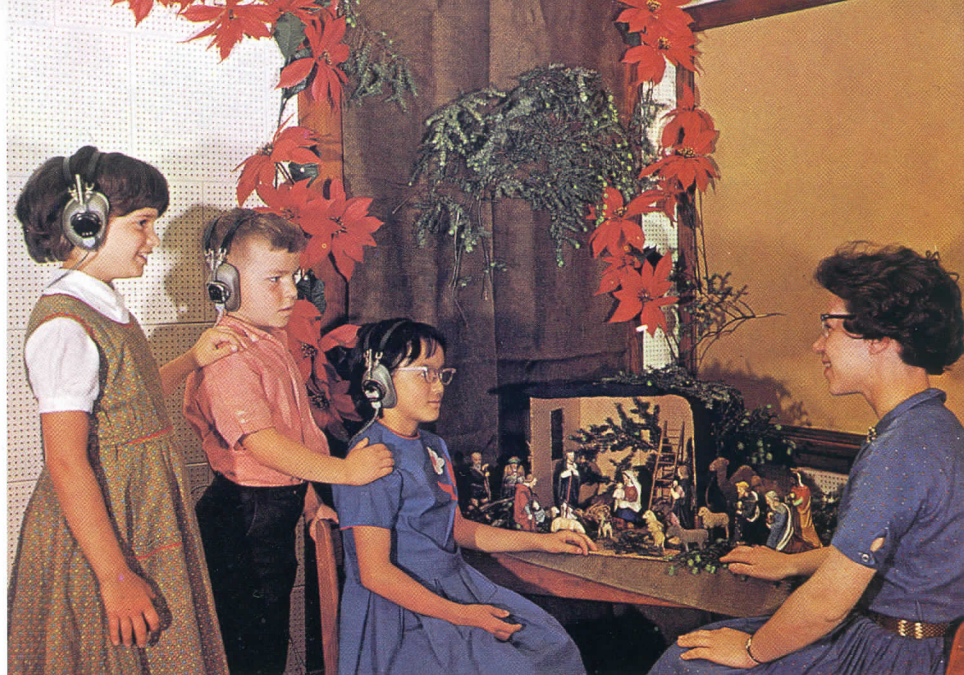
URSULA MAHONEY, photo editor, *New York Times* travel section: "A well-groomed couple in perfect shape, lying on a beach."

GARY WALTHER, editor, *Departures*: "A Caribbean shot of a smiling waiter holding a silver tray full of seafood—flown in from somewhere else."

BILL McCOY, former editor, *Northwest Airlines Passages*: "I almost never want to see a sunset—it sets everywhere. This usually betrays a failure of the imagination."

PAMELA FIORI, editorial director, *American Express Publishing*: "Happy peasants in tattered clothes. Those photos never do anyone any good, particularly the people pictured."

KATHLEEN KLETCH, photography director, *Condé Nast Traveler*: "An orange sunset over water, with a palm tree. Even the great photographers can fall for that one."



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Postcard Prep

Neal Slavin's first job as a photographer, in 1964, was shooting postcards for a Long Island company called Eston Col-orcraft, which specialized in churches and hospitals. He re-alizes how remarkably formative that year on the road was:

The South was my territory, and my obligation was to shoot one church a day, then solicit new business. I lived and breathed the job. I even spent my honeymoon shooting postcards.

It was great for my craft. I remember the head of the company swearing me to secrecy before revealing his techniques. Christmas was our busiest time, and he would send me out with two huge baby blue vinyl suitcases, one full of No. 2 flashbulbs and the other filled with red plastic poinsettias. Being a Jewish kid from Brooklyn, what did I know about poinsettias? But I'd go into a little church in North Carolina and look around and say, hmm, we need a little red here and a little red there, red being a big color in postcards. And I'd place my red plastic poinsettias all around the altar, take the picture, then pack them up and leave.

Wherever I went, I took my Leica 3C loaded with

black-and-white film. I had read a magazine story that year on Walker Evans in which he said that connecting with a subject wasn't so much a matter of what you *feel* as what you can't *unfeel*. That really hit home, because most of the time I'd pass something and be miles down the road before I'd realize that I couldn't get it out of my mind. I'd say, Wait, I can't unfeel it, and I'd go back to take the picture. The civil rights movement was at its peak then, and the South was a pretty exciting, and scary, place to be. On my own, I made pictures that I hoped would show the world what southern blacks were up against.

Well, you work very hard and you think you're going one way, right? But other things are taking place in your subconscious, a learning process that you're not even aware of. I kept working in black and white through the 1960s, then in 1972, I got a grant to exper-

iment with color materials. And as I started to work in color, the Walker Evans tradition began to fade and the postcard work started to resurface in my mind. My colors turned chromatic, the bright, primary reds and blues of postcards. The experience of that year on the road gushed out of me as if it had been waiting all that time to be expressed.

Now I know just how important that work was in shaping my whole philosophy of color. And yet that wasn't the only way the experience affected me. I met some extraordinary people that year—convents of nuns who'd taken vows of silence, schools of deaf children, old black men in church parking lots. It planted the seed for all the pictures of groups I've done since then. In 1964, I was out there meeting America.

Neal Slavin recently formed his own production company, Slavin/Schaffer Films.

Above right: Neal Slavin supplied the red plastic poinsettias for his 1964 postcard portrait of deaf children. Below: The old sunset shot is wearing thin.



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