

Johnnie Walker
Director's Treatment
Spot: This Land



After we spoke a couple days ago I came away inspired by this chance to create something that influences people for real. So, I started along the process of crafting a shot list of what we'll see and feel. A script of places and people and their stories based on your scripted moments. Things started out okay as usual, but as I furthered along I realized I was merely adding empty envelopes of ideas. Nothing that did the lyrics of your inspiration justice. Even if the image appeared in my head and I loved it, what was it really about? What's the point of planning shots of people, when I don't know who they are?

It occurred to me that the next step for all of us isn't about concepting or shot-listing, but about discovering and learning. We are going to tell a story about a country and type of people who inspire and motivate, so that needs to be born from truth. Before we tell a story about America I want to be inspired by it first.

So, the song is the brief, and the song is about America and the people who are inside, so we need to go to visit each side of the polarity and find the common threads. The people who inspire and rise up. The places that make us marvel and feel at home. There's a lot to discover and a lot to feel. We need that first. America surely needs it from our film, so lets create our own story about America for real. Then recount it spectacularly.

This idea strikes so many different inspirations and emotional notes. And I feel like we could shoot and edit this to accomplish different results, produce different meanings. But overall I want this to be positive and to inspire people in an authentic, personal and discovering way. The approach I would least prefer would be to build an image library then have our VO move over it. That feels false to me. We would essentially be filming 'postcards' of people and places. That doesn't begin to touch what I feel is so strong

about your idea. Which is the people. Their lives. What they've been through, won, lost, regained, or simply existed and been taught the right things.

I want us to show this country as it actually is – full of differences, tension, opportunity, beauty, art, inspiration. But let's show how that tension is positive, how it fuels change. And reveal how all of the ways we're different as people is a source of strength. I want people to watch this film and know beyond any doubt these people are America. And America is moving forward with them at the helm.

Their places are also an equal part of their story. We need to show all ends, all walks. The beauty and the normal. Within each place the viewer needs to discover the differences and the commonalities to create the real unity in our minds towards one positive movement forward.

APPROACH

Here are my next steps at this point. We treat this like a film. Not a documentary by any stretch. But rather research and casting and location scouting ahead of production. Finding our motivation. The coming Monday I'll start researching people who've led interesting, challenging lives from selected sides of the country. I'll zero in places I feel will create the tapestry we're after. That fit the lyrics.

The people could come from the art / music / business or sports communities. They could be a CEO, athlete, philanthropist, farmer, bartender, laborer, small business owner, whatever. I'll find one or two people each, in five cities in five states. Then I'll visit them, with a producer, and we'll integrate ourselves into their lives, into their place in the country. Instead of just trying to come up with shots we think reflect polarity – challenge – triumph –adversity - acceptance – let's find people who live it.

Maybe they've failed or been hurt by the deep divisions they've encountered. Let's find out. Maybe they've thrived because of what they've been through. Let's find that out too. I want to capture footage from their lives seen through the prisms of: community, business, the arts, family, sports, education, love, hard work and beauty. By beauty I mean nature, the things that keep us romantic and curious.

Right now, I'm considering Baltimore/Washington, New York, New Orleans, Texas, Ohio or PA(rust belt, Youngstown etc.) and somewhere in the PNW. Maybe Montana for its simplicity and beauty to contrast the complexity of the rest of the places.

These are malleable and lets discuss. Mike, your comment about watching out to be careful to not romance poverty is bang on. We aren't glorifying problems, we are profiling the people who stand out from them. Whether they rise above and fix or avoid them. The country and her people are being discovered here, not its issues.

PRODUCTION

In each city I'll spend a couple days with these people - learn, we'll go to their work, hear their stories, sit down at their children's t-ball game, at a bar b que with friends and family. I'll shoot some footage while we're with them - but it won't be the principle photography we use by any stretch. This research period will give us our people, stories and locations. We'll find out firsthand the difficulties, joys or hardships they've faced and

how they've grown and overcome and changed because of them. We want viewers to derive who these people are by experiencing their lives and to accept them because of their differences - not in spite of them.

This week or so will be our casting session. Our location scout. We write the script and assign people to the visuals you guys created last week. While we're there, I'll explore the cities and find more people, more stories and broaden the net to let things find us. America.

Then, in mid October we'll return to each city for a proper shoot. Narrative, emotive and planned.

We'll have our main unit shoot our principle photography of the people and places. Concurrently a B unit will move around the city and capture texture shots – of the city, their workplace, their H.S., the parking lot they proposed to their wife in, the hospital where their children were born. We'll also get helicopter and additional beauty shots.

I'd rather not use stock footage – whatever we need, let's shoot. I can go to LA/NYC/ specific places myself and get whatever additional shots we need if we feel like we need more scale.

VO

I read, 'I've roamed and rambled...to the sparkling sands...' while looking at the images in your board and it resonated with me like poetry does. Not because it's beautiful (which it is) but because I had no expectations. It's like I stumbled on to beautiful writing and images of people who felt familiar. When I got to... 'This land, was made...', of course I realized what I was reading. My point is, I wonder if the VO / song will be stronger if we start it out of linear order? I don't want people to snap into reflexive patriotism when they hear 'This land is your land...'. We could try starting the VO from mid-song. (Springsteen did this in his live version and its effects were strong). Then we're not leading anyone. We're creating an experience for the viewer and giving them ownership of it. I want people to be moved and inspired because what they see and hear hits them in a personal way. If we're considering the power of differences it may be worth exploring the VO in a different way.

EXECUTION

An idea of unique portraiture to bookend the film would be opening on shots of people – a person wades in the ocean, a farmer in the middle of a massive field, a woman at an empty intersection downtown, a man standing on a hilltop, an oil factory in the deep background. Each person is standing, or sitting. We show them against the landscape of their city. These are wide, beautiful encompassing compositions. After 5-6 of these portraiture / landscape shots we cut into the main part of the film – these shots are more found and task oriented. At the end, we return to one or more of these shots – they turn away from camera, then start walking away from lens. We hold on just the landscape.

To be clear, within the content of your script I love all of the moments you've planned. I feel like the see/say nature should be reduced a lot. But that doesn't mean the shots of water and sky go away, we just create our script in a linear order that works with our shots of the people, the tasks, their crew or friends.

The tone is dramatic, positive, beautiful and full of resonance. The fact that we use people, doesn't create a documentary tone at all. It simply gives us a soul within what we script after our journey. Next week I'll start to craft ideas for shots around whom we are zeroing in on...and where.

SUM

The takeaway should be a bold, strong message of change and positivity – that may feel political in moments, but isn't a political message. It's like facing your fears. Discovering your truth. Hearing it from your friends and standing up and pushing onward. America is a unique and wondrous place where the New America is driving and the story is layered and diverse, and I need to know more. We all do.

Looking forward to sitting with you today and the opportunity to make something truly unique.