

24 HOURS IN AMERICA

Documenting moments across the country, large and small, quiet and indelible.

When this project was being conceived, a storm named Florence did not exist. It had not formed far off in the Atlantic yet, and it had not swirled toward North Carolina, where it would unload more than 30 inches of rain and remind us again of a simple, elemental truth: The weather contains us, not the other way around.

Florence made landfall in Wilmington, N.C., about 25 miles from the Elwell Ferry. The boat, driven by Pat Soesbee and Betty Rose Dolce, crosses the Cape Fear River. As we started our research, a North Carolina official said they may be kin. And indeed they are, cousins who take people from one riverbank to the next. Two cars max, four minutes each way, three if the water is on your side.

These women fit squarely with one of the aims of this project: to tell the untold stories of people throughout the United States. People living lives of unannounced grace and dignity.

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EVERGLADES CITY, FLORIDA, 7:00 A.M.

Photographs by Scott McIntyre for The New York Times

When John Stark was a little boy, his father brought him to this hardscrabble village at the mouth of the Barron River, to fish. They came all the way from San Antonio, to stand at the base of the bridge that leads to Chokoloskee Island, here at the top of the Ten Thousand Islands, at the edge of the Everglades, at the back of beyond.

The water ran past them, fast on the tide into the bay, off toward mangroves and channels in every direction, vast and mysterious, down to the Gulf of Mexico under pinwheeling terns. Stark, the little boy, stared out at all of this, a child of the desert in dank, humid air, and then he looked up at his father and said that when he grew up he was going to play professional soccer in Italy, and then he was going to come back to Florida and be a fishing guide.

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PICKENS, WEST VIRGINIA, 8:40 A.M.

Photographs by Luke Sharrett for The New York Times

Christine Sneberger Long got to school later than she wanted to. For most of her dewy morning drive, she had been stuck between coal trucks, crawling along a narrow and winding Route 46 after leaving her home in Mill Creek, W.Va.

She was headed to Pickens School, where she is the principal, health teacher and math teacher, and it's a much longer commute — about an hour each way — than she used to make as a student here.

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BLADEN COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, 9:52 A.M.

Photographs by Travis Dove for The New York Times

“Lately the talk is all about the storm,” said Pat Soesbee, 65, a member of the Lumbee Indian tribe, who with her cousin Betty Rose Dolce, runs the Elwell Ferry on the Lower Cape Fear River in southeastern North Carolina.

It was the Sunday before Hurricane Florence made landfall, and though the storm did not hit until Thursday, it was then a Category 4 headed straight for nearby Wilmington. (Ferry service was suspended ahead of the storm, and would remain so for at least four weeks.)

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BOULDER CITY, NEVADA, 10:02 A.M.

Photographs by Bridget Bennett for The New York Times

On a late September morning, Jason Takeshita, 43, a hydroelectric mechanic, was traversing the top of Hoover Dam under a scorching sun.

Starting from the Nevada side of the Colorado River, not far from a bronze monument honoring 96 men who died building the dam — “They died to make the desert bloom,” a plaque reads — Mr. Takeshita walked west to east.

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PHILIPSBURG, MONTANA, 11:57 A.M.

Photographs by Jim Wilson/The New York Times

Lacie DeMers got home from a three-day rodeo at nearly midnight, driving one of four big rigs carrying the bucking horses and bulls back to the ranch.

There were 89 broncs brought to the Montana Junior Rodeo Association Finals — a herd of miniature horses and ponies to fit the sizes of the kids trying to hold onto them for eight seconds. In the dark, Ms. DeMers, 37, and a few helpers offloaded them into the corrals and made sure they were fed and watered.

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PROCTOR, ARKANSAS, 12:43 P.M.

Photographs by Eugene Richards for The New York Times

The Rev. J.L. Whitfield, 69, was baptized in the 15-mile bayou that runs behind True Vine Missionary Baptist Church in 1964, but it took him 35 years to get back to this place where he was first made in the spirit. In the intervening time, he came of age, worked as a contractor, had daughters and sons, built two churches with his own hands and led them, and saw his sons join the ministry and lead their own congregations in other Delta towns.

His return to his spiritual birthplace was not a matter of if, but rather when — 18 years ago this month. Like the sanctuaries and daughters and sons and grandchildren, this church has been built up and steadied, under Pastor Whitfield's care ever since.

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GARY, INDIANA, 1:37 P.M.

Photographs by Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

In a political climate in which the working class is front and center, people like Corey Lackey are often overlooked. Despite living in a Rust Belt city, where unemployment can be high, he has a steady job. His community has seen better days, but he isn't, as pundits might put it, "disaffected."

Mr. Lackey, 32, a slight guy who rocks a low fade and full beard, owns Lackey's Barber Shop here, where he is also the head barber. It's the kind of business that does well in any economy.

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LITTLETON, MAINE, 2:36 P.M.

Photographs by Tristan Spinski for The New York Times

The sacred fire had been burning since long before dawn. Nearly 3 in the afternoon and Clarissa Sabattis, 41, chief of the Houlton Band of the Maliseet Indians was finally able to catch a breath by the Meduxnekeag River. A beautiful spot, where the light, so relentless all day, had softened to amber.

Tall pines line the riverbank. New Brunswick is just a few miles east. Here, the river meanders slowly. Two teenagers were splashing around. Ms. Sabattis called out to them by name and pointed to an empty water bottle and a Mountain Dew can lying in the mud.

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LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 3:21 P.M.

Photographs by Jenna Schoenefeld for The New York Times

Yasu Tanida thrust his hands into the pockets of his hoodie and shivered for effect. It was a sunny 74 degrees on the Paramount Pictures lot, but inside Stage 20, where Mr. Tanida was working on a Wednesday afternoon in mid-September, the air was almost arctic.

Stage 20 contains sets for “This Is Us,” and Mr. Tanida, 38, is the cinematographer, which means he oversees the camera and lighting departments. His artistic and technical decisions on matters like brightness and shooting angles help convey the emotion for which the show is known. In television, directors come and go. But the cinematographer works on every episode, ensuring a seamless look.

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HOMEWOOD, ALABAMA, 4:36 P.M.

Photographs by Melissa Golden for The New York Times

Steve Sills hustled the referees out through the tunnel into the pouring rain and rumbling skies to the football field where his seventh grade team was waiting. Their pads were bigger than their shoulders, and their helmets, too large, made them look like life-size bobblehead dolls.

Do not tell Mr. Sills that middle-school football does not matter: It does desperately to this group of Homewood Patriots. They have never won a game, and, on a recent Monday, for the first time in two seasons, the scoreboard was on their side, 14 to 6.

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PITTS, GEORGIA, 5:30 P.M.

Photographs by Melissa Golden for The New York Times

At just about the time a lot of people were looking at the office clock and wondering what to do about dinner, Clark Roundtree was climbing into the cab of a tractor.

There were peanuts to dig.

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DOUGLAS, ARIZONA, 6:10 P.M.

Photographs by Caitlin O'Hara for The New York Times

For Ida Ann Pedregó, the owner of Illusions Boutique here, closing time means the usual tidying up of the aisles. She'll calm the ruffled organza of the quinceañera dresses she sells, sorting them according to color, size and price. She'll retrieve the ball gowns she had hung on the awning in the morning, like talismans.

One mid-September day, it was those gowns, in red and black polyester, that had lured three generations of women inside. The day before had been rough — “not a single sale,” Ms. Pedregó said, clutching her manicured hands against her chest.

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MASHANTUCKET, CONNECTICUT, 7:11 P.M.

Photographs by Benjamin Norman for The New York Times

Friday before the nighttime crowds is one of the quieter times inside a casino. The blink and boink of the slot machines is at a tolerable decibel level. There's little wait at the bar to get a cocktail and not many drinkers.

It's the countdown to the weekend, the unexciting hours that must pass before people make a night of it here.

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SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, 8:11 P.M.

Photographs by James Roh for The New York Times

"Good," Willy Chun said, about the mooncake he was eating. It was perhaps just the 15th word he had uttered during a Bing Kong Tong meeting he was overseeing in September. Mr. Chun is, to put it mildly, a reticent leader. A man his wife, Tami, 71, says can walk around the nearby Fashion Place Mall for a whole hour without saying a word.

She knows this because that's what they do for exercise. But he is kind, she said, and he never loses his temper.

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PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND, 9:18 P.M.

Photographs by Kayana Szymczak for The New York Times

Snow.

That is what Isabel Kayembe remembers being excited about during her first few days in the United States. She had never seen snow

before.

“When we woke up, the neighborhood was white, and we were like, ‘What is this?’ Ms. Kayembe, 42, said. “We tried to go outside, but it was very cold.”

She had fled the civil war in her native Angola in 1999 after her village had been attacked. She and her son ended up in a refugee camp in nearby Namibia, where they lived for nearly 17 years.

For almost a decade, Ms. Kayembe worked with Africare, a nonprofit organization that provided social services to refugees in the camp. In 2011, her family was chosen for resettlement, and four years later their application was finally approved.

“Although the process was taking so long,” she said, “we still had that hope that one day we are going to leave the camp.”

By the time she reached chilly Rhode Island in January 2015, she had gone through her fair share of hardships. New challenges emerged, however, less violent but still daunting: finding an apartment, paying hospital bills and getting around.

Now, as a case manager at Refugee Dream Center, a post-resettlement refugee agency in Providence, she is helping others overcome those same obstacles.

She started out as a volunteer, devoting her Saturdays to the agency while working at a meat factory on weekdays. “When I came, I struggled a lot,” Ms. Kayembe said. “I saw that I needed to help other people because I was so passionate about the job I was doing in the camp.”

Ms. Kayembe is deeply involved in her clients’ lives, and she is hardly ever at her desk. She spends most of her workdays helping newcomers with interpretation, job placement or counseling.

Her favorite part of the job is conducting home visits. “If you stay for a few hours, or even a few minutes, you can sense: This is the problem,” she said. “Even if they don’t tell you, you can just see how people behave.”

In the spring, Ms. Kayembe started studying at the Community College of Rhode Island. She hasn’t chosen a major yet. But, she said, social work will always be a part of her life.

— *Sara Aridi*

TULSA, OKLAHOMA, 10:02 P.M.

Photographs by Joseph Rushmore for The New York Times

As the evening wound down in Stutts House of Barbeque and the last few customers shuffled out with chopped brisket and hot links, Almead Stutts was thinking about closing up. There were sauce bottles to empty and wash. Tables to wipe and floors to mop. And there was the pit — the ancient, yawning smoke-stained pit that always needs her attention.

The pit’s walls are two feet thick, sloping, built out of firebricks. Half of it is in the restaurant, accessible through a creaky door in the kitchen, and half of it hangs outside like the kitchen’s belly.

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NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, 11:02 P.M.

Photographs by Eugene Richards for The New York Times

Troy Roberts, 66, of Bald Knob, Ark., was 38 years old when he started having heart attacks, his wife, Debbie, said. He was a manager at a

lunch meat manufacturing company and was active in most every way, and played a range of sports.

Not very far beneath the surface, though, were warning signs. There were nine children on his mother's side of the family; all but one of his mother's siblings died of heart disease. One of Troy's uncles died at 36. There were also half-cousins who died after heart attacks.

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PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA, 12:56 A.M.

Photographs by Eugene Richards for The New York Times

Christa Cassano has a bit of wanderlust. She has traveled the country and taken odd jobs while working on her craft, which includes sculpture, painting and comic book art. She grew up in Spokane, Wash., and a scholarship to Cooper Union brought her to New York in the 1990s.

In Philadelphia, where she currently lives, Ms. Cassano spends her days working at a hotel, cleaning rooms and administering to guests. But this job will be short-lived. "I've already told them I need to switch to something that is less grueling." She also offered a slight confession: "I get bored easily."

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WATFORD CITY, NORTH DAKOTA, 1:41 A.M.

Photographs by Jim Wilson for The New York Times

The workday doesn't start for Ric King until night falls on the Bakken, when flickering gas flares transform the rugged landscape into a red-hued, earthbound approximation of Mars.

Mr. King, a breezy, talkative 31-year-old, has spent almost a third of his life working in the oil fields of western North Dakota, but he doesn't consider this place home. That is a few hundred miles away in southern Wyoming, where he grew up and where his wife and 2-year-old daughter live.

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WICHITA, KANSAS, 2:02 A.M.

Photographs by Christopher Smith for The New York Times

She grew up wanting to fly airplanes, and now she fixes them for a living.

During the dark, early morning hours on a recent Saturday, in an immense hangar full of ailing planes, Sarah Witt crouched beneath a Cessna CJ4 jet and explained the troubleshooting she had been doing all night.

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PORTLAND, OREGON, 3:19 A.M.

Photographs by Moriah Ratner for The New York Times

By the time Molly Palmer removed her headset and hung up the phone in the early hours of a Monday morning, she had spoken with seven

people. The final call of the night had lasted two hours, and it had left her feeling good, like she had made a difference in someone's life.

"I was talking to a gal who was also a social justice worker, and she was experiencing a crisis," Ms. Palmer said. "We talked about post-traumatic growth as a concept — the idea of coming through trauma stronger — not just PTSD."

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MOUNT VERNON, NEW YORK, 4:18 A.M.

Photographs by Benjamin Norman for The New York Times

Achingly early on Saturdays, well before a streak of light blue much less the sun itself has appeared in the sky, Dewayne Satchell makes the rounds inside the Royal Caribbean Bakery plant, where he is the operations manager.

Jamaican staples such as hard dough bread, coco bread, jackass corn coconut biscuits, sugar buns and black fruit cakes, among other baked goods, are made here and distributed widely across New York City. Many are bound for the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn, which have particularly large Caribbean populations, and many end up, Mr. Satchell said, in "mom-and-pop stores that serve the community," bringing a taste of home to those far from home. Being a part of making that happen, he said, "it gives you a good feeling."

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HIDALGO COUNTY, TEXAS, 5:37 A.M.

Photographs by Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

At nearly 1,800 miles, the Rio Grande is one of the longest rivers in the United States, and 316 miles of the waterway fall under the purview of the United States Border Patrol's Rio Grande Valley Sector.

Much of it, said Robert Rodriguez, a supervisory border patrol agent, is "very inhospitable" land. "The terrain is just very unforgiving."

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CHINCOTEAGUE ISLAND, VIRGINIA, 6:39 A.M.

Photographs by Julia Rendleman for The New York Times

The day often has yet to break when Emarie Ayala pulls out of her driveway in the Dodge Journey. Her home, in the small city of Fruitland, Md. ("if you blink, you're out of it"), is a 44-mile drive from the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on the Virginia coast, where her work as a wildlife biologist can start as early as 5:30 a.m.

"Most of the time, as you're driving to Chincoteague, you get the sunrise," Ms. Ayala, 36, said. "A little bit of sunrise on your way to work is like, 'Ah, this is going to be a good day.'" She also loves watching the waves crash.

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Editor: Ethan Hauser

Photo editor: Beth Flynn

Produced by: Gray Beltran and Anya Strzemien

Special projects: Talya Minsberg and Heather Phillips

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