The Washington Post

What Gordon Parks Witnessed

The injustices of Jim Crow and the evolution of a great American photographer

Tenement residents in Chicago in 1950. (Courtesy of and © the Gordon Parks Foundation)

Story by **David Rowell**

DECEMBER 3, 2018

Photos by **Gordon Parks**

When 29-year-old Gordon Parks arrived in Washington, in 1942, to begin his prestigious job as a photographer at the Farm Security Administration, his first assignment was to shoot: nothing. The government agency, which was born of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, had originally intended to highlight rural suffering and the plight of farmers, but that mission quickly expanded to producing a vast visual record of American life. Overseen by Roy Stryker, chief of the photography unit within the agency's historical section, the collection was a stunning, often sobering artistic vehicle for depicting the ways the government was both serving and failing its citizens. Parks had come to the FSA on a fellowship after being a staff photographer for the St. Paul Recorder newspaper and doing commercial freelance work, but he also hadn't bought his first camera until 1937, and Stryker knew the photographer still had much to learn.

First, as Parks recounted in his 1966 memoir "A Choice of Weapons," Stryker had Parks show him his cameras — a Speed Graphic and a Rolleiflex — and promptly locked them in a cabinet. "You won't be needing those for a few days," the boss said. Instead, he asked his new photographer — who was raised in Kansas but also lived in Minnesota and later in Chicago — to eat in some restaurants, shop in stores, take in a movie. "Get to know this place," he told him.

This was hardly what Parks had in mind for his first day, and, deflated, he set off on foot. It took no time for Parks, the first African American photographer to join the FSA, to collide with the reality Stryker knew awaited him. When he stopped in a drugstore for breakfast, a waiter, at the very sight of him, snapped, "Get off of that stool. Don't you know colored people can't eat in here?" Soon after, still shaken by the encounter, Parks wandered up to a movie theater to buy a ticket — and got a similar admonishment. "Colored people can't go in here," the attendant told him. "You should know that."

A 1942 portrait of cleaning woman Ella Watson. (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress)

Harlem in 1948. (Courtesy of and © the Gordon Parks Foundation)

Next, Parks strolled into the famed department store Garfinkel's, and by now he understood he was likely in for more of the same. He was right: Not one of the salesmen would sell him a camel-hair coat.

Stryker wouldn't be shocked by any of this, but he was surprised to see Parks stalk back just a few hours later. "I want my cameras," Parks announced. Stryker asked what he intended to do with them.

"I want to show the rest of the world what your great city of Washington, D.C., is really like," Parks replied. It was the right impulse, but first Stryker wanted him to study the department's file photos by the photographers who'd come before him — and who were already well on their way to becoming some of the most important documentary photographers of the 20th century: Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, John Vachon and Russell Lee among them. So Parks spent a few weeks poring through the massive archives. The panorama included train yards, hamburger stands, city slums, burlesque houses, dust storms, funerals, employment agencies, public beaches, parades, pool halls, state fairs, swimming holes, front porches, as well as cotton pickers, factory workers, fishermen, beggars, Salvation Army musicians, medicine salesmen, miners, mayors, farmers, car salesmen, protesters, rodeo clowns, schoolchildren, teachers and preachers. Black and white and immigrants. The well-heeled and penniless. The proud and the broken.

When Parks finally began roaming Washington with camera in hand, he would prove that not only were his skills on par with the agency's roster of astounding talent, but also that, as a black photographer, he would be a uniquely qualified witness to the daunting struggles of black Americans, as well as to their resiliency and grace. In this way, he would be a crucial interpreter.

A self-portrait in 1941. (Private collection)

Rooftops in Harlem in 1948 (National Gallery of Art/Courtesy of and © the Gordon Parks Foundation)

actress Ingrid Bergman in Italy in 1949; drugstore “cowboys” in Alberta, Canada, in 1945. (Courtesy of and © the Gordon Parks Foundation; National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection/Gordon Parks Collection/Courtesy of and © the Gordon Parks Foundation)

A family says grace before dinner in an Anacostia housing project in 1942. (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston)

At the National Gallery of Art, the exhibition "Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940-1950" reveals the budding development of one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. The exhibit's startling breadth of images includes disquieting scenes of societal neglect and inequity alongside lyrical street photography, plus formal portraiture of such towering figures as Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes and Ingrid Bergman amid pictures of fashion models and haute couture.

The 1940s would usher in a series of firsts for African Americans — in 1945 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. became New York's first black congressman; Jackie Robinson broke the Major League Baseball color line in 1947— but when Parks landed in Washington the Jim Crow laws of the South were in force in all corners of the capital. When black soldiers returned home from World War II, the reception was often disgraceful. The race riots of 1943 in Detroit; Mobile, Ala.; and Beaumont, Tex., the continuance of lynchings, just to name a few of the rampant injustices, would test anew the will of black Americans. Now that he was in D.C., Parks — who had suffered his own assaults, insults and harassment because of the color of his skin — was about to show that he had a particular mastery for creating pictures of the black community that were at once haunting and hauntingly beautiful.

From the beginning of his brief tenure with the FSA, Parks demonstrated a cinematic drama and narrative tension in the way he composed his pictures. In one of those early images, Parks presents a boy, seen from behind, who has lost a leg after being hit by a streetcar, as two girls study him from across the street. The boy has taken the first steps from the shadows of his house into the sunlight, but how far can he go?How hard will his journey be in the minutes ahead? In the years to come in segregated Washington?

A boy stands in the doorway of his home in Northwest Washington in 1942. He lost his leg after he was hit by a streetcar. (Courtesy of and © the Gordon Parks Foundation)

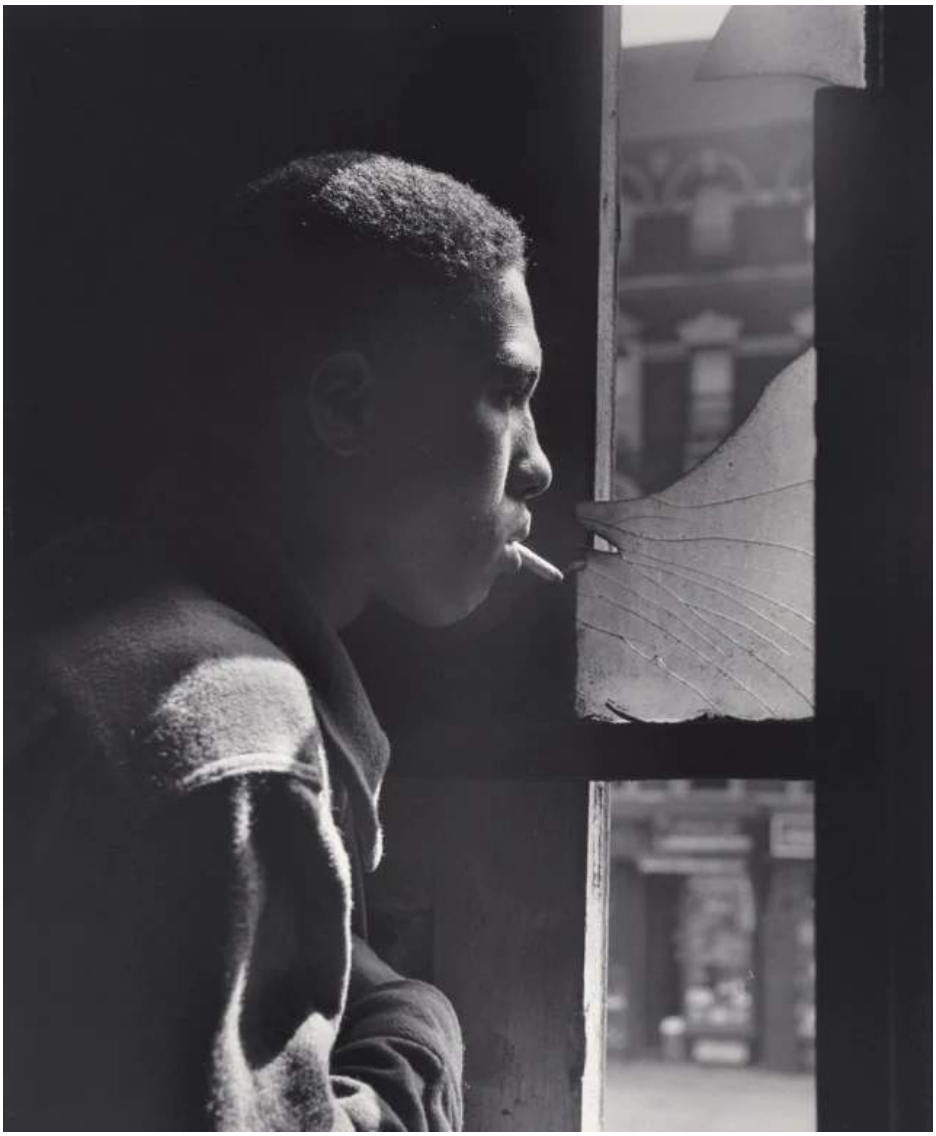
A portrait of a woman in her bedroom in Southwest Washington, taken in 1942.
(Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

After Parks had shot for a few weeks, Stryker encouraged him to go deeper into a subject. As it turned out, he didn't even have to leave the building. Stryker suggested he talk to the cleaning woman working her evening shift, to see what Parks could learn about her life. The woman's name was Ella Watson, and her story, as he would write later, was wrenching: Her father was killed by a lynch mob; her husband was accidentally shot two days before their daughter was born. That daughter had two children by the time she was 18 and died shortly after the second birth. Watson, who'd been denied a chance for advancement, lived on an annual salary of $1,080 while raising an adopted daughter. Parks quickly created a somber portrait of her holding a broom, with a mop positioned behind her, in front of an American flag turned vertical. It would go on to be Parks's signature shot, and one of the most iconic of the era, but Stryker was uneasy with the droll irony of the picture — the thick stripes of the flag resembled bars on a cage. He urged Parks to go deeper, to document. So Parks spent weeks following Watson around at work, sitting in her home, following her to church.

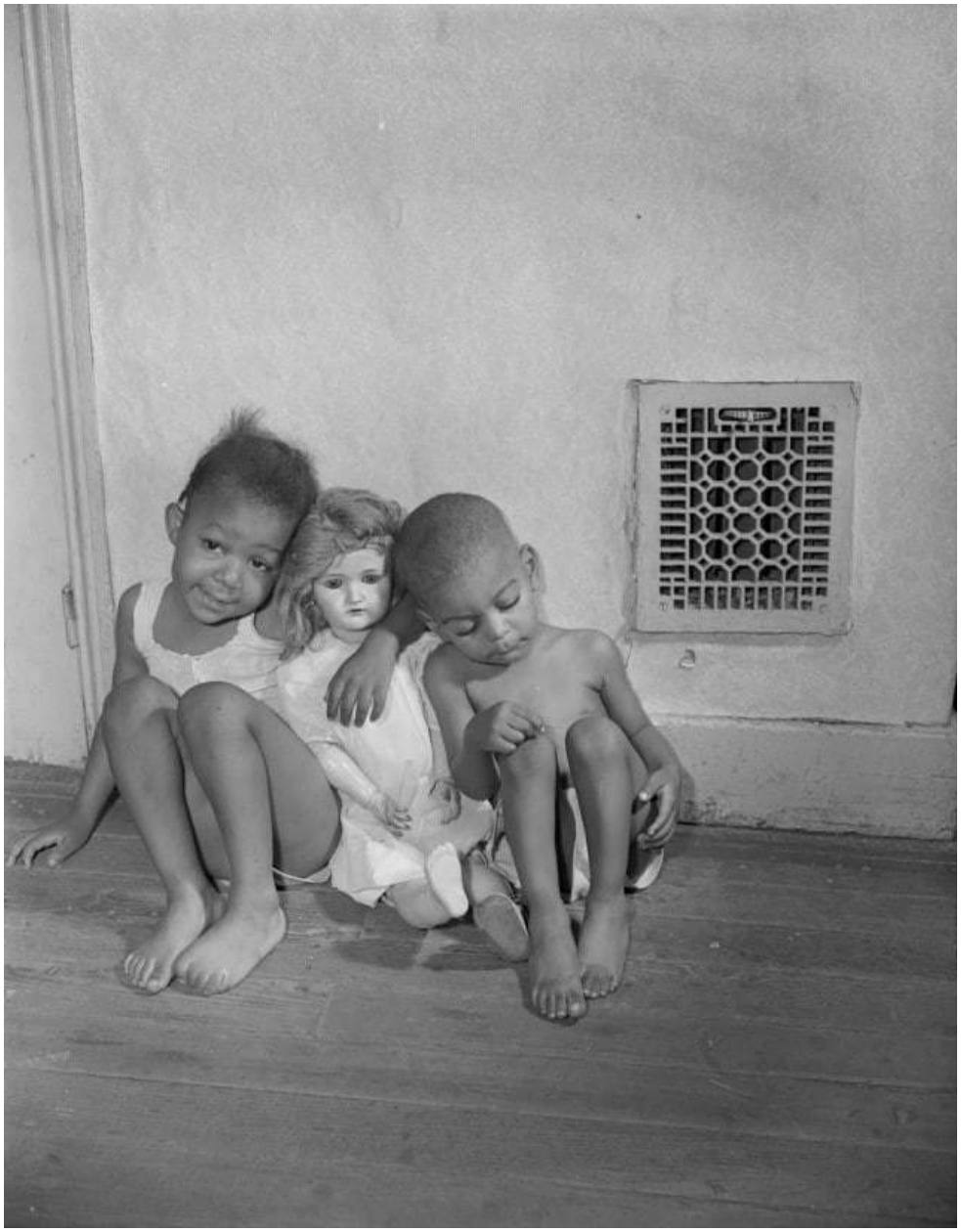
That intensely focused and intimate project would be a useful foundation for the first photo essay he did for Life magazine in 1948. (He'd be the first black photographer hired there, a year later.) This time, Parks spent weeks shadowing a 17-year-old Harlem gang leader named Leonard "Red" Jackson.

But the teen was no straightforward hooligan. He was a former Golden Gloves boxer — skills that came in handy in gang fights — and he kept the activities of his gang, the Midtowners, 20 blocks from his mother's neighborhood, according to the essay's text, so she could walk her dog in peace. Parks attended gang meetings, observed a gang rumble, watched Jackson cleaning up the kitchen at home and duking it out with his "war counselor" for leadership. He followed along as Jackson met with a detective who was mentoring the teenager, and Parks was there, too, for a publicity stunt that saw Jackson — who had been named, oddly enough, "boy mayor of Harlem" for a day — waving to a crowd from a convertible.

The shoot wasn't without its dangers: When Jackson and some fellow Midtowners spotted a group of boys Jackson believed was coming after them, they took refuge in an empty house, relying on bricks strewn about the floor for their defense and waiting out their enemies. In one of those images, Jackson gazes through a window's remaining shards of glass, surveying the chances of getting out safely, but in the way Parks frames his weary face mostly in shadow, Jackson could just as easily be surveying his seemingly dark future. (In fact, he lived until 2010.)



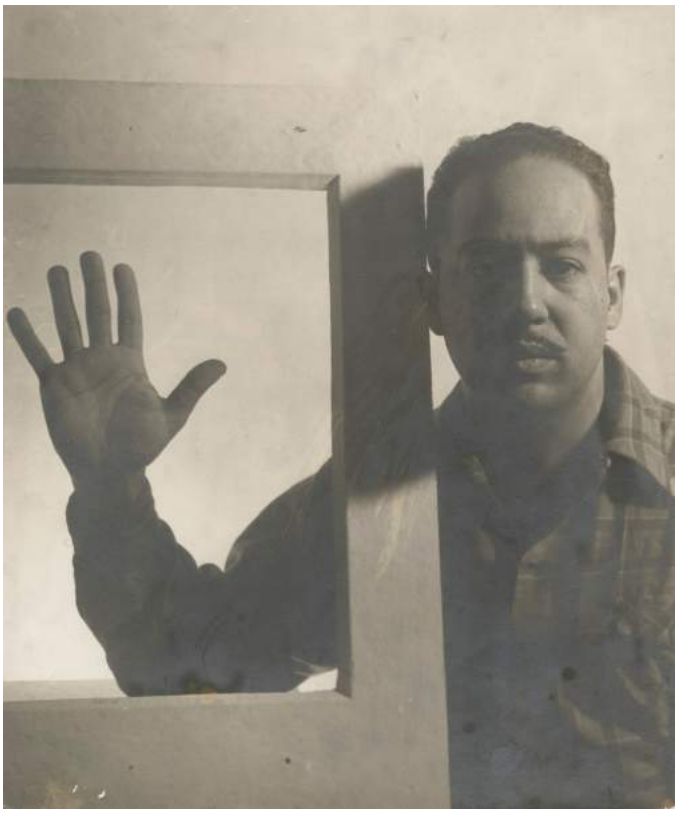
In this 1948 portrait, Leonard "Red" Jackson ponders his next move after he is trapped in an abandoned building by other boys. (National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection/Gordon Parks Collection/Courtesy of and © the Gordon Parks Foundation)



Ella Watson's grandchildren in 1942. Gordon Parks spent weeks following the cleaning woman as she went about her life. (Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress)

Throughout the 1940s, Parks kept honing his documentary approach: He worked for the Office of War Information after it absorbed the FSA, and later for Standard Oil Co. (New Jersey), in addition to freelancing for such publications as Ebony and Glamour as he began to focus more extensively on fashion photography. In 1950, Life assigned him to oversee its photo bureau in Paris for two years. And in the 1960s, book writing and filmmaking would become part of his growing oeuvre. In 1971, Parks would direct "Shaft," which helped launch the blaxploitation era.

But the seeds of all that work and vision are here in the images from 1940 to 1950. The defeat of Germany in World War II brought profound change to much of the world, yet in America change for people of color came at an excruciating pace. As U.S. soldiers returned stateside, settled back into their work and tried to resume the old rhythms of their lives, the civilian's camera aimed at the sins of inequality became a chief weapon of consequence.



Clockwise from top left: A portrait of a woman in New York from 1950; poet Langston Hughes in Chicago in 1941; a photo titled “Off on My Own” from 1948. (Photos courtesy of and © the Gordon Parks Foundation)

Children in Harlem look in a car window in 1943. (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

David Rowell is the deputy editor of The Washington Post Magazine.

Credits: Story by David Rowell. Photos by Gordon Parks. Designed by **Christian Font**. Photo Editing by Dudley M. Brooks.

The New York Times

LENS

How Gordon Parks Became Gordon Parks

A new book examines Gordon Parks's transformation over the formative decade before his time as the first black staff photographer at Life magazine.

By James Estrin

Oct. 1, 2018

At the beginning of the 1940s, Gordon Parks was a self-taught fashion and portrait photographer documenting daily life in both St. Paul and Chicago. By the end of the decade he was photographing for Life magazine. While his career has been examined closely, both in his own words and by others, this formative decade has attracted less attention than his experiences as the first black staff photographer at Life, and later as a groundbreaking Hollywood filmmaker.

A new book, "Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940-1950," published by the National Gallery of Art, The Gordon Parks Foundation and Steidl, examines this transformation. It is timed to accompany the exhibit of the same name at the National Gallery from Nov. 4, 2018, to Feb. 18, 2019. The exhibit was curated by Philip Brookman, who is also the book's author. The book features photographs that have never before been published, as well as additional essays by Sarah Lewis, Deborah Willis, Richard J. Powell and Maurice Berger, who writes the Race Stories column for Lens.

Ms. Willis, who is a noted photographer, author and the chair of the Department of Photography and Imaging at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, knew Mr. Parks well. She spoke with James Estrin about Mr. Parks, and their conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity.

The book and the exhibition cover Gordon's work photographing for the Farm Security Administration, the Office of War Information and Standard Oil as well as his time in Chicago and St. Paul in the beginning of the '40s. It's an incredible leap from 1940 to 1950. How do you think the 1940s shaped him as a photographer?

I was really excited that Philip Brookman focused on the first 10 years.

While writing that essay I had an opportunity to go back into some of the work I only knew peripherally, and what excited me was the Smart Woman magazine that he worked on as a photo editor. I started looking at the black middle class of Chicago that he photographed but no one knew about. He focused on fashion in Chicago, of course in St. Paul, but he was very active with the black press during that time, very interested in black migration from the South to the Midwest and the North. But he was focusing on who was living there and what opportunities black people had who were artistic, who had businesses, who were educated. It is a totally different realm than what he focused on in D.C. So that early part was crucial for my reintroduction to Gordon's work.

Drug store "cowboys." Black Diamond, Alberta, Canada. September 1945. Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

In the Frederick Douglass Housing Project in In Anacostia, Washington D.C., a family says grace before their evening meal. June 1942.
Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

Dinner time at Mr. Hercules Brown's home in Somerville, Maine, 1944. Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

What I find extraordinary is his range and he did all of these different things during this period.

And within different communities, Gordon was comfortable with knowing — and making different images about different communities. He understood what it meant to be an American in different forms and different ways. At the black newspaper that he worked at in St. Paul, he demanded a byline. He understood what it meant to have his name imprinted on the newspaper when he was making photographs of gorgeous ladies, college students, women who wanted to be models. He's actually part of their dream. He's documenting their dreaming of their lives outside of domestic work —opportunities that were broader.

The photos he made for Standard Oil are mostly of white people working. But if you look at the family scenes over dinner you see the composure that he must have had to make them as comfortable as they were.

I believe that he was able to make people feel at ease. You know, he was just a good soul.

How did you meet him?

I was studying photography at Philadelphia College of Art, and there were no black photographers in the history books. I was working on a paper for one of my teachers and asked, where are the black photographers?

Charles White in front of his mural "Chaos of the American Negro" 1941.
Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

I remembered seeing Gordon's work in Life magazine when I was a teenager and was curious about why he was not in the history of photography. I wrote a letter, in purely undergraduate language, that said, "I'm writing a paper on black photographers, I'd like to meet you and talk to you about your work." He sent a letter back and said, "Yes, come and meet me." He was living at the U.N. Plaza then. I met him and he opened his door and you know, he'd been in my life ever since. Until the day he died. I interviewed him about three months before he died. He called me up to talk about the last book,
"Hungry Heart."

So how would you describe him?

Generous. One word, generous. He listened closely. He understood what I needed, and he offered support. He loved his work. And like he said, he did not get up early. You could not visit him before 2 p.m. He was a neat, meticulous man in terms of his style of dress.

He understood that he had a legacy. And the fact that his photographs were organized, the fact that he knew he wanted his collection to be preserved and his story told by him and by others.

And why do you think that is?

Absence. The absence of the stories that he probably missed when he looked at the magazines while he worked on the railroad in the 1930s. He understood the silence of African-American history in terms of the larger story. And he was determined to make sure that his story was told, and the breadth of his story was told from multiple perspectives, from a boy growing up in the Midwest, to someone who had a dream about being a photographer. His life was complex. And it was not one-dimensional, as most people think when they see someone who is black and poor in that time period.

Bettina Graziani and Sophie Malgat at Coney Island. 1950. Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

This was a time when the World's Fair was in Chicago in 1939 and he was traveling back and forth with a young family. Those experiences probably left an impact on him, especially when he started going to the Art Institute to look at art and tried to place himself within that framework of art making and art creating.

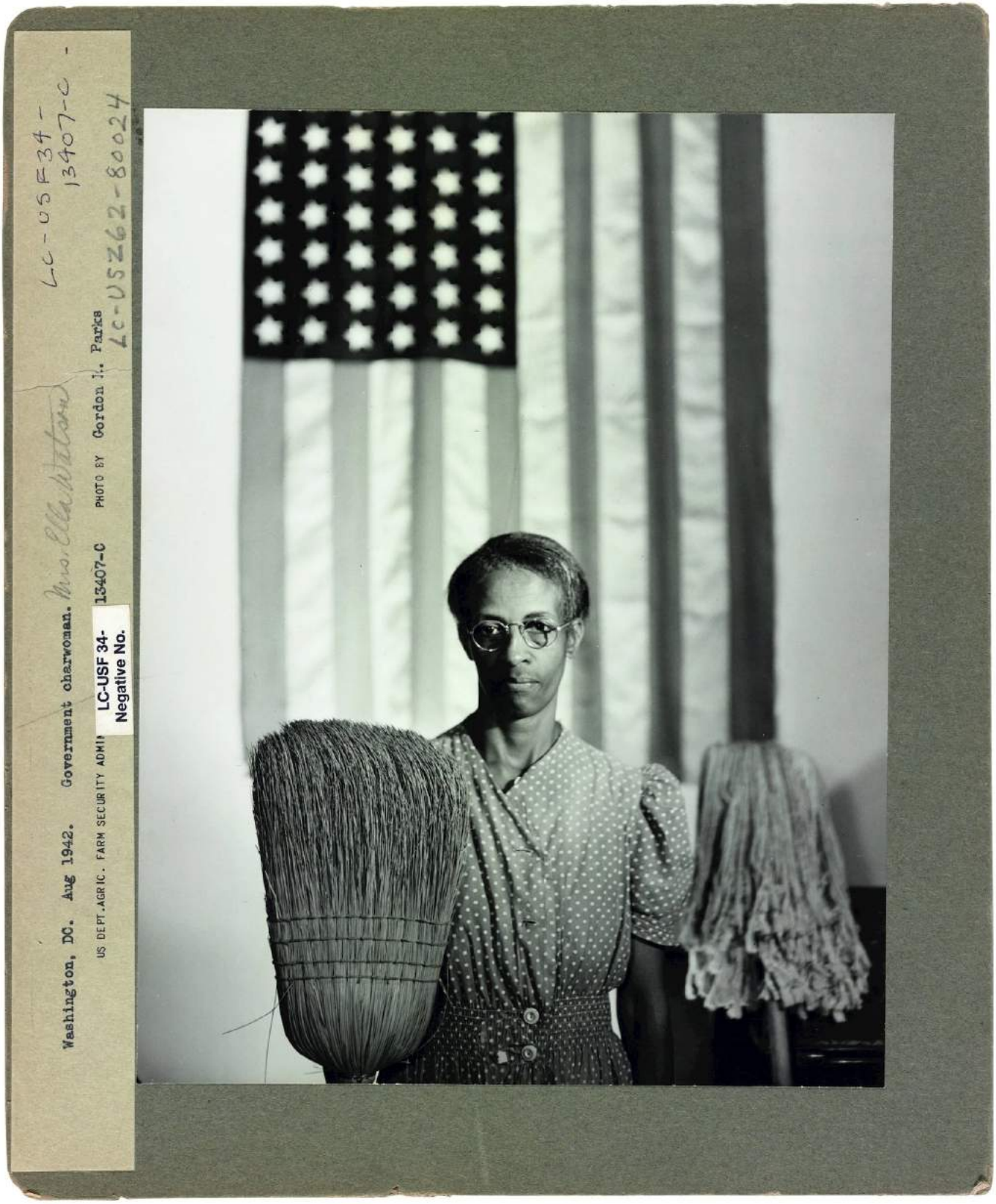
His life has been widely examined — by himself in three memoirs, and in the last few years by many other people. Is there something that you think is not often considered but is pivotal in understanding him?

I found that he was always looking at beauty. Not in terms of sentimental beauty.

But understanding beauty in life, beauty in living. And I think that that's something that he was in search of in all of his photographs, about life and beauty in that simple sense. And that's something that people don't talk about often.

That's interesting, and it goes beyond fashion.

Yes, beyond fashion. It's a kind of inner turmoil of how we appreciate life and how do we give back. When I look at his photographs I see Gordon as a generous person. I see that exchange that happens when he's in an environment of that family at a table or with the cowboys outside of the store. He's not allowing barriers to stop him. He's completely there.



Washington, D.C. Government charwoman, July 1942. Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

But what really fascinated me is that they were so cool with him. You can see it in the photo.

I just want to sit at that table and listen to what they are talking about.

It's obviously part of his gift.

And that's a relaxed gift. It's not forced. A kind of a way of reading — understanding humanity. He understood humanity. I still feel like he's with us in a sense. I'm so happy that he made the decision to create the foundation, and understood that his photographs would open up a whole new reading of photography to another generation of photographers.

What was the relationship between him and Langston Hughes?

He was in the environment of all the Harlem writers and he worked closely with Langston when Langston moved to Chicago to present his "Shakespeare in Harlem" play. They met in rehearsal time and they made photographs while he was in Chicago. They had a strong bond and a real playful relationship. Gordon was also close to Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison.

And I can see his deep involvement, not just as someone who took the pictures but someone who is part of that.

And you see that sense of theatricality in his work. The way that Gordon created the narrative for the "Invisible Man" photos — not only the manhole cover but the underground scene with the light bulbs. He's reading deeply into the text. He understood props as well. That's why he could easily move right into making films.

Is there anything else that you think is key to understanding him, both as a photographer and as a man?

Well, he understood that his images mattered. That's why he wanted the byline. And I think that he agreed to make a radical difference looking at black lives in Chicago or in St. Paul.

He understood what mattered. And most people don't. They think in the moment, but he's thinking beyond that.

WIDEWALLS

Early Examples of Gordon Parks Photography at the National Gallery of Art

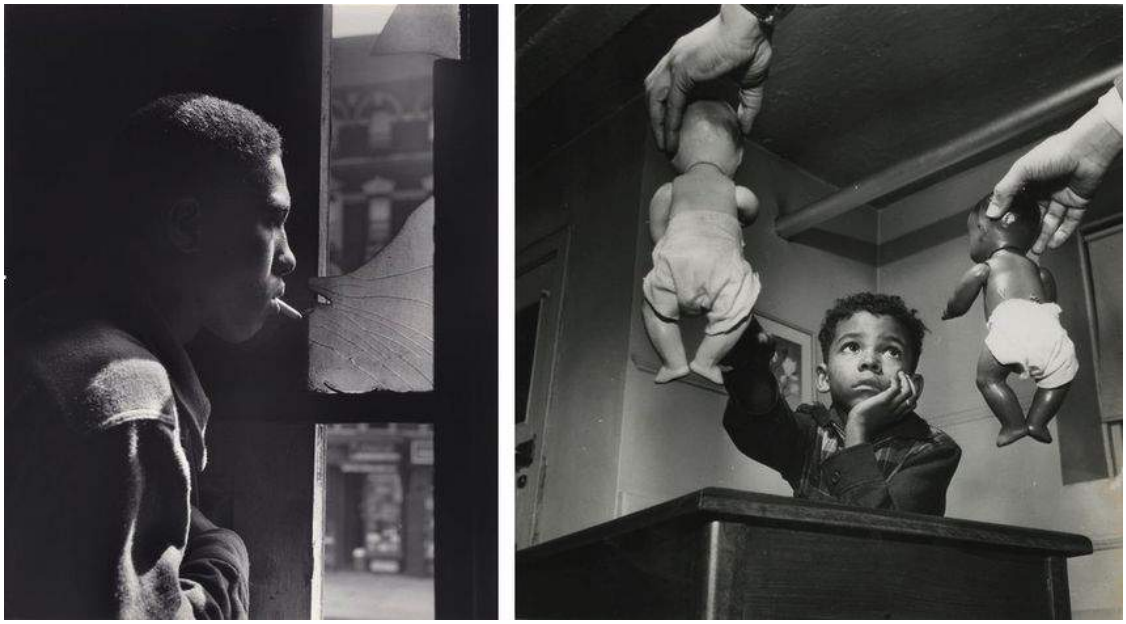
December 3, 2018

Elena Martinique

One of the most renowned photographers of his age, who alalsoorked in music and film, **Gordon Parks** is celebrated for images which consistently explored the social and economic impact of racism. Chronicling the African American experience through the fullest range of subjects, he created a powerful and poetic body of work which communicated difficult truths to a mainstream audience. He once said:

> *I saw that the camera could be a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs, I knew at that point I had to have a camera.*

The current exhibition on view at the National Gallery of Art in Washington explores the lesser-known yet incredibly formative period of Parks's long and illustrious career. Titled *Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940-1950*, the showcase provides an insight into the early evolution of **Gordon Parks photography** through **around 150 photographs**, as well as a rich archive of rare magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, and books. It also highlights **the mutual influences** between him and a network of creative and intellectual figures such as Charles White, Roy Stryker, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison.



Left: Gordon Parks – Trapped in abandoned building by a rival gang on street, Red Jackson ponders his next move, 1948. Gelatin silver print; Image: 49.21 × 39.69 cm (19 3/8 × 15 5/8 in.), sheet: 50.64 × 40.8 cm (19 15/16 × 16 1/16 in.). National Gallery of Art, Washington, Corcoran Collection (The Gordon Parks Collection). Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation / Right: Gordon Parks –Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1947. Gelatin silver print; Image: 17.78 × 17.46 cm (7 × 6 7/8 in.), sheet: 20.32 × 18.42 cm (8 × 7 1/4 in.). The Gordon Parks Foundation. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

Photography as a Tool for Fighting Oppression

In 1949, Gordon Parks became the first African American photographer at Life magazine. He also worked as a visionary professional in New York for Ebony and Glamour. However, the foundational first decade of his life as a photographer has never been explored in such detail as in this comprehensive exhibition at the National Gallery of Art. As the executive director of the Gordon Parks Foundation, Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr., explains, these images are "the foundation of his storied career and vision."

> *For Parks, creativity brought with it a fuller, more poignant understanding of humanity that is now our responsibility to share.*

Born into poverty and segregation in Kansas in 1912, Gordon Parks began his artistic career in music, starting out as a brothel pianist and traveling with a jazz band. He became drawn to photography as a young man while working as a waiter on the Northern Pacific Railway's North Coast Limited, a luxurious train that ran between Chicago, Saint Paul, and Seattle. A fellow waiter gave him **a magazine featuring images of migrant workers** by such photographers as Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein, changing the course of his life. Realizing that photography might be a tool for fighting oppression he had experienced for much of his life, he bought his first camera, a Voigtländer Brilliant, teaching himself how to take photographs.

Left: Gordon Parks – Crude oil, fuel oil, gas oil, range oil and gasoline pipelines leading from the waterfront to the Everett refinery. Everett, Massachusetts., May 1944. Gelatin silver print; Image: 23.18 × 19.05 cm (9 1/8 × 7 1/2 in.), sheet: 23.18 × 28.26 cm (9 1/8 × 11 1/8 in.). Standard Oil (New Jersey) Collection, Photographic Archives, University of Louisville. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation / Right: Gordon Parks – Pittsburgh, Pa. The cooper's plant at the Penola, Inc. grease plant, where large drums and containers are reconditioned, March 1944. Gelatin silver print on board with typed caption; Sheet: 23.9 × 19.1 cm (9 7/16 × 7 1/2 in.), mount: 29 × 24 cm (11 7/16 × 9 7/16 in.). Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The Formative Years

Studying photography manuals and magazines while consistently taking images, Parks began to make a name for himself by photographing and publishing portraits of glamorous women. After working briefly as a staff photographer for the *Recorder*, in September 1939 Parks returned to working for the railroad, this time as **a porter** traveling between the Twin Cities and Chicago. Honing his craft and developing a keen eye, he was dedicated to connecting with people and tackling a range of issues he saw across his travels in the United States. What mattered to him was **the humane side of all people**, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or religious beliefs. Among the first of his exhibitions on view was a show on Chicago's South Side black ghetto and in 1941.

In 1942, he began working for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which was then chronicling the nation's social conditions in the wake of the Great Depression. After the agency closed, he began working as a freelance photographer, balancing his practice between fashion photography and the humanitarian issues which concerned him greatly. In 1948, he produced a compelling photo essay on the Harlem gang leader Red Jackson, depicting his existence as one that was shaped by senseless violence and thwarted dreams. This compelling series won him widespread acclaim and a position as the first African American staff photographer and writer for Life magazine. In 1969, Gordon Parks wrote, directed, and scored the first major Hollywood film to be directed by a black American, The Learning Tree.

Left: Gordon Parks – Washington, D.C. A young girl who lives near the Capitol., June 1942. Gelatin silver print; Image: 13.02 × 10.16 cm (5 1/8 × 4 in.), sheet: 13.02 × 10.16 cm (5 1/8 × 4 in.).The Gordon Parks Foundation. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation / Right: Gordon Parks –Washington, D.C. Government charwoman, July 1942. Gelatin silver print; Sheet: 24 × 19.3 cm (9 7/16 × 7 5/8 in.), mount: 29 × 24.2 cm (11 7/16 × 9 1/2 in.). Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Exhibition Highlights

The exhibition Gordon Parks: The New Tide is divided into five sections.

Titled A Choice of Weapons (1940-1942), the first section opens with the high society portraits that established Parks's career as a professional photographer in Saint Paul and Minneapolis. It also includes his portraits of the city's middle- and upper-class African American community, as well as images which documented activities of the South Side Community Art Center in Chicago, where he was given access to studio space and a darkroom in 1941. These include the images of influential figures such as SSCAC director Peter Pollack, renowned poet and playwright Langston Hughes, philosophy professor and architect of the New Negro movement Alain Locke, and opera singer Todd Duncan.

The second section of the exhibition, titled Government Work (1942), features his images produced for the FSA. He was assigned to photograph the Frederick Douglass Dwellings—quality public housing recently constructed in DC's Anacostia neighborhood for black defense workers. The section also features other images which were aimed at improving conditions for African Americans, such as Washington, DC. Government charwoman, featuring Ella Watson, a cleaning woman who worked for the government. The woman and her family soon became a subject of an extended series which chronicled their daily lives.

The third section, The Home Front, features examples of Park's projects for the Office of War Information, such as depictions of children living in substandard housing slated for removal, fishermen in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and the Fulton Fish Market in New York City, children on the streets of Harlem, and the first fighter groups of African American pilots.

Titled Standard Oil (1944-1948), the fourth section features the rarely seen archive of work Parks produced for Stryker while working for Standard Oil Company (New Jersey)(SONJ). Over the course of four and a half years, he photographed coal workers, roughnecks, refinery operators, pipefitters, railroad workers, grease makers, drilling crews, and miners, as well as the cities, towns, schools, shops, farms, and transportation networks that depended on petroleum.

The final section, Mass Media (1945-1950), features his work for major fashion and lifestyle magazines, such as Ebony, Circuit's Smart Woman, and Glamour, in addition to his freelance work and early photo essays for Life, such as the aforementioned Harlem Gand Leader. While working for Life, he documented a range of subjects, from couture fashion in Paris to segregation, street life, and poverty around the world.

Gordon Parks Photography at the National Gallery of Art

The exhibition Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940–1950 will be on view in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington until February 18th, 2019. It is curated by Philip Brookman, consulting curator, department of photographs, National Gallery of Art, Washington. There will be a series of related programs accompanying the show, such as the Retrospective of Films by Gordon Parks and Related Subjects between January 5th and February 17th, 2019, John Wilmerding Symposium on American Art and Community Celebration: Artists and the American Community on February 8th and 9th, and much more.Editors' Tip: Gordon Parks: The New Tide: Early Work 1940–1950First starting his career in music, Gordon Parks evolved into one of the most acclaimed photographers, but also film makers. Focusing on new research and access to the forgotten archive, The New Tide, Early Work 1940–1950 documents the importance of these years in shaping Gordon Parks' passionate vision.

Left: Gordon Parks – Untitled, Puerto Rico (Inauguration of Luis Muñoz-Marín), January 1949. Gelatin silver print; Image: 26.2 × 27.1 cm (10 5/16 × 10 11/16 in.), sheet: 26.2 × 27.1 cm (10 5/16 × 10 11/16 in.). Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with funds contributed in memory of Magda Krauss, 2001. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation / Right: Gordon Parks – Washington (southwest section), D.C. Negro woman in her bedroom, November 1942. Gelatin silver print; Image: 35.56 × 27.94 cm (14 × 11 in.). Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

The book, produced and published by the Gordon Parks Foundation and Steidl in association with the Gallery, brings together photographs and publications made during the first and most formative decade of his 65-year career.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

ART REVIEW

‘Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940-1950’ Review: Young Talent in Black and White

Early in his career, the photographer was portraying racism, reality—and fashion

Gordon Parks, ‘Washington, D.C. Government charwoman,’ July 1942. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON, D.C

By William Meyers
Dec. 5, 2018 5:01 p.m. ET

Washington

Ella Watson dutifully stands her post at the entrance to "Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940-1950," at the National Gallery of Art. In the poster-size blowup of Parks's best-known image, Watson, an African-American charwoman for the federal government in Washington, holds her broom, straw head up, as if it were her staff of office. Her dress is secured at the waist with two buttons, but buttons are missing above the waist and the top is held by a pin, a sign of her limited means. She faces forward, her eyeglasses giving her an intelligent look. She is not staring directly at the camera, though; her eyes are shifted slightly to the left, perhaps because this unaccustomed attention is a bit unnerving. Behind her, out of focus but unmistakably recognizable, hangs an enormous American flag, symbol of the government that promises her equality, although it is 1942 and the nation's capital is a racially segregated city. Watson has worked as a charwoman for 26 years with no chance of advancement.

A 1941 Parks self-portrait. **PHOTO:** PRIVATE COLLECTION

Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940-1950

National Gallery of Art, West Building, through Feb. 18, 2019

Gordon Parks (1912-2006) was born into a large, black, close-knit family in Fort Scott, Kan. At age 6 he taught himself to play piano on the family's upright as he would later teach himself, at 25, how to take photographs with a used camera he bought in a pawnshop. Living alternately in St. Paul, Minn., Minneapolis and Chicago, he developed a clientele in the black community for his portraits, fashion photography and coverage of events. In 1942 he won a prestigious Julius Rosenwald Fund Fellowship that paid his salary when he went to Washington to work at the Farm Security Administration (FSA) under the direction of Roy Stryker. When Parks first arrived, Stryker insisted he spend a few days roaming around Washington without his camera to accustom himself to life in a segregated city. Then Stryker helped in the development of Parks's talent, the progress of which is the theme of the 151 pictures in this exhibition.

Parks was assigned to cover housing developments and other facilities the government built for blacks to encourage their support for the war raging in Europe and the Pacific. Stryker taught him to verbalize his objective before setting out to photograph a project, so he would know what to look for and could produce a compelling narrative. When he wasn't out shooting, Parks pored through the FSA files, studying the work of the great photographers who had documented the Depression: Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Lee Russell, Arthur Rothstein. Parks also photographed the constricted lives of the city's blacks, which is what brought him to Ella Watson.

'Washington, D.C., Mrs. Ella Watson, a Government Charwoman, With Three Grandchildren and Her Adopted Daughter' (1942) **PHOTO:** LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON, D.C.

The National Gallery is displaying seven prints from Parks's documentation of Watson's life. Following Stryker's advice, he befriended her so he could shoot her at work in the halls and offices of the buildings she cleaned; at home with her adopted daughter and the daughter's two young nephews and a niece; at the church that was an important part of her story. The Watson pictures show Parks's growing sophistication with artificial light, composition and the use of symbolic details, and also his insistence on presenting African-Americans in ways that defied stereotypes. In his autobiography, Parks describes his determination to master the camera as his "choice of weapons," weapons he would use to fight segregation, bigotry and poverty. Stryker immediately recognized the brilliance of the picture of Watson with her broom, but knew the FSA could not use it. It was not published until 1949, when it ran in Ebony magazine.

Parks's 'Paris Fashions' (1949) **PHOTO:** THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION

Parks was an enormously versatile photographer. There are portraits throughout the show, particularly of black luminaries, many of whom were close friends: Alain Locke (1941), Langston Hughes (four pictures, 1941), Todd Duncan (1941), a self-portrait (1941), Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune (1943), several black fighter pilots in training (1943), Ralph Ellison (1948). And workers—black and white—in diverse fields. Parks followed Stryker from government work to Standard Oil and took industrial photographs, many in a modernist style. Throughout his career he took fashion pictures; he had a natural instinct for what made women and their clothes look good. But always he documented the condition of his race.

Life magazine published Parks's debut photo essay, "Harlem Gang Leader," in 1948. Typically, of the hundreds of pictures Parks took for the gang story, none of the positive images ran, only ones that reflected poorly on the subjects. The museum shows pictures the editors did and did not use in the article, and it is instructive. The next year Life hired Parks as a staff photojournalist, the first black photographer on staff at the influential magazine, and sent him off to France on the Queen Mary to cover the Paris fashion shows.

Chester Higgins, born in 1946, an African-American who became a staff photojournalist for the New York Times, told me: "Gordon led the way by example for every black photographer. We all aspired to be like him. His work caused us to believe in ourselves."

AnOther Magazine

The Mid-Century Fashion Photographer Who Broke the American Colour Line

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY / IN PICTURES

Untitled, Coney Island, New York, 1950 Photography by Gordon Parks, Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

Looking back at the early work of Gordon Parks, the first African-American photographer at LIFE magazine

NOVEMBER 06, 2018

TEXT Miss Rosen

Gordon Parks (1912–2006) was a singular figure in every sense of the word, transcending every boundary foisted upon him as a black man coming of age in Jim Crow America. Now, *Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940–1950*, a new exhibition in Washington, looks back at the groundbreaking first decade of his career, during which he rose to become the first African-American photographer at *LIFE* magazine.

Hailing from Fort Scott, Kansas, Parks decided to become a photographer while working as a waiter in a railroad dining car and looking through discarded copies of magazines like *Vogue* and *Look*. At the age of 25, Parks purchased a Voigtländer Brilliant, which he later called his "choice of weapon", and taught himself to become a professional portrait photographer and photojournalist.

"Having a camera gave him access to tell different stories," says Dr Deborah Willis, who wrote an essay titled 'Gordon Parks: Haute Couture and the Everyday' for the exhibition catalogue published by Steidl.

"We have to keep in mind that at the time, black people didn't have that sense of freedom to walk into spaces and expect the respect that he received. That's what I find fascinating about Gordon: the boundaries weren't there for him. He understood that he had an eye. He believed in his sense of understanding of the depths and complexities of life that he wanted to pursue work and develop the work."

With this inner faith, Parks set forth, launching his career when he walked into a local department store in St Paul, Minnesota, where he was living in 1939. Parks told the owner, Frank Murphy: "I'd like to shoot fashions for you, sir." His inquiry was declined until Murphy's wife, Madeleine, made her support known.

Untitled, New York, New York, 1950
Photography by Gordon Parks, Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

It was here that Parks honed his talent for fashion photography, combining his finely crafted observations of its masters with an intuitive understanding of the viewer's mind. "By looking at the images in *LIFE* and *Look* magazines, Gordon starting to think about how we create a narrative about the fabric of life," Dr Willis says.

"I believe that he looked at those images and began to place stories in his own imagination about the condition of women and others. He had this sense of inside/outside flexibility. He could also see inequality and find a way to equalise it in a sense. Through fashion, that happened."

The genesis of this perspective began with an old photograph dated circa 1890, in which his mother Sarah Ross Parks stands tall in her finest gown. Parks, who was the youngest of 15 children, was only 14 when his mother died. "I imagine Gordon understood his mother through the lens of that image, his mother outside of raising children," Dr Willis observes.

Paris Fashions, 1949, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Corcoran Collection (The Gordon Parks Collection)
Photography by Gordon Parks, Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

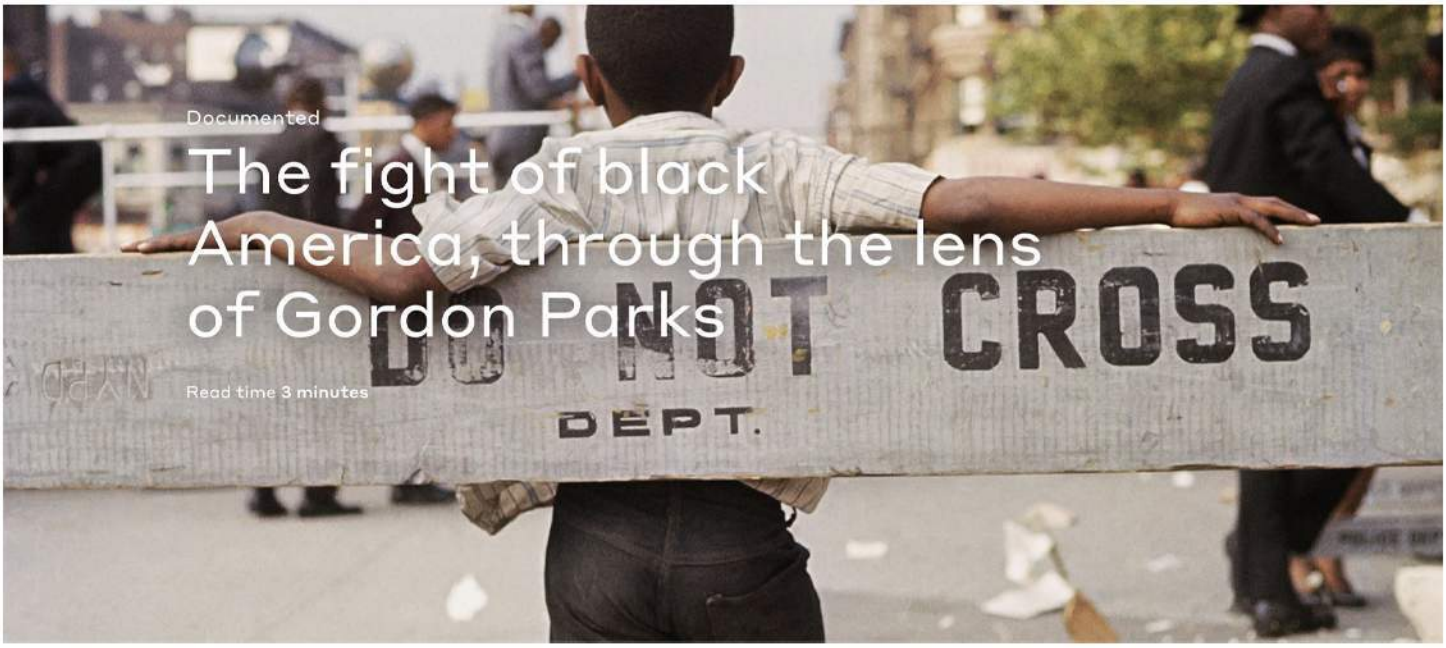
"I see this image as pivotal of what it meant to have a portrait made at that time. It allowed Sarah Ross Parks to create the personality and character of a woman who, within a 30-year period after Emancipation, and how she is using this space as a place to acknowledge not only her femininity and her sense of self as a free woman."

The spirit of self-determination, pride, and personal agency passed from mother to son, and Parks would pay it forward in his work. "Gordon was placing these women in this clothing in these high powered places like New York or Chicago – and seeing these spaces, they had a right to dress and be in these environments."

Bettina and Frances McLaughlin-Gill, 1950
Photography by Gordon Parks, Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940-1950 is on at National Gallery of Art, Washington until February 18, 2019.

DOCUMENT



Documented

The fight of black America, through the lens of Gordon Parks

Read time 3 minutes

Text by
Gordon Parks

Photography by
Gordon Parks

Posted
October 31, 2018

For Document Fall/Winter 2018, The Gordon Parks Foundation contributed an exclusive portfolio of his photographs from that watershed moment in 1963, accompanied by his own words.

Gordon Parks (1912—2006) was first drawn to photography by a photo essay of migrant workers he saw in a magazine, which prompted him to buy a camera and teach himself to wield it as an instrument of social justice. The photos in this portfolio, taken in 1963 and previously unpublished, capture the spirit of Harlem when community members regularly gathered to rally for change. Here, in his own words, Parks describes his experience as a black man documenting the fight against racism.

Covering some of these stories was like reporting from the darkness. During that period, I saw men in incomprehensible actions against their fellow men. I witnessed jagged moments of brutality and terror. I came to understand the implications of bigotry, poverty, and war. During some unbelievable hours, I doubted that another morning would arrive; each day seemed sufficient to bring the world to a stop. Nonetheless, I have been in awe of what remained to be admired. For while evil and corruption suited certain men, there were others inclined toward greatness, good men who refused to be squashed under the heels of others. These were men who, when the sky threatened to fall upon us, raised their voices and guaranteed another sunrise.

In 1963, the turbulent black revolution was steadily building, and *Life* magazine wanted to cover it. The Black Muslims and Malcolm X, their fiery spokesman, had become the magazine's first target. Other forces were slowly gathering—the Black Panthers, Huey [P.] Newton, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, and Bobby Seale would come later to stridently berate racism throughout the nation. Infiltration into their volatile camps by a white publication that was held suspect seemed impossible. Whatever attempts the magazine had made had fallen flat.

It seems reasonable that at the time, *Life*'s editors would question my ability to report objectively about black militancy. I was black, and my sentiments lay in the heart of black fury sweeping the country. I came to each story with a strong sense of involvement, finding it difficult to screen out my own memories of a scarred past. But I tried for truth...through the careful sifting of day-to-day emotions that white America whips up in black people. My own background has enabled me, I hope, to better share the experiences of some other black people. I do not presume to speak for them. I have just offered a glimpse, however fleeting, of their world through black eyes.

ARTFORUM

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ICONIC ENCOUNTER

Michael Lobel on Gordon Parks and Ella Watson

Gordon Parks, *Government charwoman, Washington, D.C.,* August 1942. Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

EVEN NOW, decades later, it retains the power to mesmerize. Spare and emblematic, the image has the concision of a single-verse hymn: a woman, standing at center, mop and broom on either side of her; a few pieces of office equipment appearing at left and right; an American flag hanging in the background. Yet there is just enough ambiguity to elicit

closer attention. Note the woman's gaze: Some have described her as staring straight into the camera, while others assert she is looking down and to the side. I believe it's the latter, but the angle of her eyeglasses, along with that sliver of shadow below her eye, like the track of a tear, make the precise direction of her glance unclear. And the photographer took care to adjust the depth of field so that, while the woman is in focus, the flag behind her is hazy and indistinct.

The image, arguably Gordon Parks's best known and most widely circulated, is one in a remarkable series of pictures resulting from an extended collaboration between the photographer and federal worker Ella Watson. Over several weeks in the summer of 1942, Parks captured Watson at work, at home, and at her church. He also documented her immediate milieu: the view from the window of her apartment, the shoppers at her neighborhood market, the workers at her local laundry. A closer look at their collaborative endeavor brings to light the scope and ambition of Parks's artistic vision, while also offering the opportunity to revise our understanding of Watson's role in the creation of these photographs.

Gordon Parks, *View from the bedroom window of Mrs. Ella Watson, a government worker, Washington, D.C.,* August 1942 Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

Parks arrived in Washington, DC, that spring, the recipient of a fellowship from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Among its many philanthropic enterprises, the Rosenwald Fund helped build rural schools for African American children across the South and awarded grants for travel and creative activity to a range of black artists, including Elizabeth Catlett, Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, and Augusta Savage. The support Parks received from the fund helped to secure him a position working under the tutelage of Roy Stryker, the legendary chief of the Historical Section of the Farm Security Administration, who oversaw a wide-ranging project to document American life—one that produced some of the twentieth century's most enduring photographs.[1] Parks was the FSA's first—and ultimately only—African American photographer.

In a profile published in the July 1946 issue of *Ebony*, Parks recalled arriving in the nation's capital full of energy and optimism.[2] "I was like a kid about Washington— excited, thrilled. I was dumb enough to regard it as the symbol of everything wonderful in the United States." [3] Parks had spent most of his adult life in Minnesota and Illinois, and Stryker, who at the time was more cognizant ofthe city's deep-seated racism, sent the young photographer out to explore. "Go get yourself a good meal, buy a hat, take in a movie, go for a bus-ride," Parks recalled him saying. "Leave your camera with me—then write up what you saw, and how you want to go about photographing this town."[4] Whether intentionally or otherwise, Stryker had sent him to run the city's Jim Crow gauntlet. Once Parks was alerted to the realities of segregation in Washington, having been refused service at stores, theaters, and restaurants, he sat down to record his response: "Man, I pounded that typewriter so hard it almost melted. I wrote for two days. I wanted to photograph every rotten discrimination in the city, and show the world how evil Washington was."[5] As the story goes, Stryker eventually suggested to Parks that Watson, who was cleaning the FSA offices, might be a suitable photographic subject.

Gordon Parks, *A dance group, Frederick Douglass housing project, Anacostia, Washington, D.C.,* June 1942. Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

There are photographs Parks took that summer that portray "every rotten discrimination": a boy on crutches in a doorway, his leg lost in a streetcar accident; a young girl in bed with an infection caused by a rat bite. Yet others are aspirational, even joyful, like his images of the commencement exercises at Howard University, and of a line of pint-sized dancers practicing ballet positions. He also captured portraits of influential figures in the African American community, such as Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP, and famed entertainer and activist Paul Robeson.[6] Other pictures by Parks, however, are not so easily categorized.

Soon after I began poring over Parks's FSA negatives, available in digitized form on the Library of Congress website, I came across one image that continues to haunt me. According to Parks's notes, he took the picture near the site of the Frederick Douglass Dwellings, a housing project built for African American workers during World War II.[7] In the dozen or so scenes he captured at the Douglass Dwellings, he focused on recording slice-of-life moments, including the photo of the aforementioned young dancers as well as one of boys playing leap-frog, and another of a mother watching her children while she prepares dinner. When he took the image in question, however, he turned his attention to a scene devoid of human presence: In a brush-filled lot, a weathered wooden sign advertises a real-estate opportunity for a "colored" development. By including that sign in the foreground of his image, Parks put the fact of segregation front and center. Behind the placard looms a single tree—dark, blasted, its limbs sawn to jagged stumps—silhouetted against a cloud-filled sky. Its presence can't help but evoke the shameful history of racial violence in the United States; in the decade prior, artists had often used such denuded trunks to symbolize lynching trees.[8] In stark contrast to the gnarled, desiccated trunk, young plantings dot the terrain in Parks's views of the Douglass Dwellings, conveying the promise of new beginnings. What caught my attention was that, in the midst of capturing shots that served the FSA's general purposes, Parks was compelled to create something different: an uncanny tableau, its subject less easily defined, that delivers an unsettling jolt.

Titles possess a strong magic. They function like binding spells, restricting an artwork's meaning, its available range of references. That's no less true of Parks's iconic image of Watson, which is now commonly referred to as *American Gothic, Washington, D.C.* Applying that label, the photograph is read as a politically charged transfiguration of Grant

Gordon Parks, *Playing in the community sprayer, Frederick Douglass housing project, Anacostia, Washington, D.C.*, June 1942. Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

Wood's indelible American Regionalist painting: An African American laborer replaces Wood's dour white Midwesterners, the farmer's pitchfork supplanted by her mop and broom. However, the association with Wood's picture came later.[9] Parks's original caption, following standard FSA practice, was *Government charwoman, Washington, D.C.*—a title that places the emphasis on its subject's profession.[10] In fact, there are numerous images of both Watson and another woman working, suggesting that Parks may initially have had a different purview in mind—perhaps a series on cleaners at work—before focusing solely on Watson.

Certain elements in the photographs Parks made that summer highlight a simple, easily overlooked fact: These are wartime images. Watson standing before the American flag, mop and broom at her side, should be understood within the context of the African American experience of discrimination and segregation during World War II. Even as

Gordon Parks, *Sign on Alabama Avenue, Frederick Douglass housing project, Anacostia, Washington, D.C.*, June 1942. Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

military enlistment created a shortage of labor on the home front, entrenched racism hindered the employment of qualified African Americans. By the summer of 1942—precisely as Parks was setting out to photograph for the FSA—this issue had become a major topic of public discussion. In a July address at the University of Virginia, Brigadier General Frank McSherry, director of operations for the War Manpower Commission, asserted that "employers can no longer afford to discriminate against Negroes and workers of other minority groups. . . . We cannot afford to permit any preconceived prejudices or artificial hiring standards to interfere with the production of tanks, planes and guns." [11]

By mid-June, African American leaders were calling for a national campaign to protest the Army, Navy, government agencies, war industries, and labor unions. They planned rallies in New York and Chicago, and threatened a large-scale march on Washington if these inequities were not addressed.[12] Historian Carol Anderson, who has documented how labor problems rooted in racism and discrimination politicized the African American community during the war, quotes two leaders who used language that resonates strongly with Parks's image of Watson:

At the NAACP's national convention [in 1941], *Oklahoma Black Dispatch* editor Roscoe Dunjee challenged the American government to come up with something more original than the idea that African Americans were supposed to fight Hitler's army with only "a mop and a broom." Black government official Robert Weaver echoed that sentiment when he intoned that, "We cannot stop tanks with squads of janitors. We cannot blast the enemy with buckets of charwomen."[13]

If the visual rhetoric of Parks's photo echoes wartime debates about African American labor, it also draws on a long-standing iconographic tradition: The personification of the nation in the form of an allegorical female figure often wielding two staves or implements, accompanied by (or at times costumed in) the flag. Typically labeled "Columbia" or "Liberty," these characters circulated widely in popular culture from at least the nineteenth century and through the World War I era. By World War II, Uncle Sam had largely supplanted Liberty, but in July 1942—the month Parks was likely taking many of his photographs of Watson—the cover of *Vogue* revisited the tradition by featuring a model posed between two flagpoles, Old Glory billowing behind her. Parks's portrait of Watson takes the popular allegory and racially recasts it, transforming the symbol of a unified national identity into an exemplification of those who have been excluded from it.

Gordon Parks, *Government charwoman, Washington, D.C.*, August 1942. Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

But what of Watson's own role in the creation of these images? Looking at the entire body of photographs she made with Parks reveals the extent to which she was actively performing for his camera. Although the ostensible purpose of these pictures was to show the subject at work (a common FSA aim), one notes that Watson is often captured not working at all. There are a number of images of her sweeping or wetting a sponge at a sink, but in the most memorable examples, she's posing—more like a professional model in an artist's atelier than a worker busy on the night shift. While there are many reasons why Parks may have chosen Watson as a subject, one likely factor was her apparent willingness to collaborate with him. It's easy to imagine that others would have quickly tired of the exercise, not wanting to interrupt their long night's work to give the photographer time to set up, arrange the shot, and take his pictures. Watson was probably sympathetic to his goals. The two conversed at length, as is indicated by Parks's later recollections, as well as the captions he wrote at the time, which include information about her salary, work history, family, and daily routines.

Watson's posing was met, in turn, by Park's composing. In more than a few images, the photographer made choices regarding lighting and other details that call attention to the artifice of these scenes, perhaps in a bid to undermine their claims to documentary veracity. In one picture of Watson pushing a broom, a beam of light shoots across the floor at a dramatic and improbably low angle.14 In others, Parks leaves his lighting gear in frame: a bulb is propped against a trash can, or a lamp cord snakes along the carpet. Indeed, Parks foregrounds the workings of photography throughout his collaboration with Watson, casting it as a highly mediated form.

A series of four photographs Parks took at the apartment Watson was then sharing with her adopted daughter and three small children reveals the extent to which he was carefully staging his pictures. These images—three shot in a horizontal format, one shot vertically—capture the family at mealtime. Considered in sequence, the photos show how Parks arranged and rearranged the room to achieve the compositions he desired: The children's small table is moved; a framed picture on the dressing table changes position; the teenager, reflected in the mirror, shifts her pose.

Gordon Parks, *Government charwoman, Washington, D.C.*, August 1942. Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

One photograph in this sequence stands out, achieving what Parks was, I think, truly after. To my mind, it should be as well known and as widely reproduced as the iconic image of Watson standing before the flag. In it, Watson and the children are framed within the kitchen doorway, the baby squirming on her knee. Either because of a shift in the photographer's position, or due to an adjustment of his lighting setup, there is a subtle yet consequential difference between this and the other versions: The light bounces off the mirror in such a way as to make the teenager's reflection appear fogged, less distinct. The result is a composition containing three separate framing elements—the doorframe, the mirror, and the picture on the dressing table—each conveying a different mode of pictorial representation. Watson and the children are viewed directly through the doorway; the teenager appears as a reflection within the mirror, its hazy surface lending the impression of a memory or dream; and the studio portrait of an African American couple in their Sunday best (variously identified either as Watson and her husband, or as a portrait of her parents) is presented as a picture within a picture.

Gordon Parks, *Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman dressing her grandchildren, Washington, D.C.,* August 1942. Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

Parks's image offers not only three modes of depiction but also three corresponding distinctions in the subjects' address to the photographer. In the framed photo, husband and wife face the camera and adopt formal poses, as is customary in studio portraits. Their deportment contrasts with both that of the seated teenager, who looks down as if lost in thought, and of Watson, who, caught up in her caregiving responsibilities, directs her attention to her young charges. If the picture functions as a complex meditation on the workings of photographic representation, it also raises questions about the role of authority and consent in the practice of photography in general: What exchange or agreement between photographer and subject led to the image? To what degree were the depicted individuals allowed to determine how they presented themselves to the camera? That such concerns were on Parks's mind is made even more evident when we consider that, in capturing Watson and the children within the doorway, his photograph reiterates

the figural grouping of another iconic FSA image that he surely knew: Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* of 1936. In both cases, a woman is flanked by two small children as she holds a baby on her lap.

Lange has been criticized for maintaining the anonymity of her subject, who is cast not as an individual but as a symbol—of poverty, of suffering, of maternal concern. Indeed, Lange would later confess, "I did not ask her name or her history." (Decades later, the woman was identified by a journalist as Florence Owens Thompson.[15]) Spending time with Watson and her family and including her name and other pertinent details of her life in his captions were ways for Parks to avoid rendering Watson similarly anonymous, and thus to challenge some of the presumptions implicated in the FSA's brand of documentary photography. Another way to accomplish the latter was to compose an image that, as we've seen with his picture of her household, interrogates the codes and conventions of photographic representation from within.

Gordon Parks, *Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman and her grandchildren, Washington, D.C.,* August 1942. Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection.

Whatever the depth of his collaboration with Watson, there was still a point at which Parks had to pack up his equipment and go home. So who was she, apart from these photographs? Until recently, the generally available public record of her life has been limited to Parks's recollections and the information included in his captions. To learn more about Watson, I turned to the National Archives and Records Administration, which retains official personnel folders of federal workers employed between 1850 and 1951, and holds three employment files for her: one from the State Department, where she served as a temporary employee around 1919; one from the Post Office Department, where she worked in the 1920s; and one from the Treasury Department, her place of employment from 1929 through 1944. Various documents list her birth date in late March of 1883, which means that she was fifty-nine years old when Parks photographed her.[16] They also tell us that she was born in Washington, DC, that she left school in 1898, when she would have been about fifteen, and that same year went to work ironing at the Frazee Laundry in Washington.[17] The files also contain a photograph of Watson, likely a picture she submitted with an employment application. On the back of the photo, she inscribed her name in careful, looping cursive.

A recent interview with several of her surviving relatives—two granddaughters, Audrey Johnson and Sharon Stanley, and one great-granddaughter, Rosslyn Samuels—has provided additional information about her later years.[18] Her family members spoke of her strong religious beliefs, which were evidenced in Parks's pictures of her worshipping at St. Martin's Spiritual Church, as well as in the devotional imagery displayed in her home. They talked of her daily habit of reading the newspaper, documented in a Parks photograph of her with the paper spread out on a bed. And they described her as a loving, nurturing presence, the matriarch of several generations of an extended family.

A household flood destroyed most of the family's photographs of Watson, but fortunately a few survive. One shows her at a church event, wearing the white robes of a deaconess. She sits at a table, a half-filled glass of water before her. She appears lost in thought, unconcerned with the goings-on around her. An intimate family snapshot, it offers a view of her later in life, decades after her encounter with Parks. On Monday, April 7, 1980, the *Washington Star*, a now-shuttered daily newspaper, published two notices of her death; she had passed away the previous Thursday at Prince George's Hospital convalescent home. She was survived, it was reported, by six grandchildren, twenty-one great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. According to the record preserved in her family Bible, Ella Watson was ninety-seven years old when she died.

Gordon Parks, *Dinner time at the home of Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman, Washington, D.C.,* August 1942.
Credit Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI

In the course of a life lived for almost a century, the time she spent with Gordon Parks was but a momentary episode. Nonetheless, the two of them, working together, managed to create something noteworthy, a body of profound and purposeful images that continue to reveal themselves to us.

Michael Lobel is a Professor of Art History at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY.

NOTES

1. For a chronology of the FSA Historical Section, see Annette Melville, *Farm Security Administration Historical Section: A Guide to Textual Records in the Library of Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1985), 9.

2. "Reporter with a Camera," *Ebony*, July 1946, 24–29.

3. "Reporter with a Camera," 28.

4. "Reporter with a Camera," 28.

5. "Reporter with a Camera," 28.

6. Robeson's visit to Washington, DC, was prompted by the nation's involvement in World War II, as he was there to perform for the Russian War Relief drive, one of a number of efforts to raise funds for medical supplies to be sent to the Eastern Front. "Diverse Groups Pool Effort for Russian Relief," *Washington Post*, June 28, 1942.

7. Parks's original caption, from the typed list held by the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, indicates that he captured this photo of a sign "on *Alabama* Avenue, near Frederick Douglass Housing Project." However, in the FSA editing process, the word *near* was removed.

8. See, for instance, images by Hyman Warsager and Julius Bloch, and the cover to the 1935 exhibition catalogue *Struggle for Negro Rights*, as reproduced in Helen Langa, "Two Antilynching Art Exhibitions: Politicized Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, Gendered Constraints," *American Art* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 10–39. Other examples include Jacob Lawrence's *Another cause was lynching. It was found that where there had been a lynching, the people who were reluctant to leave at first left immediately after this. There were lynchings.* panel from his 1940–41 "Migration" series, and Lamar Baker's 1936–37 etching *Fright*.

9.The earliest published instance of the *American Gothic* titling for Parks's photo I've been able to find is from 1980. See, for instance, Marian Christy, "A Date with Fame," *Boston Globe*, January 27, 1980. On at least one earlier occasion, Parks did mention Woods's painting in relation to his portrait of Watson (although not by name), when he described how he stood [Watson] up with her mop hanging down with the American flag hanging down Grant Wood style and did this marvelous portrait, which Stryker thought it was just

about the end." Oral history interview with Gordon Parks, December 30, 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

10. This is the phrasing used in Parks's original caption, from the typed list held by the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Other instances, including the current Library of Congress online entry, list the title as *Washington, D.C. Government charwoman.* 11. Frank J. McSherry, "Manpower Problems and the War Effort," July 7, 1942, quoted in *Vital Speeches of the Day* 8, no. 22 (1942): 702, in "Preventing Labor Discrimination During World War II, 1942," History Now, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/world-war-ii/resources/preventing-labor-discrimination-during-world-war-ii-1942, accessed July 18, 2018. See also "War Industry Will Induct 20 Million During 1942–43," *Washington Pos*t, July 8, 1942.

12. Led by such figures as A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the movement was supported by the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Harlem branches of the YMCA and the YWCA, and other organizations. See "Negroes to Fight Employment Bias," *New York Times*, June 13, 1942, and "10,000 Negroes Hear Appeal to Ban Color Line," *Chicago Tribune*, June 27, 1942.

13. Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

14. The scholar Nicholas Natanson quotes African American photographer Robert McNeill commenting on Parks's unconventional approach to lighting: "Gordon was doing so many things that were different [in 1942–43]. I remember seeing him covering a Howard University commencement, and even the other black photographers who were there were saying, 'Who is that crazy [guy]?' I mean, Gordon would use four flashbulbs for a single shot, outdoors where he could have gotten away without using any. He wasn't content just to stand up and take shots from a position that was comfortable for him—he lay on the ground, he shot up, he shot down." Nicholas Natanson, *The Black Image in the New Deal: The Politics of FSA Photography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 266.

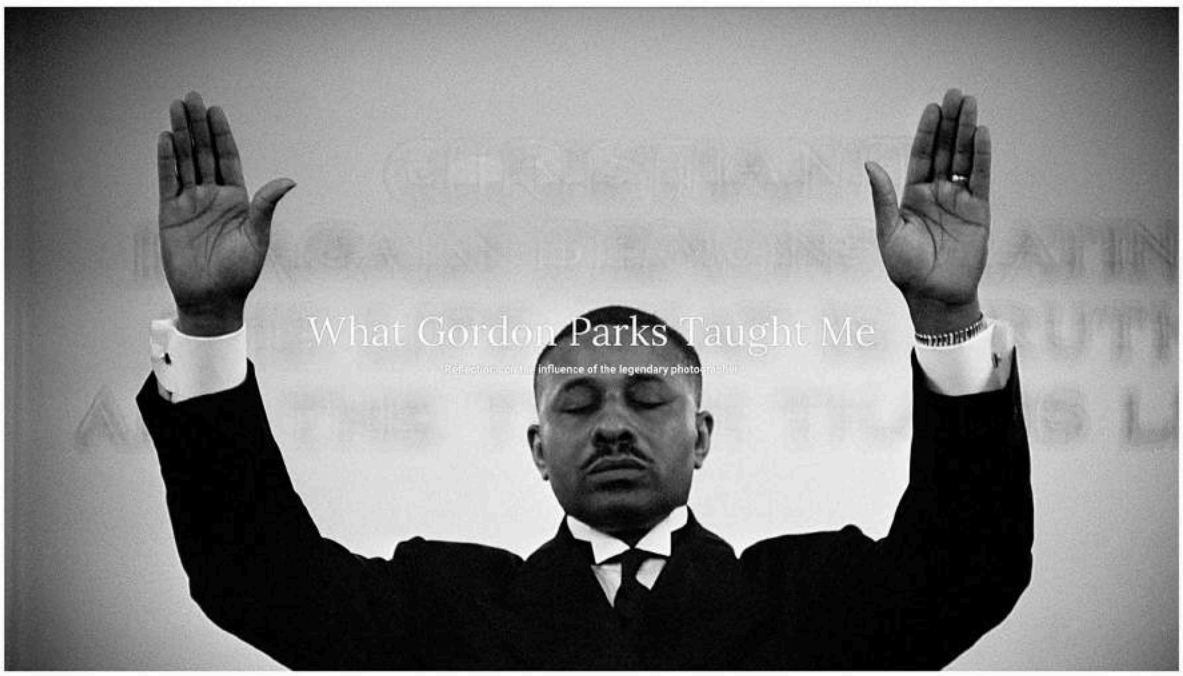
15. Dorothea Lange, “The Assignment I’ll Never Forget: Migrant Mother,” *Popular Photography*, February 1960, 42–43, quoted in Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1. On the identification of Florence Owens Thompson, see “Never Saw a Cent from Photo: ‘Migrant Mother’ Feels Exploited,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1978.

16. There is some ambiguity in the files about Watson’s actual date of birth; at times it is given as March 27, 1883, at others as March 29. Letters in her Post Office and Treasury Department employment files also indicate a lack of clarity about the year, which was variously cited as 1882, 1884, or 1885. A letter sent by the US Civil Service Commission explains that the record of her birth was not preserved in any official documentation but rather in a family Bible. The letter, dated to May 2, 1927 and signed by John T. Doyle, commission secretary, states: “You are advised that on a personal visit to this office Mrs. Watson presented a family Bible, showing that she was born March 27, 1883. The Commission’s records are being changed to show that this is the date of her birth instead of 1884 or 1885 as previously given by her.” Ella Watson Official Personnel Folder, US Post Office Department, National Personnel Records Center, Archival Programs Division, National Archives at Saint Louis. A later (1936) letter from the Civil Service Commission in Watson’s Treasury Department file cites her birth date as March 27.

17. Application for Employment, August 28, 1940, Ella Watson Official Personnel Folder, US Department of the Treasury, National Personnel Records Center, Archival Programs Division, National Archives at Saint Louis. On the application, Watson indicated that she had an earlier course of employment at the Treasury Department, from 1919 to 1922.

18. Interview of Audrey Johnson, Sharon Stanley, and Rosslyn Samuels by ~~Michael Lobel~~ and Philip Brookman, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, August 31, 2017.

TIME



What Gordon Parks Taught Me

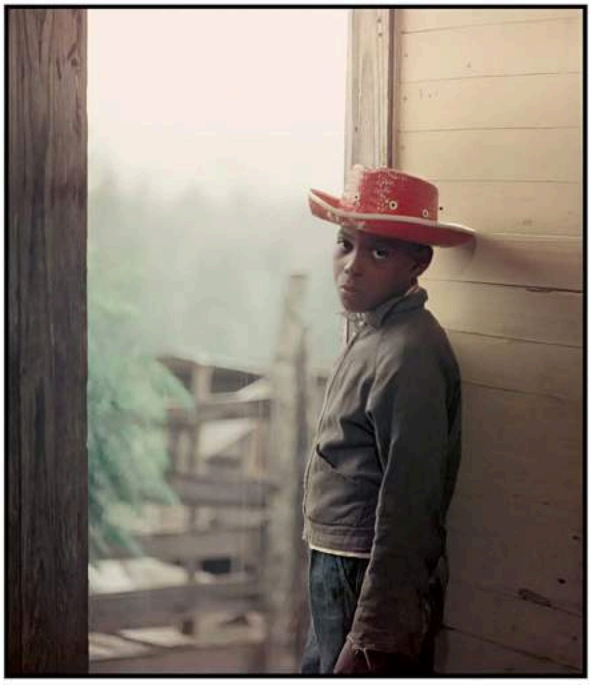
Reflections on the influence of the legendary photographer

The opening of a new exhibition of work by the late photographer Gordon Parks offers a chance to reflect on some of Parks' most iconic imagery relating to civil rights. In collaboration with the Gordon Parks Foundation, 'I Am You | Part 2' opened at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York on Feb. 15 and focuses on work from the late 1940s through the '60s. TIME asked Andre D. Wagner, a contemporary artist and photographer who has been influenced by that work, to discuss how Parks affected his own path.

By **ANDRE D. WAGNER**

During my freshman year of college, I was looking for easy classes to take so I could spend the maximum amount of time on the basketball court. Among them was a film photography course. After barely getting through the class, I thought I'd never think about a 35mm camera again.

That is, until six years later, after I moved to New York City to pursue my master's degree in social work. Since I was from Omaha and had gone to college in Iowa, the energy of the city turned my world upside-down. Even though I was oblivious to the history of photography and the potential power of the medium, I was drawn to pick up a camera.



Untitled, Shady Grove, Alabama, 1956. Gordon Parks/Courtesy of and Copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

Untitled, Washington D.C., 1963. Gordon Parks/Courtesy of and Copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

One day, a friend gave me an old beat-up library copy of *Voices in the Mirror: An Autobiography* by Gordon Parks. As soon as I started reading, I couldn't put it down.

Chapter after chapter, I continued to relate to Parks' story and struggle. His path of falling into photography and wanting more out of his life than what was thought to be possible resonated with me immediately.

Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1948. Gordon Parks/Courtesy of and Copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

Red Jackson, Harlem, New York, 1948. Gordon Parks/Courtesy of and Copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

Parks, as a photojournalist, chronicled the civil rights era among countless assignments for *LIFE*. His photographs are documentary by nature, but a lot of the beauty in his work comes from his recognition of what's hidden in plain sight. It's the dignity of the people that he was able to capture and his ability to get below the skin that made his pictures undeniable. Parks gave us something only he could give us, and that's been a huge lesson and revelation for me on my path.

Through Parks' work and life, I started to understand my own strength and potential. And, maybe most importantly, I realized that if my photography were going to mean anything it would be on the basis of how intelligently it could engage with current times.

Bushwick, Brooklyn, 2014. Andre D. Wagner

Bushwick, Brooklyn, 2014. Andre D. Wagner

I've only been photographing seriously for about six years, the same amount of time I've lived in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bushwick. As a black man in dialogue with this community, and given my social work background and Midwest upbringing, I understood that I had a responsibility to the people who had already been here.

I may not follow Parks' photojournalistic approach, but my commitment to communicating through pictures is informed by the documentary aesthetic. My images showcase the movement of everyday life, and the people and places within that flow. But my subjectivity is part of the work as well.

Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, 2014. Andre D. Wagner

Bushwick, Brooklyn, 2016. Andre D. Wagner

Parks was and always will be in a league of his own. Making history in photography is a feat for anyone, let alone a black man in his era. He broke down barriers and cemented himself in books and museums without pause. When I think about Parks' story and his life's work, I'm inspired to keep going.

As a black artist, I'm working on paying my dues and will hopefully move the bar forward—building on the legacy of his brilliance, dedication and commitment to social justice. At times, the path of artistic pursuits may feel unclear, but Gordon Parks has proven that it's a life worth living.

By the time I finished the book, the camera in my life started to make sense when I thought about it the way Parks did: I could use it "as a weapon."

The camera became more than a tool to make ends meet, and photography became more than just pretty pictures—it was a way to be defiant and to speak about society. It's not lost on me that it was through his own humanity that Parks found his way. More than 20 years later, his words encouraged me to find my own.

Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, 2016. Andre D. Wagner

Andre D. Wagner is a contemporary artist and photographer, based in Brooklyn. Follow him on Instagram @photodre.

GORDON PARKS: I AM YOU (PARTS 1 AND 2)

In The Menu., Visual Arts. by L. Brandon Krall / March 8, 2018

What I want. What I am. What you force me to be is what you are. For I am you staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom. Look at me and know that to destroy me is to destroy yourself.

Born in 1912 in rural Kansas, Gordon Parks and his siblings were orphaned when he was 14 years old. He was sent to live with relatives and left them a year later; a teenage man on his own in the segregated and racist world of mid-western America at the brink of the Depression. Parks' natural abilities in the arts (later he became a filmmaker and composer), enabled him at a young age to recognize photography as the most important tool he could use to convey his vision. The first African-American photographer to work for *Life* magazine and at the height of its influence, Parks' photojournalism addressed and exposed the stark realities of racism, segregation and poverty in America. Parks also photographed for *Vogue* and other fashion magazines. His ongoing portraiture is exceptional, capturing Iman brilliantly, Mohammed Ali off-guard and he captured iconic portraits of Helen Frankenthaler and Alberto Giacometti.

His close associates included authors Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Malcolm X. Parks states the fundamental message that black Americans have been enslaved and treated as sub-human through segregation and the atrocities countenanced under racism, but the black American has always been integral to the identity of the United States as a whole. Gordon Parks' skills and his humanity enabled him to capture a wide arc of culture in America and Europe, keeping in balance portraiture, documentary coverage of civil rights issues and conditions, fine art and high fashion.

The images go deep and should be seen in person. Parks' well known, *American Gothic* shows the same woman posed with a broom and an American flag, who in another photograph can be seen in the process of sweeping; a graceful and restorative process. Portraits and fashion photographs, the latter taken using in an early color film that lends a certain quality to the images, can be completely iconic. Parks filmed Alberto Giacometti in black and white in his studio in Paris and Helen Frankenthaler in color in America in hers. A portrait of Mohammed Ali leaning casually off-guard in London, and a fashion shot of Iman in profile with an African sculpture at her back are not to be missed...

Gordon Parks: I Am You | Part 1 January 11th – February 10th, 2018
Gordon Parks: I Am You | Part 2 February 15th – March 24th, 2018

Jack Shainman Gallery
513 West 20th Street, New York NY

GORDON PARKS, *UNTITLED*, 1941
© GORDON PARKS. COURTESY OF THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

GORDON PARKS, *UNTITLED*, 1978
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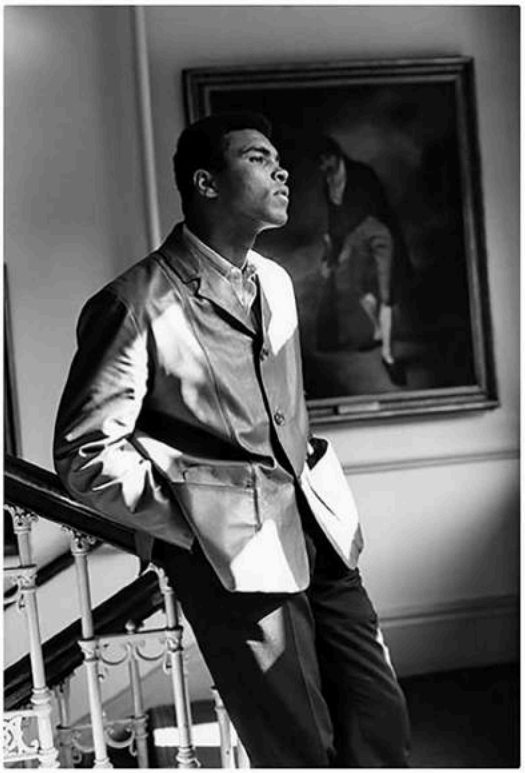
GORDON PARKS, *UNTITLED, PARIS, FRANCE*, 1951
© GORDON PARKS. COURTESY OF THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.



GORDON PARKS, *UNTITLED, LONDON, ENGLAND*, 1966
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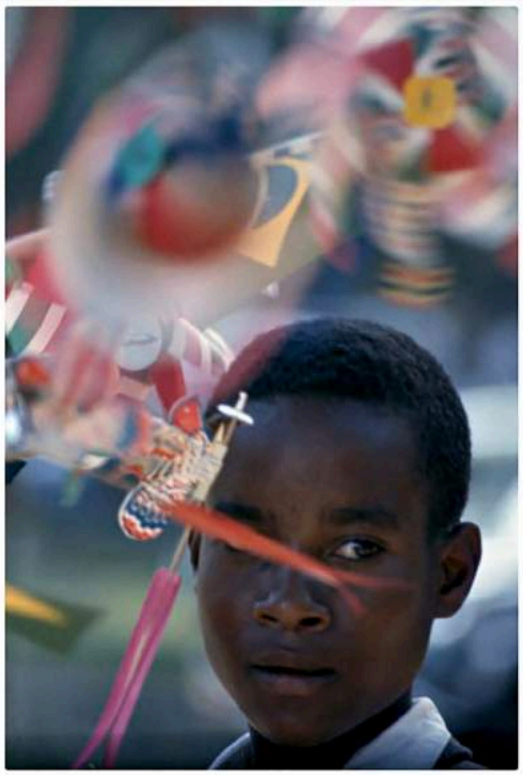


GORDON PARKS, *BOY AT CARNIVAL, FORT SCOTT, KANSAS, 1963*
© GORDON PARKS. COURTESY OF THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

GORDON PARKS, *ELLA WATSON SWEEPING, WASHINGTON, D.C.*, 1978
© GORDON PARKS. COURTESY OF THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

GORDON PARKS, *DEPARTMENT STORE, MOBILE, ALABAMA*, 1956
© GORDON PARKS. COURTESY OF THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

GORDON PARKS, *UNTITLED, SAN DIEGO*, 1959

ARTFORUM

Gordon Parks, *Untitled, Harlem, New York*, 1952, gelatin silver print, 20 x 16". © Gordon Parks/The Gordon Parks Foundation and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Gordon Parks

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | WEST 20TH STREET

In an untitled photograph from 1978, the model Iman casually rests her elbows on two tall stacks of ancient African artifacts. In another, from 1966, a young Muhammad Ali leans against a stairwell bannister in London, gazing intently toward the upper right-hand corner of the frame. In another still, from 1960, we see Duke Ellington through the television monitors of a recording studio. In 1957, the photographer Gordon Parks made a vivid color portrait of the painter Helen Frankenthaler, vamping for the camera on a drop cloth in her studio. In 1952, he shot the hand of Alexander Calder, reaching from the shadows to adjust one of his mobiles. A year earlier, he photographed Alberto Giacometti at work on his sculptures in his Paris atelier. Two years before that, he captured the eternal sadness of Ingrid Bergman, at a beach on the Italian island of Stromboli.

This show was the first in an ambitious two-part series of exhibitions delving into Parks's lesser-known works. It offered a tantalizing sampler of celebrity portraiture, theatrical fashion photography, gritty photojournalism, and, thanks to a pair of color composites from 1995, *Evening* and *Travelers*, a surprisingly formalist approach to almost total abstraction. More than a decade after his death, Parks is still best known for his documentary work with the Farm Security Administration and for the drama he captured in the emotional midcentury struggle for civil rights. In 1948, he was the first African American to be hired as a staff writer and photographer for *Life*, but well into the 1970s he was also working as a freelancer. He took all kinds of assignments on the side. Much of his freelance work was successful, such as his fashion photography for *Vogue*, for which he often used the architecture of New York as a prop—evinced in *Cocoon Cape, New York, New York,* from 1956, of a model posed between two men in tuxedos in front of the Flatiron Building. A few of Parks's extra assignments, however, ended in disaster. In 1948, he began a fruitful collaboration with the novelist Ralph Ellison. They worked together on "Harlem Is Nowhere," among other projects. But the magazine that had commissioned the piece went bankrupt before it was published. Ellison managed to wrestle back the rights to his essay, which ran in *Harper's Magazine* almost two decades later. But Parks never retrieved the full set of his photographs. They were most likely lost or destroyed in the legal dispute that followed the magazine's closure. Two photographs here—the abstract circles of *Sewer Pipes, Harlem*, from 1946, and *Untitled, Harlem, New York*, from 1952, showing an evocative row of abandoned shoes in the foreground, serve to memorialize that loss.

Later on, Parks wrote a novel, *The Learning Tree*, which was published in 1963. At the urging of John Cassavetes, he turned the book into a film, which premiered in 1969. It is considered the first Hollywood movie made by a black director, and it paved the way for *Shaft* and Parks's essential invention of the blaxploitation genre. When *The Learning Tree* came out, *Life* ran an excerpt with a series of photographs, including *Boy with June Bug, Fort Scott Canvas,* from 1963. The color image of a child lying in tall grass, holding on to a string tied to

an insect that sits on his forehead, is quiet and elusive and unlike anything else in the artist's oeuvre. Though less theatrical than, say, his black-and-white picture of young black Muslims praying in Brooklyn, *Boy with June Bug* is so full of narrative potential, so suggestive of cinematic time, that it seems to move like a dream, a premonition, a memory. It is a reminder of how well Parks could write, and how often his words went without credit in *Life*. The two-part show was named "I Am You" for the opening lines of an essay that ran with his pictures in 1968: "What I want. What I am. What you force me to be is what you are. For I am you, staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom. Look at me and know that to destroy me is to destroy yourself. You are weary of the long hot summers. I am tired of the long hungered winters. We are not so far apart as it might seem."

—*Kaelen Wilson-Goldie*

CNN style

Gordon Parks' cinematic photos captured the injustices of the civil rights era

Published 21st February 2018

Written by
Allyssia Alleyne, CNN

Credit: Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

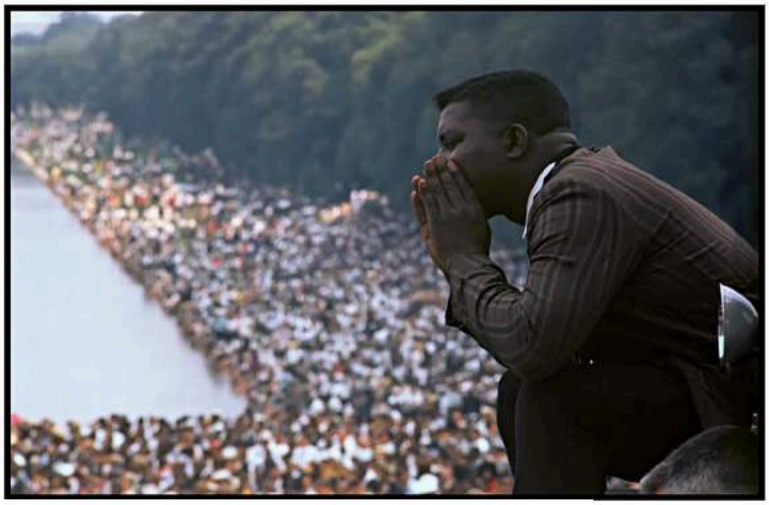
He photographed fashion for Vogue, directed the 1971 blaxploitation film "Shaft," composed orchestral scores, and wrote memoirs, novels and poems. But it was with his sensitive, insightful documentary photos of black America that Gordon Parks made himself one of the 20th century's most important cultural figures.

It's this contribution that New York's Jack Shainman Gallery is revisiting with "Gordon Parks: I am You | Part 2." The exhibition follows a month-long look at look at the photographer's lesser known work with portraiture and fashion photography.

"Department Store, Mobile, Alabama" (1956) Credit: Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Born in Fort Scott, Kansas, Parks worked his way from advertising and portrait gigs in Saint Paul, Minnesota and Chicago to an apprenticeship with the Farm Security Administration and, in the mid-1940s, a post as Vogue's first black photographer.

In 1948, he made history again when he became the first black staff photographer at Life magazine, a position he would hold for two decades. He would go on to fill the magazine's pages with photo essays of black life in the segregated south as well as northern states. Eventually, he would photograph the great leaders of the civil rights era, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver, and those who rallied behind them.



"Untitled, Washington, D.C." (1963) Credit: Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

"(Parks) went through so much scrutiny as a African-American photographer and as an African-American in general, and wanted to have his voice heard," Peter W. Kunhardt Jr., executive director of the Gordon Parks Foundation, said in a phone interview. "He felt that, by picking up a camera and using his creative works, he could tell a story and show the injustices of America."

It would seem that, in the current political moment, his work has taken new urgency. According to Kunhardt, the foundation has "absolutely" seen an increase in requests related to both exhibitions and education opportunities recently. (The Foundation offers scholarships and fellowship opportunities, and hosts education programs.)

"Gordon's now been dead for 12 years, and I'm certain that if you were still around he would say that that that dialogue has to continue on today, and that's what we're doing with the foundation," said Kunhardt.

"His fight was never over and his struggle to end racial segregation and the ability for everyone's voice to be heard would be louder right now given what's happening in this country right now. This struggle is not over."

"Doll Test, Harlem, New York" (1947) Credit: Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Last summer, 12-time Grammy-winner Kendrick Lamar reinforced the point when he recreated scenes from some of Parks' most memorable photos in the video for his single "ELEMENT." For two and a half months, stills from the video were on displayed alongside the images that inspired them at the Gordon Parks Foundation headquarters in Pleasantville, New York.

Kunhardt, who considers Lamar a "friend of the foundation," called the rapper's appropriation a work of "pure genius and creativity." (Lamar will host the Foundation's annual awards gala with Alicia Keys and producer Swizz Beatz later this year.)

"Untitled, Harlem, New York" (1963) Credit: Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

"What he did in his appropriations, you couldn't have commissioned someone to do that. He was taking Gordon as a legendary figure in the African-American historical context and using him in such a contemporary way that brought millions and millions of eyes to him that would not necessarily have ever known who Gordon Parks was," Kunhardt said.

"There are so many contemporary artists -- and I don't just mean painters and sculptors, but I also mean musicians and choreographers to poets and writers -- who are doing their work today because of what Gordon was able to pave the way to. And they feel so strongly that that Gordon needs to be honored and recognized for having a voice at a time where that voice was much harder to have heard."

"Gordon Parks: I am You | Part 2" is on at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York until March 24, 2017.

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

The Lesser-Known Photos of Gordon Parks, from Fashion to Artists' Portraits

A two-part exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery sheds light on relatively obscure works by the master photographer, from colorful fashion imagery to portraits of Muhammad Ali, Helen Frankenthaler, and others.

Ilana Novick Feb 5, 2018

Gordon Parks, "Untitled, San Diego, California," (1959), archival pigment print, 20 x 16 in, edition 2 of 15, + 3 APs
(all images courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation unless indicated otherwise)

A perplexed giraffe peers from behind a woman bundled in a purple printed headscarf. She's holding an umbrella, whose pattern of brown shapes framed by yellow borders mimics that of the animal. Photographer Gordon Parkscaptured the giraffe mid side-eyed glance, as if it's thinking, "who is this woman and why is she stealing my look?" In a nearby image, a woman

wearing a tiered wedding cake of a red ball gown, her diamond barrette like frosting, nestles into her date. They're standing in the middle of busy Park Avenue, but they might as well be the only two people in the world.

Parks, who was the first black photographer on staff at both *Vogue*and *Life* magazines, is best known for the photo essays he shot for the latter, where, wielding the camera that he referred to as his "choice of weapon," he created searing portraits of black life in the years before and during the Civil Rights movement. The aforementioned photos — "Untitled, San Diego, California" (1959), and "Evening Wraps" (1956) — are just two examples of a lesser-known facet of Parks's practice, one that included fashion and event photography, as well as portraits of artist friends that were as slyly funny as they were intimate. All of these are included in *Gordon Parks: I Am You*, a two-part exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, the first installment of which showcases Parks as fashion and fine art photographer.

The same incisive eye that captured, in saturated color, the indignity of waiting in line to drink from a water fountain, while another, labeled "white only" sat unused, infuriatingly out of reach, also shot fashion editorials and portraits of artist friends like Alberto Giacometti and Helen Frankenthaler. Parks also did street style photography long before the current crop of influencers could hold a camera. His camera-weapon could document it all, with intimacy, sharpness, and occasionally, humor.

The show begins with playfully, with black-and-white glimpses of Giacometti interacting with his long-limbed sculptures. In "Falling Man, Paris, France" (1956), a single, seemingly disembodied hand reaches out to Giacometti's skeletal, sculptural figure, evoking Michaelangelo's "The Creation of Adam." Parks uses the sculptures' outstretched limbs to frame Giacometti, who sits beneath them. He looks in awe of, and dwarfed by, his creations. His 1959 portrait of painter Helen Frankenthaler follows a similar pattern. Frankenthaler sits in between her giant canvases, smaller and out of focus, where her work is bright and colorful, commanding the space.

By contrast, nothing overshadows Eartha Kitt. In “Eartha Kitt Performs at The Blue Angel” (1952), Kitt, in shimmering satin, sings, one hand on her hip, the other held up as if to say “stop.”The audience is hidden, but there’s no doubt they’re entirely under Kitt’s control.

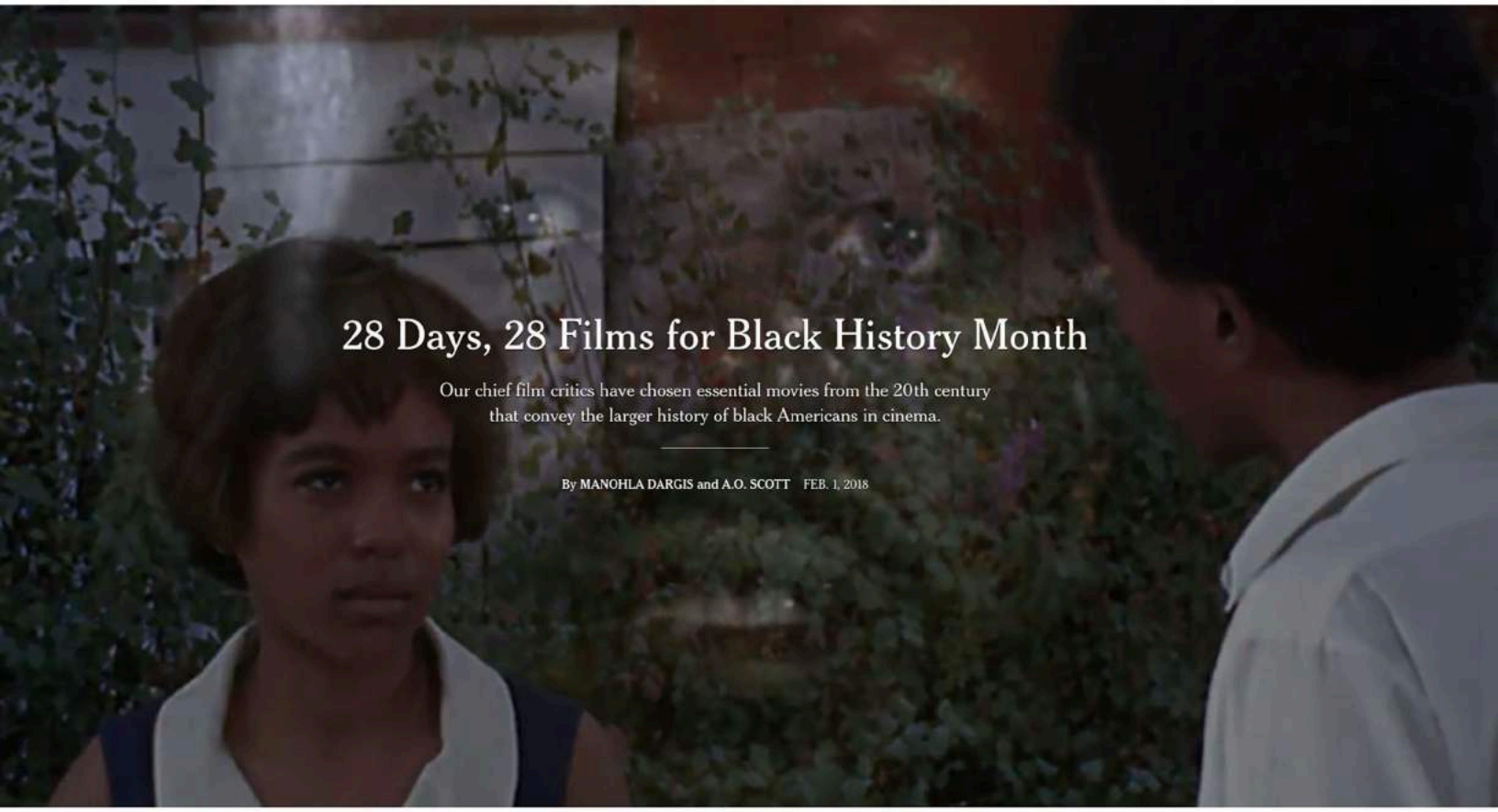
Parks is a master of angles, conjuring emotion through geometry, whether it’s Kitt, or the anonymous woman in “Untitled, Chicago, Illinois” (1950). She leans at a window, holding a cigarette and leaning toward the street, face directly in the light, arms bent. Her eyes are pointed toward something we can’t see. Parks leaves just enough mystery to make me long to know what the smoking woman was looking at and thinking about, and wondering how she got in the perfect frame.

The same attention to position at framing is on display in “Toni Riddleberger Talks About a Boyfriend” (1951). In it, Riddleberger hangs off an armchair, enveloped in a blanket of black and white light, while she talks on a rotary phone. She’s facing downward, so her expression is hidden; only the sculptural waves of her hair are visible, her body framed by the back of the chair, and the white light streaming from the french doors next to her. The pose felt achingly familiar, conjuring memories of perching on my own teenage bed, toward a landline on the floor.

The photo captures intimacy without intrusion, a through-line of Parks’s practice that connects the seemingly different sides of his work, from fashion and performance photography to his photojournalism. That work taught America uncomfortable lessons about itself, bringing the realities of racism and poverty into the living rooms of people who would have preferred to bask in the glow of post-World War II American supremacy. Parks’s fashion photography, while less well-known, is just as revealing.

Gordon Parks, I Am You, Part 1 *runs through February 10 at Jack Shainman Gallery (524 West 24th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan).* Gordon Parks, I Am You, Part 2 *opens February 15 and runs through March 24.*

The New York Times



28 Days, 28 Films for Black History Month

Our chief film critics have chosen essential movies from the 20th century that convey the larger history of black Americans in cinema.

By MANOHLA DARGIS and A.O. SCOTT FEB. 1, 2018

IT HAS BEEN ALMOST A YEAR since Barry Jenkins's "Moonlight" won the Oscar for best picture. This awards season, Jordan Peele's "Get Out" and Dee Rees's "Mudbound" have received multiple nominations and accolades, optimistic signs that black filmmakers are receiving more opportunities in the movie industry. Soon these titles will be joined by two of the most anticipated releases of the year: Ryan Coogler's "Black Panther," the first Marvel superhero movie from a black director, and Ava DuVernay's "A Wrinkle in Time," the first movie with a $100 million budget directed by a black woman.

The critical and box-office success of "Get Out" and the very existence of big-studio productions like "Black Panther" are good reasons to revisit the remarkable, complex story of black filmmaking in America. For Black History Month, we have selected 28 essential films from the 20th century pertaining to African-American experiences. These aren't the 28 essential black-themed films, but a calendar of suggested viewing. We imposed a chronological cutoff in an effort to look back at where we were and how we got to here.

We begin in the 1920s with Oscar Micheaux (1884-1951), a novelist and bold, prolific independent filmmaker. Micheaux along with black directors like Spencer Williams made "race movies," low-budget films with all-black casts for black audiences (some from white producers). During the Jim Crow era, the color line ran through movies, including into segregated theaters, and most Hollywood films depicting black life were produced by whites, including musicals, like "Cabin in the Sky," with all-black casts of well-known singers, dancers and musicians. From the early 1930s to the late '50s, the mainstream industry's Production Code specifically banned representations of sexual relations between black and white people.

When African-Americans in Hollywood were not singing or dancing, they were often cast as maids, butlers, porters or other servile, peripheral figures. There are exceptions, including "Imitation of Life," a 1930s melodrama with a storyline about a black character who "passes" for white, as well as "Intruder in the Dust," a 1940s parable of white conscience. Both are worth viewing because of the power and integrity of their featured black actors — Louise Beavers, Fredi Washington and Juano Hernandez — who with the humanity of their performances challenge and movingly subvert the mainstream industry's racism.

Race movies disappeared shortly after World War II, and soon the mainstream industry turned toward social issues. Yet even as the civil rights movement gathered force, black characters and their experiences were seen through a white lens, often myopically. Consider this sobering fact: Between 1948 (when Micheaux's last film appeared) and 1969 (when Gordon Parks's "The Learning Tree" arrived on the big screen), almost no movies directed by African-Americans were released commercially in the United States.

Our selections for subsequent decades are exclusively the work of black directors. For the later 20th century, we have chosen titles that represent waves and countercurrents: Blaxploitation, the independent film scenes in Los Angeles and New York in the '70s and '80s, the flowering of commercial and independent movies in the '90s. There are comedies and crime stories, historical epics and slices of ordinary life, socially conscious dramas and sublimely silly comedies. Taken together, they do not offer a unified theory of African-Americans in cinema, but a great multiplicity.

Warner Bros.

The Learning Tree

Directed by Gordon Parks, 1969

The moment that Parks — the photographer, novelist and filmmaker — called "action" on "The Learning Tree," he broke decades of Hollywood apartheid. With this delicate memory film (and the backing of Warner Brothers), Parks became the first African-American director of a major studio production. Based on Parks's novel of the same title, it tracks the coming of age of his adolescent surrogate, Newt Winger, in a rural 1920s Kansas that is by turns paradisiacal and terrifying. Filled with lilting visual beauty and spiked with instances of abrupt barbarism — a white sheriff shoots two black men in the back and faces no consequences — the film paints a bittersweet, richly textured and plangent picture of a young man whose life is irrevocably defined if never circumscribed by the color line. — Manohla Dargis

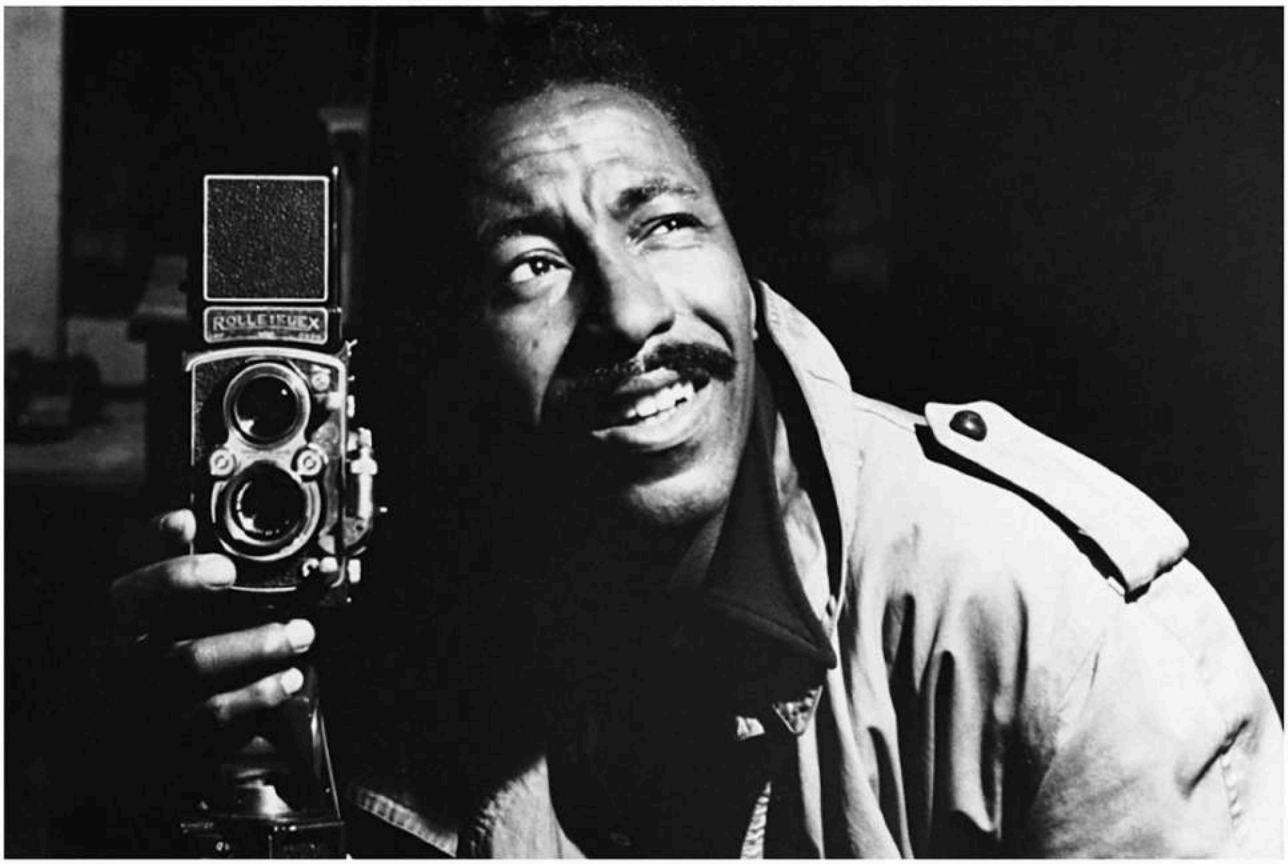
THE RAKE
THE MODERN VOICE OF CLASSIC ELEGANCE

ICONS / MARCH 2018

GORDON PARKS: THROUGH THE LENS

We examine the work – and exceptional style – of photographer, filmmaker, musician and writer Gordon Parks, whose legacy is being embraced by a new generation of influential artists.

by ED CRIPPS

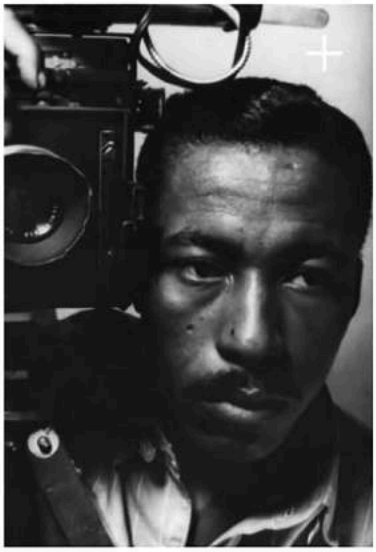


Photographer and filmmaker Gordon Parks wears a trench coat, fit with shoulder epaulettes and a turned-up collar, circa 1960.

A recent exhibition on the photographer and filmmaker Gordon Parks could not be better timed. At New York's Jack Shainman Gallery through March, *Gordon Parks: I Am You Part 2* captures the undimmed relevance of a self-taught pioneer in whose slipstream have followed a generation of genre-resistant black artists. Rapper Kendrick Lamar recreated so many of Parks' photographs in the video for his song 'ELEMENT.' that a separate New York exhibition recently showcased the overlaps between the two. Why is Parks so influential, and how does his style stand up today?

The youngest of fifteen children, Parks grew up on a farm in Kansas, where he attended a segregated school and took an early job as a brothel pianist. Having bought a camera at a thrift store, he won a fellowship with the Farm Security Administration (FSA), a government programme aimed at combating poverty in rural America. His 1948 project on Harlem caught the eye of *Life*, who made him the first black staffer at a magazine with an almost exclusively white readership.

Parks' ability to frame the struggles of the black working-class in a visual grammar relatable to *Life*'s privileged audiences made a genuine social impact. 'American Gothic' (1942) reworked Grant Wood's painting of grim-faced white patriots to depict FSA cleaner Ella Watson with a mop and a broom in front of the national flag. A photo negative of the American Dream, it burnishes the exhaustion of a woman whose father and husband had been murdered with the anger of a photographer who had himself been refused service at a cinema, a restaurant and a coat shop earlier that day.



As Parks' prestige grew, so did his editorial control over the notes that accompanied the pictures. Compare the rewritten conservatism of *Harlem Gang Leader* (1948), a series Parks originally wanted to offer an open perspective on the possibility for redemption, to the more nuanced *The White Man's Day Is Almost Over* (1963), his essay on the Black Muslim community whose leader Malcolm X felt such a rapport he made Parks godfather to one of his children.

Though backlit with a harsh political reality, Parks' composition often drifts into the surreal: 'Doll Test' (1947) has an uneasy fairy-tale optimism; 'A Man Becomes Invisible' (1952) plunges the hero of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* into a manhole underground; in 'Boy With June Bug' (1963), a boy dozes in a field as a tethered insect tied crawls on his face, an image one critic interpreted as Gordon's own life story.

Parks transitioned seamlessly into high fashion and became *Vogue*'s first black photographer (another echo with today, as British *Vogue*'s first black editor Edward Enninful seeks to recalibrate the magazine's racial focus). In his 1990 autobiography *Voices In The Mirror*, Parks said of *Vogue*: "I studied the names of its famous photographers – Steichen, Blumenfeld, Horst, Beaton, Hoyningen-Huené, thinking meanwhile that my own name could look quite natural among them." Undaunted by celebrities, he photographed Iman, Muhammad Ali, Ingrid Bergman, Duke Ellington, Eartha Kitt and the sculptor Giacometti, though he grew impatient with the entitled whims of the models.

His cinematic career showed a similar duality to his photographs. He became the first black artist to produce and direct a major Hollywood film with *The Learning Tree* (1969), an adaptation of his autobiographical 1963 novel about a young man coming of age in 1920s Kansas (Parks also wrote the music and the script). Very different though just as symbolic, *Shaft* (1971) reappropriated black stereotypes with a leather-jacketed swagger complemented by Isaac Hayes' score, a counterpoint to Sidney Poitier's idealised doctors and teachers. A sometime poet, jazz pianist, abstract painter and classical composer, Parks also wrote *Martin*, a ballet tribute to Martin Luther King.

SAVINELLI
Large Smooth Brown Briar Wood Pipe

$5,460

RUBINACCI
Navy Double-Breasted Cashmere Jacket

$1,910

NAKED CLOTHING
White Short Sleeve Pique Cotton Polo Shirt

$135

In private, he shared the elegance, modernity and rigour of his work. His dress sense was an extension of his artistic versatility, a mix of casualwear (roll necks, trench coats and chore coats similar to Shaft himself) and more formal dress, often accessorised with a pipe. Between three marriages, he romanced heiress Gloria Vanderbilt and *Sex and the City* creator Candace Bushnell (she was 18, he 58).

Since his death at the age of 93 in 2006, Parks' influence has been palpable in some of the most urgent art of today. In Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (which won the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay this year), Daniel Kaluuya's photographer Chris recalls Parks himself, just as the metaphor of the "Sunken Place" rhymes with Parks' Invisible Manhole-underground. There's a shadow of *The Learning Tree*'s poetic deconstruction of burgeoning black masculinity in *Moonlight*, and the moral ambiguity of Mahershala Ali's drug-dealing surrogate father figure in the ambivalence of Parks' work on gangs. *Shaft*, an early black superhero of sorts, prefigures *Black Panther*. Parks' closest kindred spirit might be Donald Glover, a cross-form prodigy whose masterful TV series *Atlanta* returned last week. In a recent New Yorker profile, Glover put forward the paradox that "blackness is always seen through a lens of whiteness", but that now white America likes seeing itself through a black lens.

For the age of Trump and Black Lives Matter, it's apt and exhilarating that the same individual could inspire such different artists. In the notes to his 1967 project on the Fontanelles, Parks defined himself through his audience: "What I want. What I Am. What you force me to be is what you are. For I am you, staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom. Look at me and know that to destroy me is to destroy yourself." Twelve years later in his memoir *To Smile in Autumn*, he acknowledged a porous mystique: "I've disappeared into myself so many different ways that I don't know who 'me' is." Enigmatic, decorous, reflective, Gordon Parks is a double master of blackness through a white lens and whiteness through a black lens, the invisible man as unforgettable icon.

Wearing a navy overcoat with a brown fur lining and neck scarf, Parks celebrates with fellow photographers following a portrait session featuring himself and 100 other prominent African-American photographers in Harlem, New York, 2002. Photograph by Suzanne Plunkett / Associated Press.

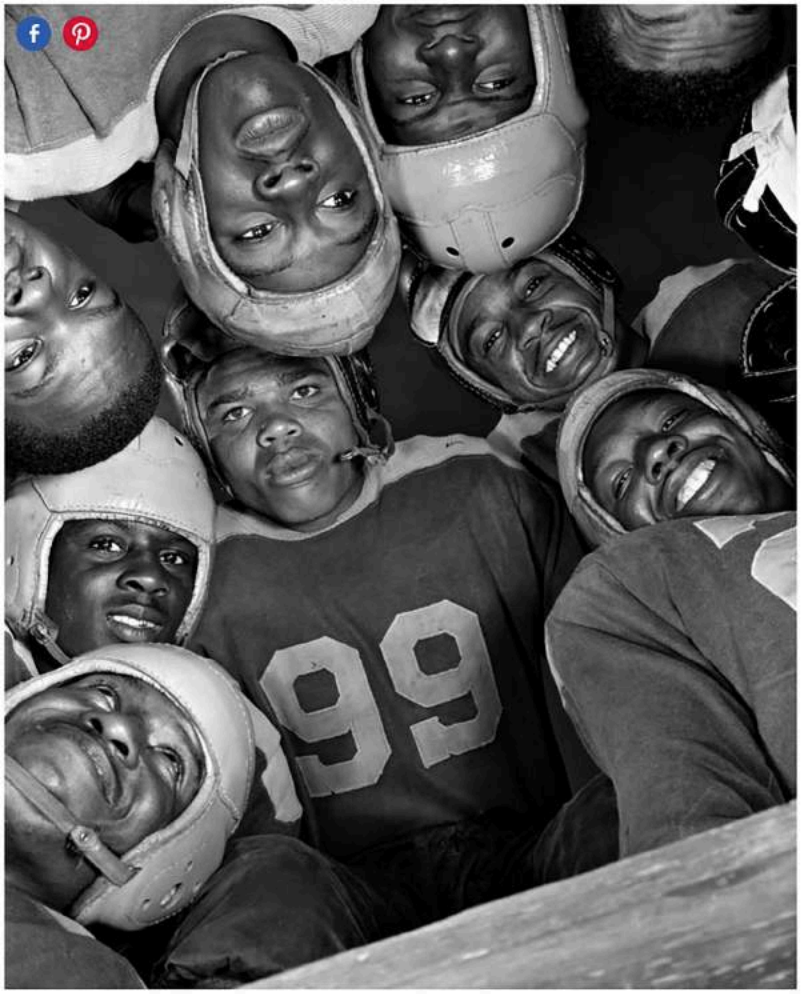
BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Gordon Parks's Pictures Run Through the Subconscious of Black America

The late Harlem photographer Gordon Parks never shied from puncturing a black cultural stereotype or a black American icon. When Muhammad Ali died in 2016, the *New York Times* in their obituary ran not the famous photo of the champ standing in triumph over a fallen opponent, but Parks's intense, vulnerable close-up of Ali's sweating face during a training session—a champ, and a man, in progress. When Parks made his 1971 film *Shaft*, some dismissed it as "blaxpoitation," but its empowered black action hero was trailblazing, not to mention that Parks was the first black director to make a Hollywood movie. These images and many more that are now iconic—think of the Harlem photographs of the Fontanelle family in *Life*, a deliberate provocation of racist white America, or his portraits in the Deep South—are part of black history now because Parks embedded himself deep in it. Here, revisit some of Parks's famous images in honor of Black History Month. But, really, they're always there right beneath the surface waiting to bubble up, as they did in Kendrick Lamar's 2017 music video for "ELEMENT.", which recreates slides 1 and 9—and the entire essence of Parks's work.

by Wmag
February 1, 2018 2:52 pm

1/14 Black Muslim Women, Chicago, Illinois, 1963. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

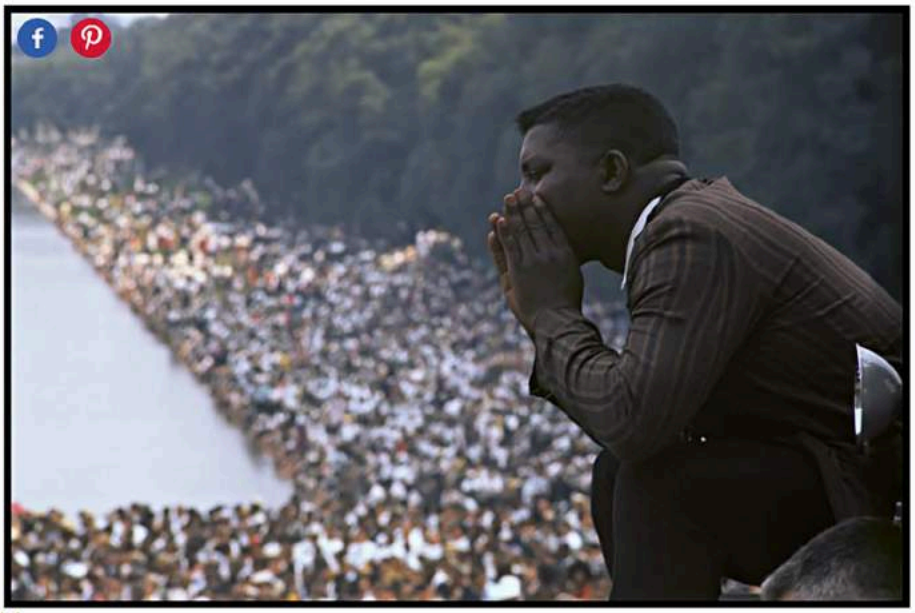


2/14 Football, Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Florida, 1943. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

3/14 Home Economic Students Learning to Make Good Bread, Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Florida, 1943. Photograph courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation.

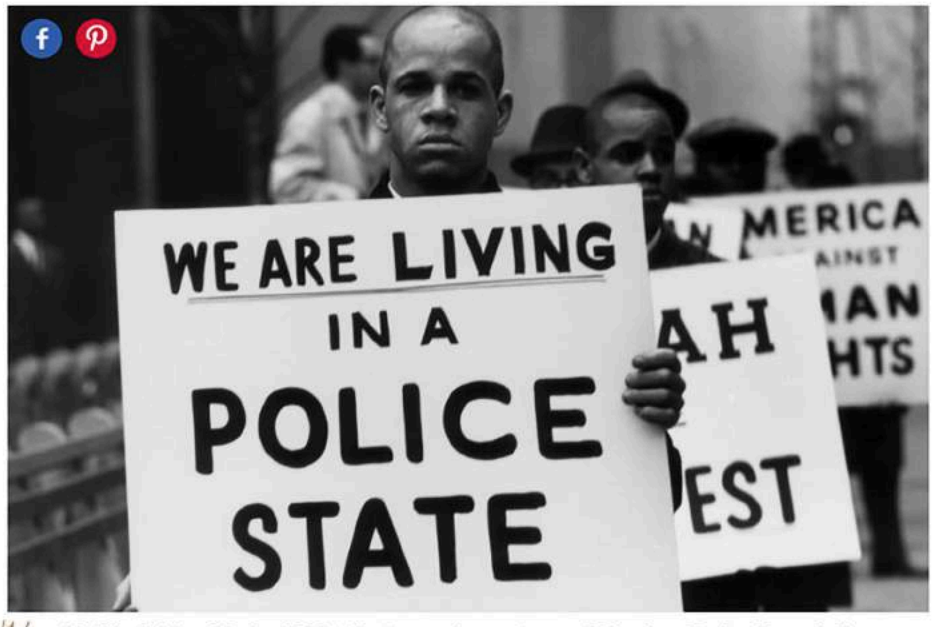
4/14 Mess Call, Southfields, New York, 1943. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

5/14 Uncle James Parks, Fort Scott, Kansas, 1950. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.



6/14 Untitled, Washington D.C., 1963. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

7/14 Tenement Dwellers, Chicago, Illinois, 1950. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

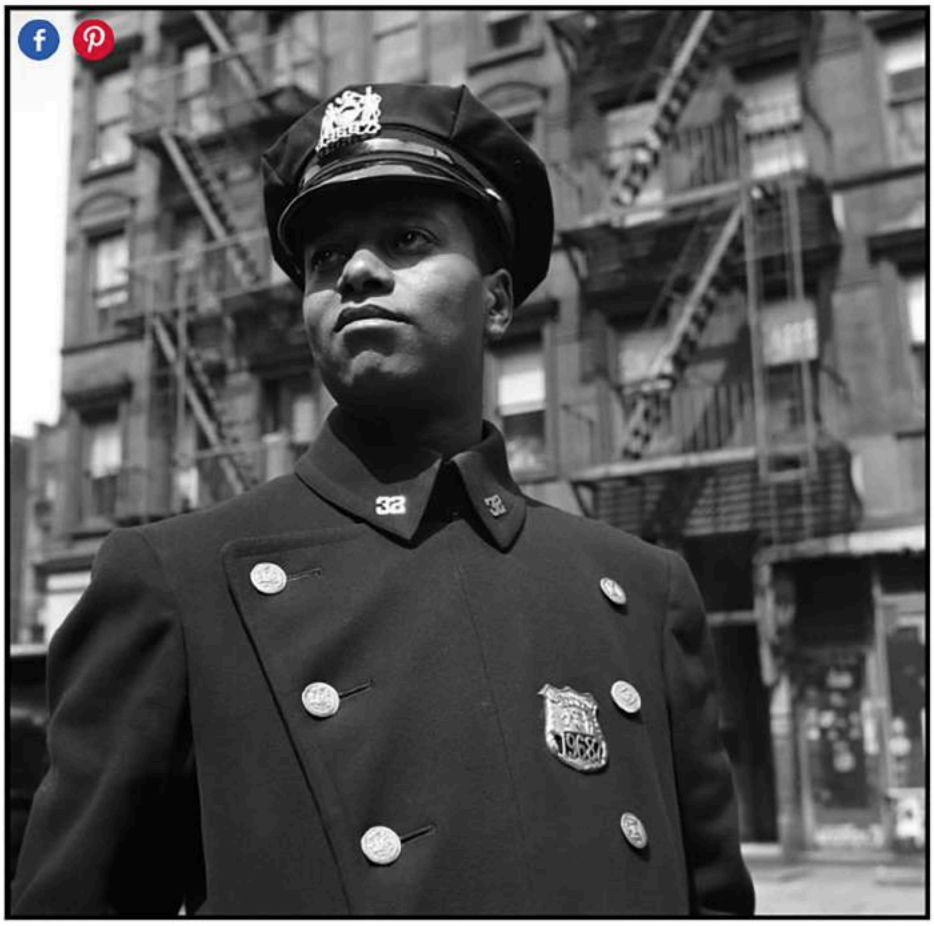


8/14 Untitled, New York, 1963. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

9/14 Black Muslims Train in Self-Defense, Chicago, Illinois, 1963. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

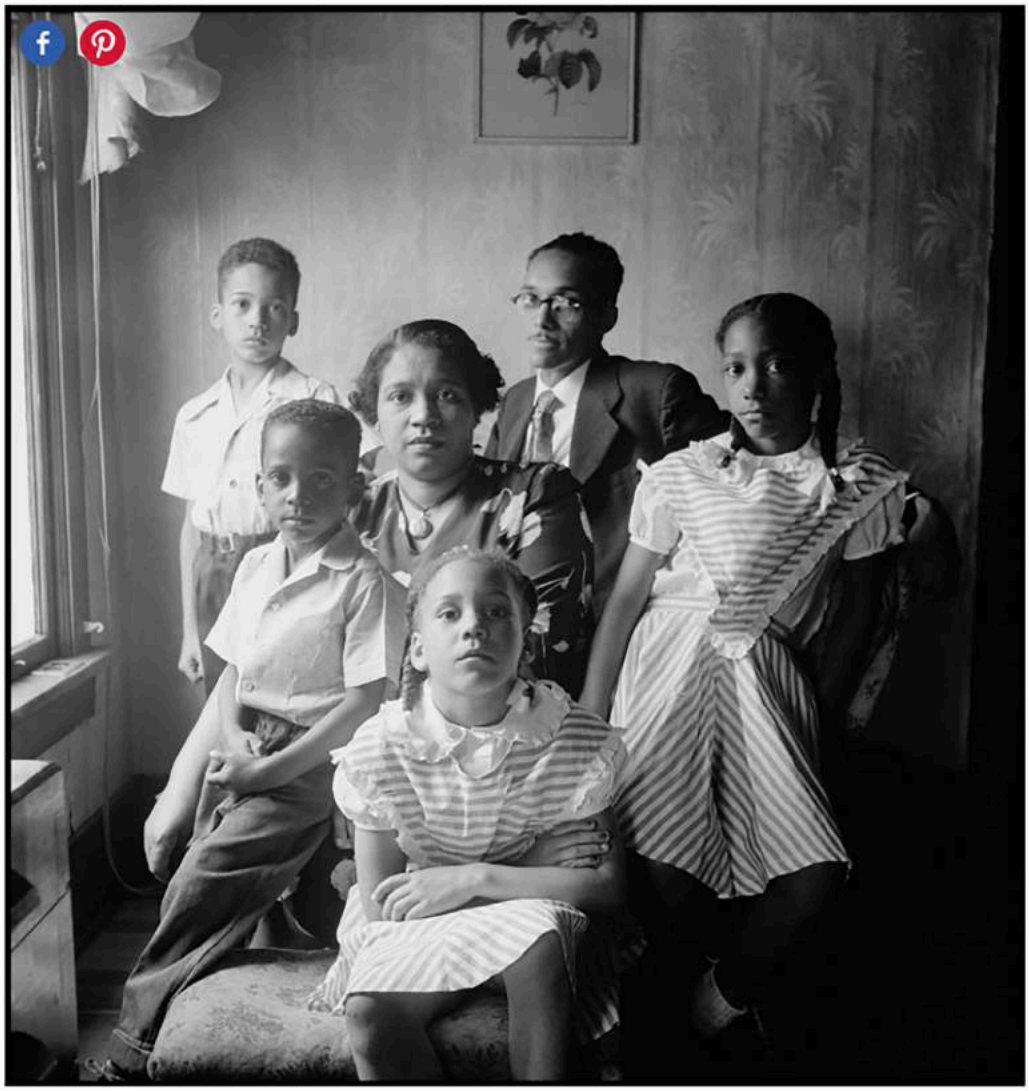
10/14 Neighborhood Children, Washington D.C., 1942. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

11/14 Woman and Dog in Window, Harlem, New York, 1943. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.



12/14 Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1943. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

13/14 Husband and Wife, Sunday Morning, Detroit, Michigan, 1950. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.



14/14 Family Portrait, Fort Scott, Kansas, 1950. Photograph courtesy of Gordon Parks Foundation.

whitewall

NEW YORK
ART, JANUARY 29, 2018

Gordon Parks, Judy Chicago, Anthony McCall: Must-See New York Shows

By Whitewall

"Gordon Parks: I Am You | Part 1" at Jack Shainman
January 11—February 10
524 West 24th Street
Jack Shainman presents "Gordon Parks: I Am You | Part 1" in collaboration with the **Gordon Parks Foundation**. Known for his documentation of the Civil Rights Era, this first half of what will be a two-part show begins with images that are perhaps less familiar to Parks' oeuvre—portraits of artists in their studios like **Helen Frankenthaler** and **Alberto Giacometti**, as well as fashion editorials shot in the 1950s and 60s.

Gordon Parks
Evening Wraps, New York, New York
1956
Archival pigment print
20 x 16 inches
Photograph by Gordon Parks

MUSÉE
VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE
JAN 16

Gordon Parks: Then and Now

FEATURES

By Frances Molina

Yesterday, Musée Magazine reported on Gordon Parks' I am you exhibit which opened late last week at the Jack Shainman Gallery. In late recognition of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and in early celebration of Black History Month, Musée would like to take a moment to recognize Gordon Parks as a true vanguard, a revolutionary artist with one eye fixed on the mounting and mourning invisible masses.

Born into the poverty and unbridled racism of rural Kansas at the start of the 20th century, Parks navigated a bleak landscape of loss and violence with the guidance of his mother who taught him to value "love, dignity, and hard work over hatred" (*A Choice of Weapons*, Parks). At sixteen, he left for his sister's home in St. Paul, Minnesota, the last wish of his dying mother. The next few years saw Parks working a variety of unsatisfying odd-jobs and side-hustles. One such job, working as a server on a railroad dining car, brought him face-to-face with his destiny in the form of a coworker's photography magazine and a portfolio of striking photographs of migrant workers.

These photographs resonated deeply with Parks, who had never seen an image communicate so much with a single shot. They hummed with humanity, reaching out from a wellspring of emotion that inspired Parks to pick up a camera and teach himself the craft. Despite his lack of professional training, Parks pursued photography with a dedication and ambition that quickly landed him a spot alongside his photography heroes at the Farm Security Administration. He began his creative career as both a photojournalist and fashion photographer, working freelance for high profile glossies such as *Vogue* and *Ebony*.

Credit: Photograph by Gordon Parks. Copyright: Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

Even with his freelance work in the high-fashion world Parks captured a signature aesthetic, shooting models in luxe, haute couture gowns and evening wear against the gritty backdrop of the city, an innovative approach to fashion photography that we recognize today as “street style”. But it was his time on staff at Life magazine that helped cement Parks as a photographic visionary and a cultural icon synonymous with a national black consciousness struggling and surviving in the face of systemic racism.

Credit: Photograph by Gordon Parks. Copyright: Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

Parks photographed what he knew - the truth of the poverty and destitution that plagued Black America, the strength and resilience of their communities, the lives of those rendered invisible by a country reluctant to face its horrors, past and present. His work was a challenge to mainstream America, a subtle call for action and empathy, a fearless declaration of an unpleasant truth. At a time when our country is reeling from corruption and continually subjugated by racial and sexual violence, Parks creative legacy of compassion and social justice is immensely relevant.

In his Life editorial “A Harlem Family”, Parks begins with a prose-poem, speaking in a voice that transcends his time and his medium, reaching audiences today with urgency: *“For I am you, staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom. Look at me and know that to destroy me is to destroy yourself...There is something about both of us that goes deeper...it is our common search for a better life, a better world.”*

Credit: Photograph by Gordon Parks. Copyright: Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

BuzzFeed NEWS

These Powerful Photos Capture Life For Black Americans During The 20th Century

"Look at the times that we're living in today; some of these pictures look like they could have been taken last year."

Posted on February 28, 2018, at 5:54 p.m.
Gabriel H. Sanchez, BuzzFeed News Photo Essay Editor

"Department Store in Mobile," Alabama, 1956
The Gordon Parks Foundation

Gordon Parks is a photographer whose name is synonymous with artistic genius and unwavering perseverance amid an era of bigotry and hate. Parks rose to prominence as one of the nation's preeminent photojournalists, hired to be the first black staff photographer for Life magazine. While his pictures expertly depict a wide range of topics, some of his most iconic photographs show aspects of African-American life that many of his white colleagues simply did not have access to. Because of this, Parks became the voice of a generation, able to capture and contextualize the African-American experience at a time when many sought to silence black voices in the US.

A two-part exhibition of his work titled Gordon Parks: I Am You, *on view now at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City, brings together some of his most iconic pictures. On the occasion of this exhibition, BuzzFeed News spoke with Peter W. Kunhardt Jr., the executive director of the Gordon Parks Foundation, on what Gordon Parks accomplished during his long life of 93 years. His legacy can still be felt today:*

What Parks did was transcended all barriers. Gordon Parks was the first African-American photographer to work on the staff of Life magazine. He didn't allow racism and discrimination stand in the way. He knew he had a creative calling as a young boy growing up in the prairie land of Kansas, in a small town called Fort Scott.

"Doll Test," Harlem, New York, 1947
The Gordon Parks Foundation

"Segregated Drinking Fountain," Mobile, Alabama, 1956 (left); "The Invisible Man," Harlem, New York, 1952 (right)
The Gordon Parks Foundation

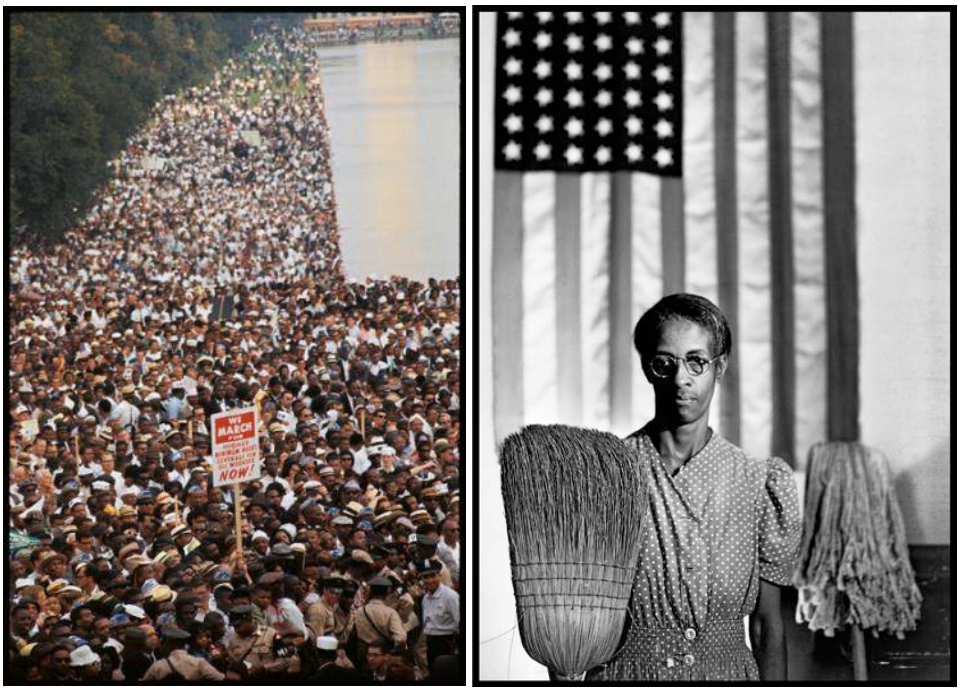
"Drinking Fountains," Mobile, Alabama, 1956
The Gordon Parks Foundation

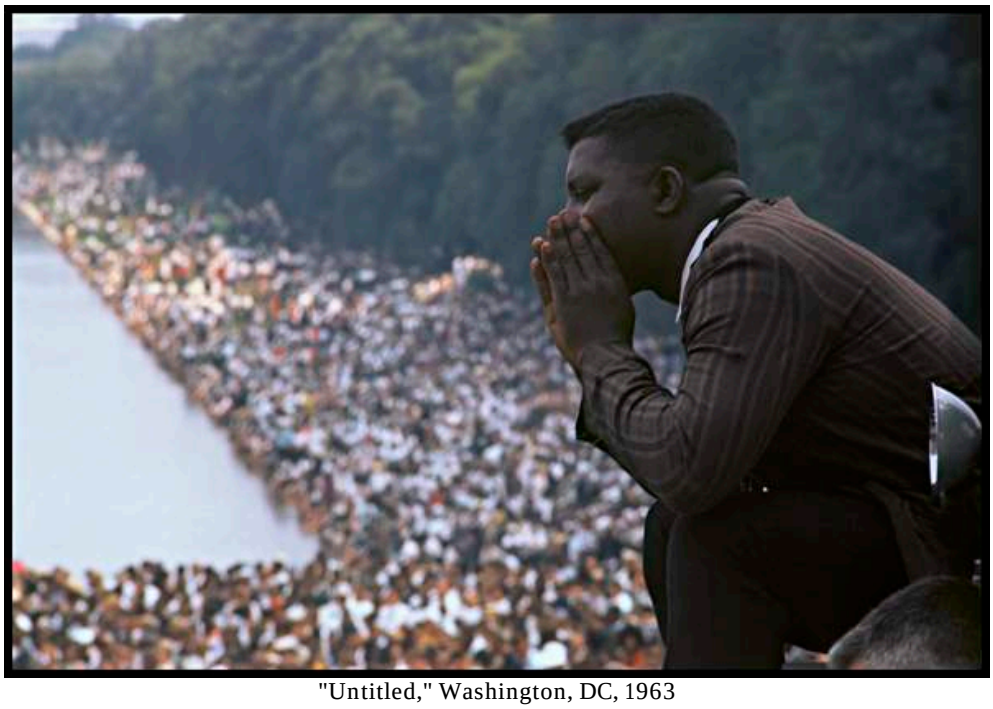
He was the youngest of 15 children and knew that he had to have an education, though he actually never finished high school. Looking back on his life as an older man he realized that the best thing that he did was pick up a camera. His choice of weapon was a camera. He had to express himself in other formats.

Before Life [magazine], his mother died when he was 15 and he was sent to live with his sister in St. Paul, Minnesota. There, he got into a big fight with his brother-in-law and was eventually kicked out onto the street. He was homeless at the time and ended up moving to Chicago to work on the railroad. That's where he found his calling, photography.

He worked at the Southside Community Art Center, processing his photographs in the darkroom after hours. In 1941, he was awarded the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the first photographer to receive this grant. That's as prestigious today as winning a MacArthur Genius grant, for example.


"Martin Luther King, Jr." Washington, DC, 1963
The Gordon Parks Foundation


"Untitled," Washington, DC, 1963 (left); "American Gothic," Washington, DC, 1942 (right)
The Gordon Parks Foundation


"Untitled," Washington, DC, 1963
The Gordon Parks Foundation

Gordon had this explosion of creativity when he went to Washington, DC, to work for the Farm Security Administration under Roy Stryker. That's where he took many of his most famous photographs. From there, he moved to New York and worked for a period of time for Vogue, before he was hired full-time for the staff of Life.

What's so interesting about his time at Life was that he not only had to prove himself as a photographer, but also a black man. As I said before, he was the only African-American on the staff. So they used Gordon to go into places that they didn't think a white photographer could go — and he'd always come back with really strong material.

"Untitled," Mobile, Alabama, 1956
The Gordon Parks Foundation


"The Fontenelles at the Poverty Board," Harlem, New York, 1967
The Gordon Parks Foundation

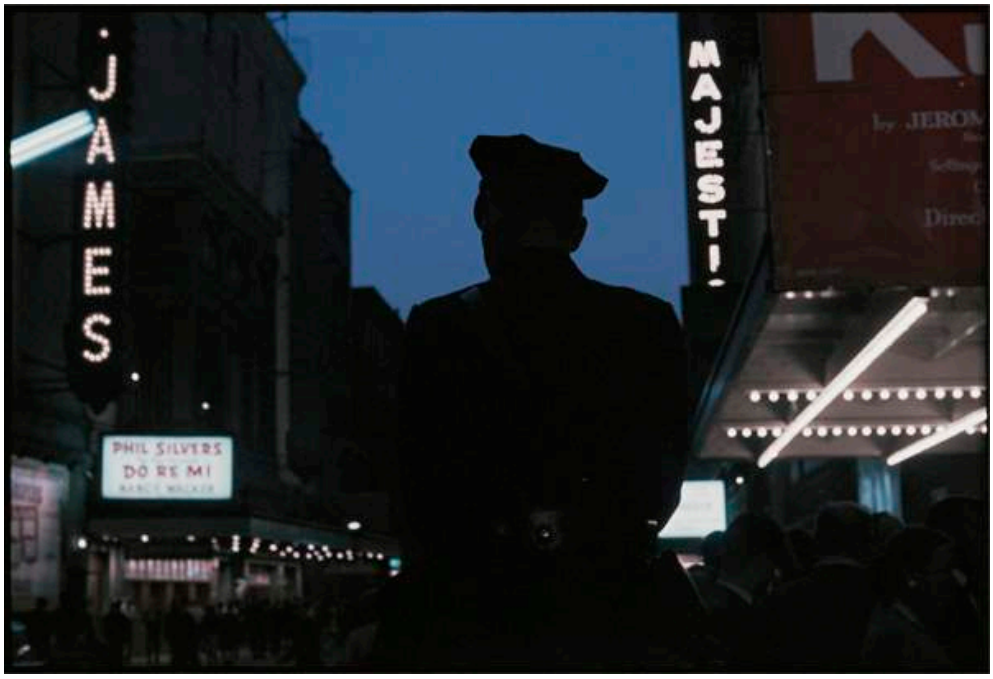
When Gordon went to photograph gangs in Harlem, those were relationships that he had built and would continue to relish over the course of his entire life. Red Jackson was a gang member in Harlem and probably one of Gordon Parks' most important stories. Parks befriended him and his family, and this was all prior to taking a single photograph. This was something none of the other photographers at Life could possibly pull off.

Later in his career, when photographing Muhammad Ali, Parks took pictures of the boxer when he was leaving the ring and his face was all battered and his eyes were bruised. Gordon simply destroyed the negatives after he took the pictures because it was such a disservice to Ali that he figured, "I can't let these be out in the world." He was a humanitarian and had such a respect for all of his subjects in a way that this wasn't just the day's news; it was a Life story — no pun intended.

Suddenly Life realized that this guy really knows what he's doing. He can shoot fashion, gangs in Harlem, artists, everything. As Gordon became more established in the Life community, he began to write for them as well, becoming a writer for the magazine as well as a photographer. That led him to really take on a senior role within the ranks of the magazine. He continued to do that for several decades then went on to become a filmmaker, producing an autobiography, The Learning Tree. Then he directed the film Shaft in the 1970s. Gordon Parks' life was multifaceted and he continued his writing, filmmaking, and photography all the way up until the end of his life.

"Black Panther Headquarters," San Francisco, California, 1970
The Gordon Parks Foundation

"Untitled," New York, 1957 (left); "Untitled," Chicago, 1957 (right)
The Gordon Parks Foundation



"Untitled," New York, 1957
The Gordon Parks Foundation

I knew Gordon very well. My grandfather was the managing editor of Life magazine and worked with him on many of his assignments, so I grew up as a kid knowing Gordon very well as a family friend. All of his books sitting in my office are signed "Uncle Gordon." He was a fixture in our lives.

Unfortunately, he and my grandfather died two weeks apart from each other. It was really a hard time because they were both so important in my life. With that, running this foundation has been important to me for so many reasons, because this is something that I promised would work for Gordon.

The foundation was formed shortly after to preserve his life's work — his photographs, his films, his music. Since then we've built the foundation around all of his creative works and spent the last decade preserving and cataloguing the material. We've preserved approximately 30,000 negatives, 10,000 prints, not including his other mediums. We probably have 15,000 contact sheets as well.

With Gordon, you have to remember that he also lived a very long time and he kept everything! As well as the boxes upon boxes of film, writing, and outtakes — it's a vast archive.

"Untitled," Harlem, New York, 1963 (left); "Harlem Neighborhood," 1952 (right)
The Gordon Parks Foundation

So many of the contemporary artists who are working today, especially African-American artists, feel like Gordon Parks paved the way. He was able to bring social justice to life and to show that an African-American voice can and should matter. What Gordon was able to do was break down those boundaries.

On that level, having him become a metaphor for what came before and what people can do today is really important, but I also think on a more historical level to see that times really haven't changed is also significant. So many of Gordon's pictures from the crime series have a lot to do with police brutality. Look at the times that we're living in today; some of these pictures look like they could have been taken last year. There's such a relevance to his work, not only from his personal story but also his subjects.

That's why so much of his work fits so well within museums and educational institutions, because it crosses so many disciplines — you could be studying African-American history, US history, photography, race, gender, English.

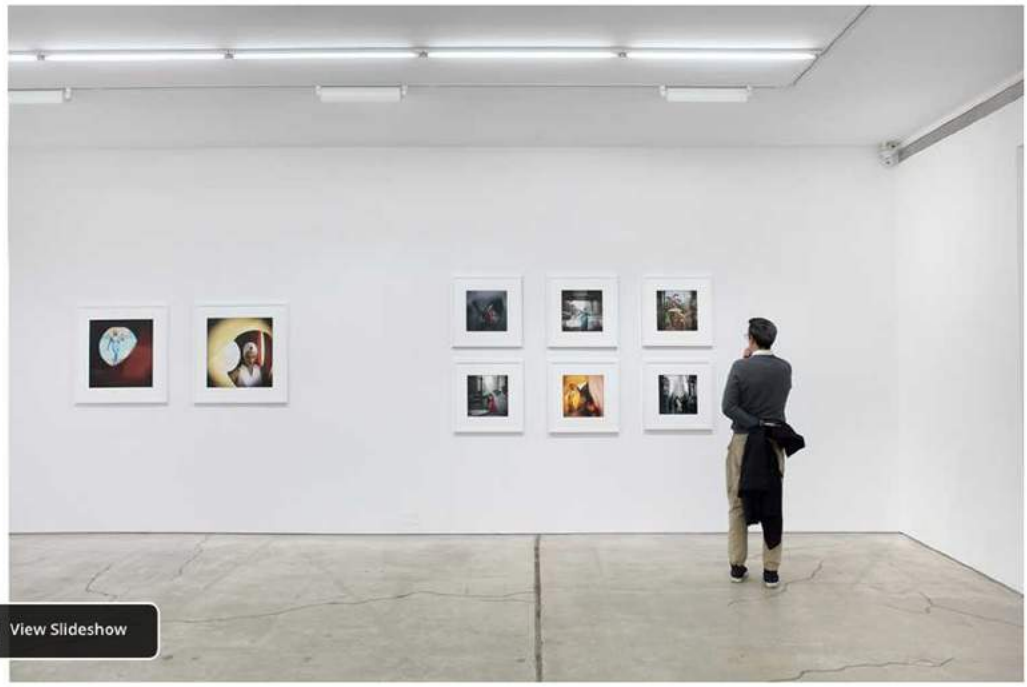
Gordon is a slice of everybody.

Gordon Parks: I Am You is on view now at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City.
To learn more about the Gordon Parks Foundation, visit its website at gordonparksfoundation.org or follow them on Instagram.

BLOUINARTINFO INTERNATIONAL

Gordon Parks at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | JANUARY 24, 2018



Gordon Parks: I AM YOU I PART 1. Exhibition view
(courtesy: Jack Shainman Gallery)

Jack Shainman Gallery in New York is hosting an exhibition of rare works by Gordon Parks – "I AM YOU / PART 1."

As a photographer, film director, writer and composer, Gordon Parks (1912-2006) was a visionary artist whose works continues to influence American culture to date. His photographs transcend art, history, race and culture and have endured to stand the test of time. Parks is best known for his photographs documenting much of the civil rights era. His work documented everyday life across the country, when photographs were not only taken at face value, but could turn the tide of public opinion. In collaboration with the Gordon Parks Foundation, this first half of a two-part exhibition will focus on Parks' lesser known body of works, such as his elegant compositions of artists in their studios, as well as his timeless fashion photography. "I AM YOU / PART 1" also includes examples from Parks' fashion works taken during the 1950s and 1960s in New York.

Jack Shainman Gallery was founded in 1984 in Washington, D.C. by Jack Shainman and Claude Simard. The focus of the gallery since its inception has been to exhibit, represent and champion artists from around the world, in particular artists from Africa, East Asia, and North America, by mounting major exhibitions of their work in the gallery, presenting artworks at important fairs, securing museum exhibitions and publishing major catalogues and scholarly essays. Gallery artists are included in numerous public collections worldwide. The gallery is a member of the Art Dealers Association of America and hosts approximately 12 exhibitions a year and participates in major art fairs including Art Basel Miami Beach, The Armory Show, and Frieze New York.

THE STAR

Gordon Parks' photo captures an ambiguous moment from a tumultuous era

In image coming to Toronto gallery, we're invited us to discern the emotions in a gathered crowd inspecting something, or someone, we can't see.

Gordon Parks, Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1963. (COURTESY OF AND COPYRIGHT THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION)

By **MURRAY WHYTE** Visual Arts Critic
Mon., April 30, 2018

It's the look on the women's face, front left, that gets you: Dubious but hopeful, a seen-it-all weariness behind those sunglasses that's still left room for a glimmer of optimism, however faint. We don't know what she's looking at or who she's listening to, but the young man behind her, whose broad grin conveys an unleavened joy, offers a clue: He holds an issue of *Muhammed Speaks*, a weekly newspaper produced by the Nation of Islam under Malcolm X; the adoration in his eyes suggests they're focused on the man himself.

It's Harlem, 1963, a time and place Gordon Parks was photographing with deep commitment and purpose. In the 1940s, Parks was the first African-American photographer hired at *Vogue*, by visionary art director Alexander Lieberman, but quickly turned his lens from fashion to the racial inequities of New York City. Working for *Life* magazine, his attention shifted to gang violence in Harlem, and he dug deep into its intractable social ills. Parks, who grew up in rural Kansas, had moved north looking for a better life; he found it, for the most part, but made a life's work of those who didn't share his luck.

We don't know for certain if Malcolm X is the subject of their gaze, a crowd whose expressions cover the gamut from infatuation to unease; Parks calls it only *Untitled, Harlem*. What we do know is, that same year, Parks was working intently in his "Black Muslim" series, a voluminous black-and-white photo essay meant to capture the rising dissent in the African-American community over the shortcomings of civil rights — its slow pace, its tokenism, its cautious ambitions. No one took more pictures of X than Parks, who was given almost unfettered access. The moment seems almost casual, a visual break from the formal rigour of Parks' project, maybe captured in passing, on the way home.

Later that year, President John F. Kennedy, civil rights' staunchest ally, would be shot dead. In 1964, Cassius Clay would join the movement, becoming Muhammad Ali. Less than a year later, Malcolm X would be shot dead, too. In America today, race relations have perhaps never been more fraught, and this after eight years of an African-American president.

For every step forward, that many more back, in a cycle as reliable as it is demoralizing. And you circle back to that dubious wince, all those years ago, bundled up under a blue kerchief, and you wonder if it's hope that you see.

Gordon Parks: I Am You opens May 10 at the Nicholas Metivier Gallery, 451 King St. W., Toronto.

Colorado Springs Independent

Five photographers to know and be inspired by

By Sean Cayton

Gordon Parks

American Gothic, Washington, D.C.

Gordon Parks never got a high school degree but went on to become a profoundly important photographer, musician and filmmaker in the 20th century.

Parks was African-American and a photographer at the Farm Securities Administration for a brief time. That he documented poverty and the plight of African Americans, as well as having a highly successful career in fashion photography, in an era of segregation is amazing.

One his very first photographs as a government photographer is also one of the most profound statements on the Black experience in America. The image shows Ella Watson, part of the cleaning crew of the FSA building, standing in front of an American flag hanging on the wall, a broom in one hand and a mop in the background.

Upon viewing the photograph, Parks' editor Roy Stryker said that it was such an indictment of the U.S. that it could get all of his photographers fired.

aperture

The Other Side of Gordon Parks

featured

January 12th, 2018

A new exhibition reconsiders the legendary photographer's fashion and portrait work.

Gordon Parks, *Cocoon Cape, New York, New York*, 1956 © and courtesy the Gordon Parks Foundation

"Even from the beginning, Parks challenged prevailing rules about how to photograph fashion, including objects, group poses and streetscapes that beckoned with the allure of a desired lifestyle or career," writes the photography historian Deborah Willis of Gordon Parks. A new exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, *Gordon Parks: I Am You, Part 1*, displays Parks's fashion work from the 1950s and '60s along with portraits of artists in their studios—Helen Frankenthaler, Alexander Calder, and Alberto Giacometti, to name a few. Parks, who is best known for his velvety black-and-white photographs of the civil rights era, was also an innovative fashion photographer, often taking to New York's streets for his atmospheric shoots. His artist portraits, however, are quiet and considered, letting the artists disappear into their creations.

Gordon Parks: I Am You, Part 1 is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, through February 10, 2018.

THE CUT

A *Vogue* Photographer Who Joined the Civil-Rights Movement

By Carolyn Twersky

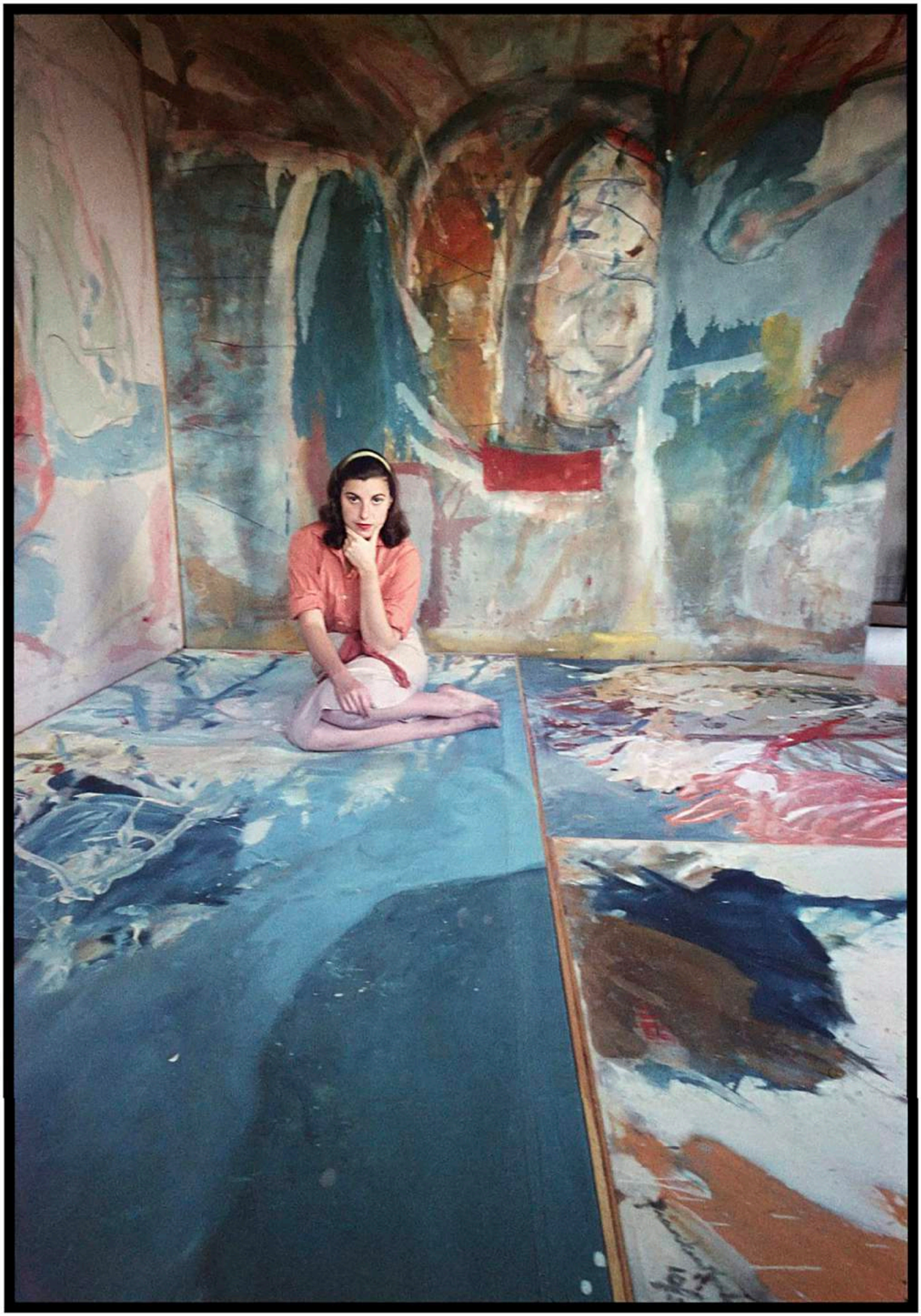
JANUARY 10, 2018
5:30 PM

Untitled, 1962, by Gordon Parks. Photo: Gordon Parks/Courtesy of and Copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

Every photograph taken by Gordon Parks tells an intimate story: a private glimpse of Malcolm X during a rally, for example, or a woman draped in fur on a deserted Park Avenue. A new exhibit in New York celebrates some of the late photographer's lesser-known images, such as portraits of artists at work in their studios and street-style shots from the 1940s and '50s. The show opens January 11 at Jack Shainman Gallery.

Born in Kansas in 1912 and self-taught, Parks became the first African-American staff photographer for *Vogue* and *Life* magazines. Throughout his career he took black America as seriously as he took fashion, documenting Harlem residents and the Jim Crow South while producing glamorous fashion spreads. He addressed stark differences between those worlds in a moving 1968 photo essay for *Life* titled "A Harlem Family," writing, "There is something about both of us that goes deeper than blood or black and white. ... I too am America. America is me. ... Look at me. Listen to me. Try to understand my struggle against your racism. There is yet a chance for us to live in peace beneath these restless skies."

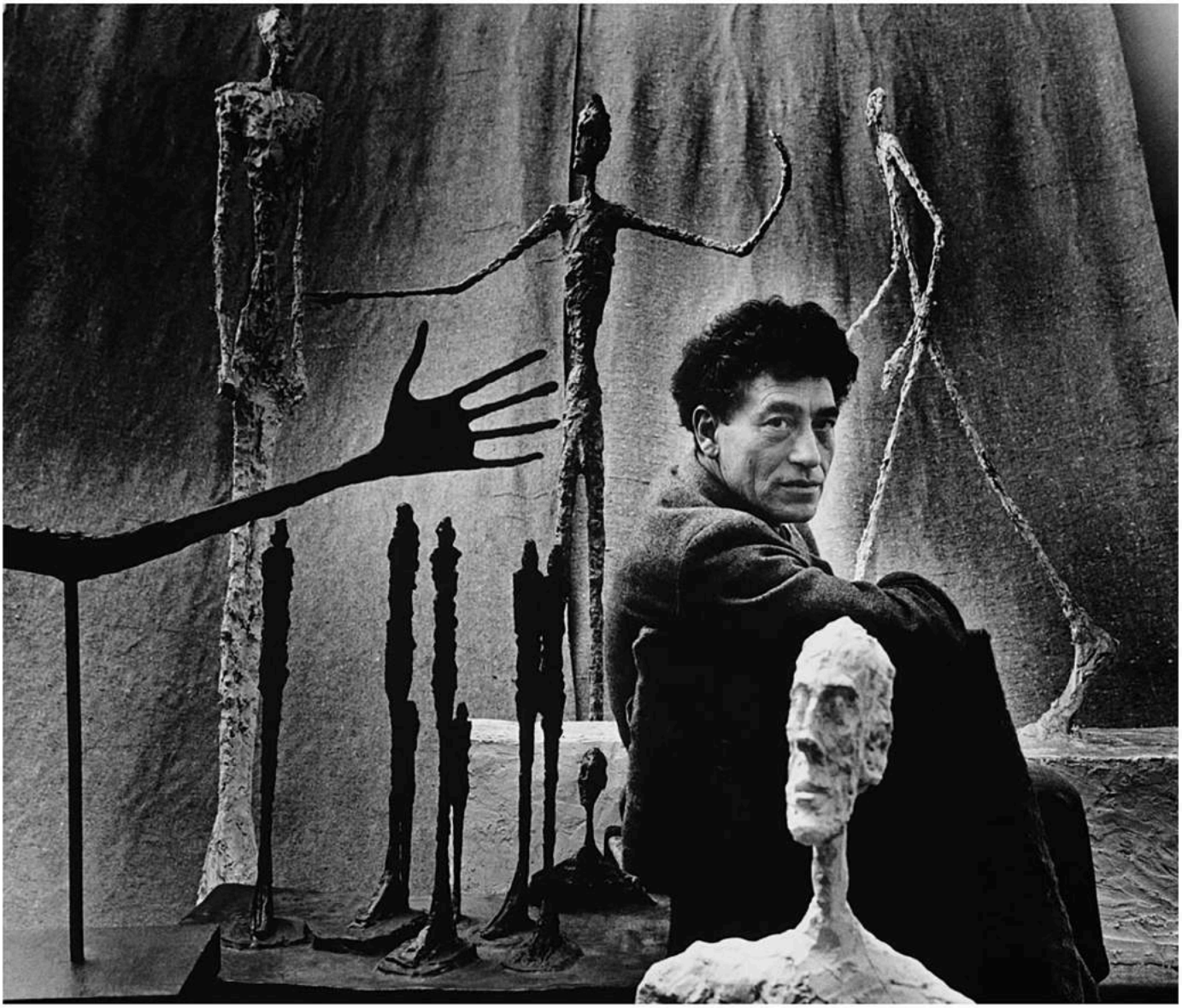
The gallery show titled "Gordon Parks: I Am You | Part 1," features fashion shots along with photos of artists Helen Frankenthaler and Alberto Giacometti, among others, in their studios, surrounded by their art and lounging on canvases. Part two of the exhibition opens February 15, just after part one closes. Scroll ahead for a preview of part one.



Helen Frankenthaller. Photo: Photograph by Gordon Parks. Courtesy of and copyright the Gordon Parks Foundation.

Evening Wraps, New York, New York, 1956. Photo: Photograph by Gordon Parks. Courtesy of and copyright the Gordon Parks Foundation.

Untitled, 1978. Photo: Photograph by Gordon Parks. Courtesy of and copyright the Gordon Parks Foundation.



Alberto Giacometti and His Sculptures, Paris, France, 1951. Photo: Photograph by Gordon Parks. Courtesy of and copyright the Gordon Parks Foundation.

"Gordon Parks: I Am You | Part 1," will be on view from January 11 to February 10 at the Jack Shainman Gallery.

VOGUE

CULTURE > ARTS

At Jack Shainman Gallery, the Softer Side of Gordon Parks

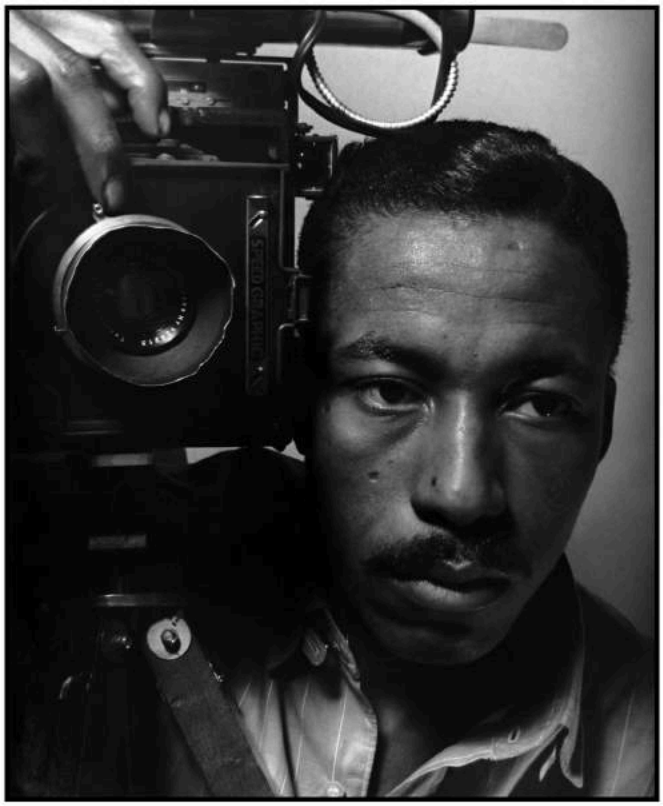
JANUARY 12, 2018 7:30 AM
by JULIA FELSENTHAL

Jeweled Cap, Malibu, California, 1958

Photo: © Gordon Parks / Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

Gordon Parks, who died in 2006 at 93, is best remembered as a filmmaker (*The Learning Tree*; *Shaft*) and as a photojournalist who wielded his camera—his "choice of weapon," as he put it—against social injustice. He was also a painter; a talented pianist and composer; a fiction writer, an essayist, and a serial memoirist; and a breaker of glass ceilings ("One marvels that he has been able to find the time to write about his life while he has been busy living it," quipped *The New York Times* in 1991). Born in Ft. Scott, Kansas, in 1912, the youngest of 15, into a poor tenant farming—rural Kansas, Parks would say, was technically Northern but functionally Southern in its institutionalized racism—he grew up to become one of the first major black filmmakers and the first black photographer to shoot for *Vogue* and *Life*.

He made his name at *Life* publishing searing photo essays that exposed the struggles of black Americans during the decades surrounding the Civil Rights movement. But he also shot portraits and fashion spreads for both *Life* and *Vogue*. Those lesser-known images are now at the center of "Gordon Parks: I Am You, Part 1," a new show opening tonight at the Jack Shainman gallery in Chelsea (a second chapter will open in February, and will focus on his better-known photojournalism).



Untitled, 1941
Photo: © Gordon Parks / Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

"I wanted to show first the things that people don't really know of him," Shainman told me when I came by earlier this week to check out the work as it was being installed. "The range is so extraordinary." The gallerist, whose roster of artists reads like a Who's Who of the black contemporary art world, says Parks's name comes up often as an influence. "I've sold works that are based on Gordon Parks for so many years," Shainman goes on, mentioning Carrie Mae Weems and Hank Willis Thomas. An assistant proffers an iPad so that I can compare a piece by Thomas to the Parks photograph it quotes: *American Gothic, Washington, D.C.*, taken in 1942 during a stint working for the Farm Security Administration. It shows an African-American janitor wielding her mop and broom in front of an American flag (Parks, of course, was quoting Grant Wood).

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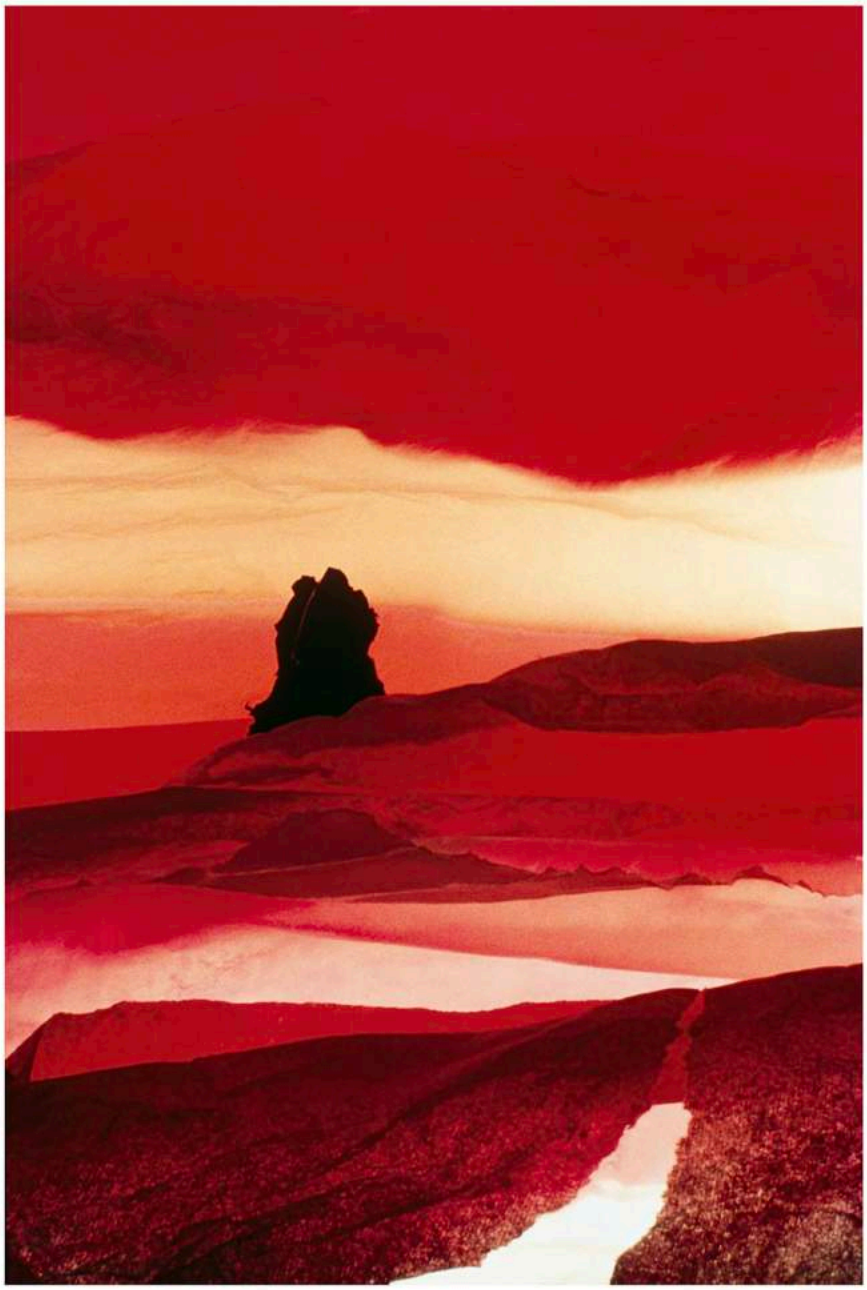
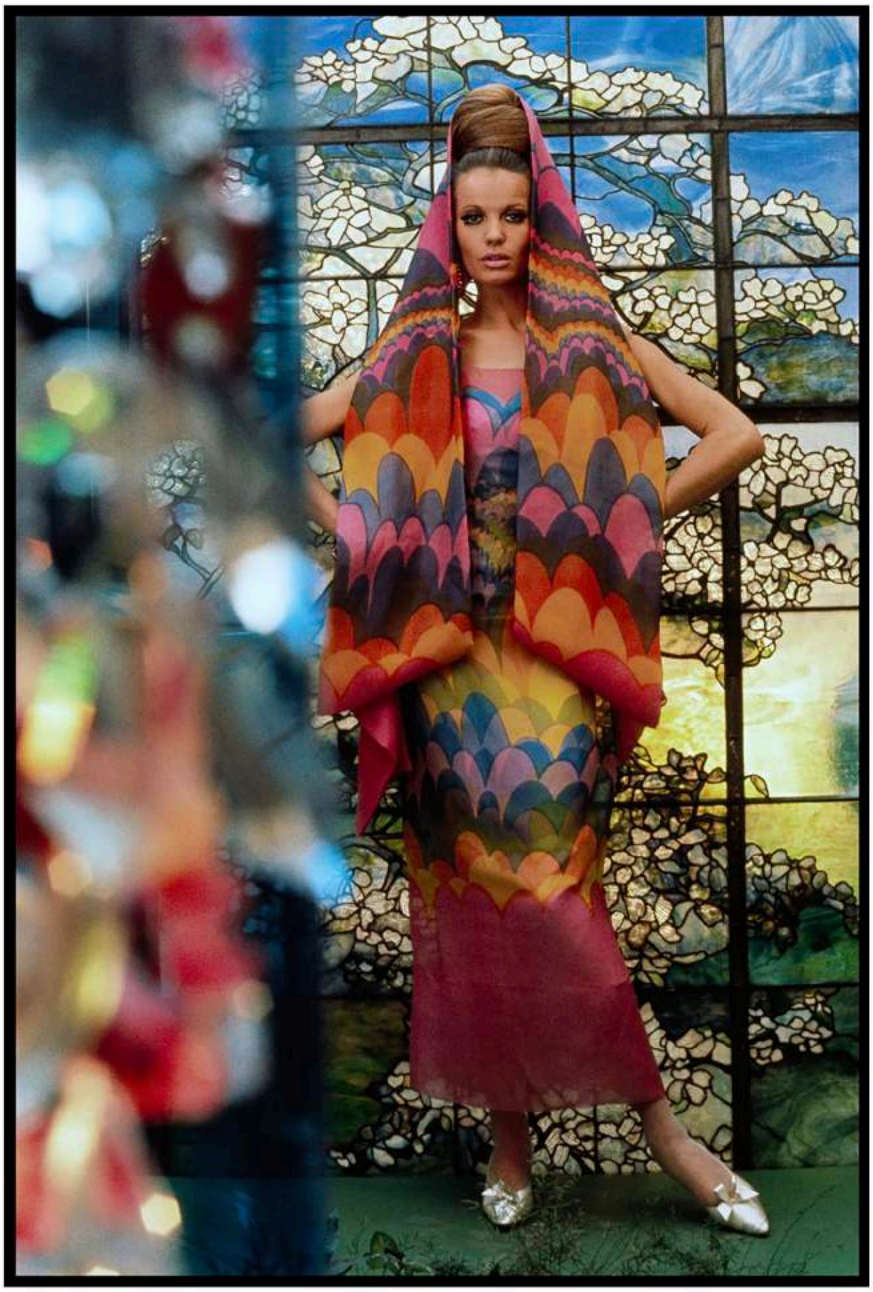
Shainman's exhibition takes its title from text the artist penned to accompany a 1967 project on the Fontenelles, the down-on-their-luck Harlem family Parks photographed as a way of illustrating the squalid, systemic poverty that was contributing to race riots in cities across America. In his essay, he wrote: "What I want. What I Am. What you force me to be is what you are. For I am you, staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom. Look at me and know that to destroy me is to destroy yourself."



Travelers, 1995
Photo: © Gordon Parks / Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

Much of Parks's work demands that sort of visual confrontation. This show does not. "I Am You, Part 1" is about the pleasure of looking, about Parks as a seeker and creator of beauty, an "incredible artist," says Shainman. Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr., executive director of the Gordon Parks Foundation, puts it more bluntly: "We've strategically been working on Gordon Parks as a 20th-century master photographer." He indicates two abstract images that hang near the front of the gallery, the type of otherworldly landscapes that dominated the artist's attention near the end of his life. He made them by photographing assembled objects against painted backgrounds, and he would be "thrilled," asserts Kunhardt, to have them in the show.

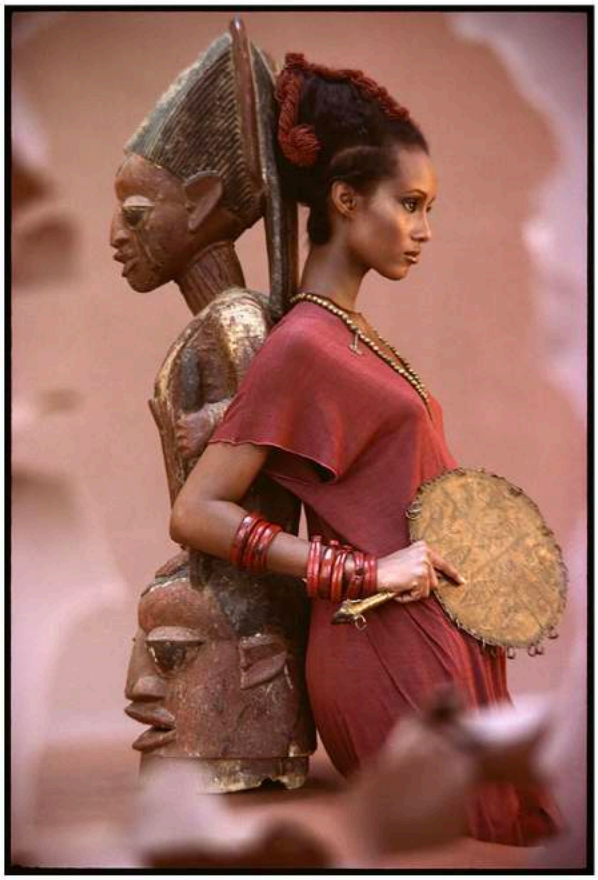
There are excerpts from some of Parks's harder-charging projects: a photo essay on the Nation of Islam (the photographer was close with Malcolm X, and godfather to one of his children); one about a black family living in the segregated South; a diary of a trip back to Kansas to revisit the home he had endeavored to escape; a collaboration with his friend Ralph Ellison, illustrating *The Invisible Man*. But divorced from context, they only gesture at their broader story. When we see Harlem, it isn't a gritty photo from the Fontenelle series, it's a lovely filmic image—think *Newsies*—of a boy in a captain's hat, resting against the window of a car.



Veruschka, photographed by Gordon Parks, *Vogue*, March 1965

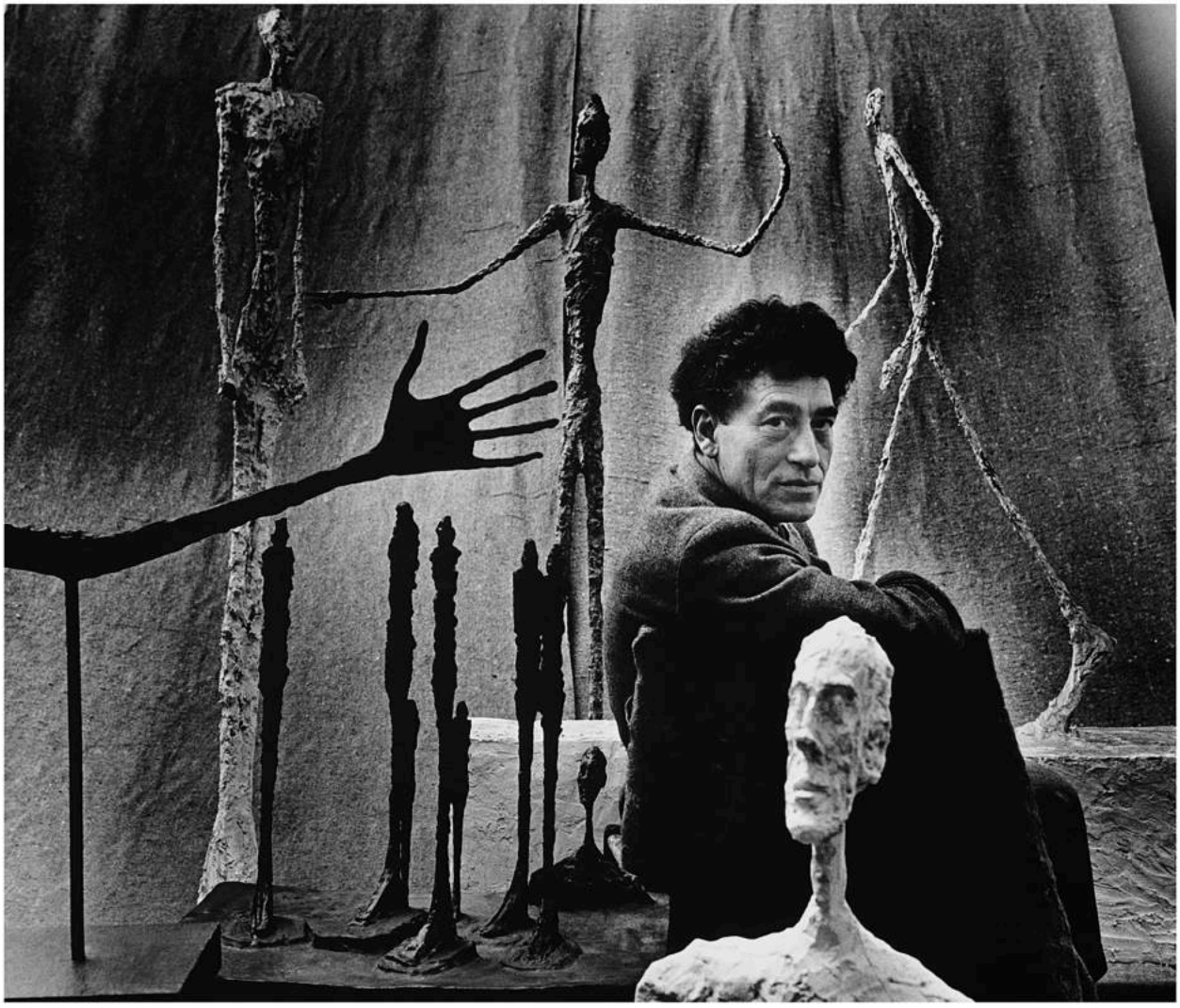
Parks first imagined a future in fashion photography when he was a young man working as a waiter on the North Coast Limited rail line, and devouring the magazines that travelers left behind. He wrote in his 1990 autobiography, *Voices in the Mirror*, about *Vogue*: "Along with its fashion pages, I studied the names of its famous photographers—Steichen, Blumenfeld, Horst, Beaton, Hoyningen-Huené, thinking meanwhile that my own name could look quite natural among them." First, he needed a portfolio. He pitched his services to a high-end St. Paul department store (he'd moved to Minnesota after his mother died when he was 15), and was granted an unlikely audition that ended in near disaster: After developing his film, he realized that he'd double exposed almost everything. But the one image that survived was strong enough to win him a do-over.

In the mid-1940s, *Vogue* Art Director Alexander Liberman hired him. Only two of his images for this magazine, both from a 1965 shoot with the model Veruschka, made it into the Shainman show. There are many more from *Life*: fantastically glamorous shots of women wearing evening wraps for a 1956 story set on the empty streets of Manhattan; one of a lady in a giraffe-print coat standing in front of an actual giraffe, at what must be the San Diego Zoo ("something he did a lot was merging the background and the female figure," says Marisa Cardinale of the Parks Foundation); and a set of photos taken in Malibu in 1958, of models in beachwear, framed as though the photographer was surveilling his subject with a telescope—very *Rear Window*. There are also a couple of outtakes from a 1978 Revlon shoot with a young Iman.



Untitled, 1978
Photo: © Gordon Parks / Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

In most of his fashion images, Parks was photographing white models, and one can infer the extra layer of complication that must have accompanied these shoots, particularly in the early days, an era when black men weren't free to stare at white women, much less to instruct them on how to pose for the camera. But his accounts of those times focus less on the subversion of the white gaze than on his irritation with his preening, entitled subjects. "My work in *Vogue*," he wrote in his 2005 memoir, *A Hungry Heart*, "brought me into contact with the industry's most dazzling models. But coping with their moods and whims wasn't easy. The finest ones demanded big money, and some arrived weighted with troubles. Soured love affairs and monthly female problems prevailed. At times the first hour was given to tales of woe. But ignoring those problems amounted to tossing big money into the rubbish." He groused about the same issue in 1990 in *Voices in the Mirror*: "The sensual wink of an eye or a mischievous smile could reduce the gown they wore to insignificance. That the wink or the smile failed to contribute to the mood I was creating seldom crossed their mind. It then became my responsibility to lull them into expressions more fitting to the clothes they were wearing. This consumed time—expensive time."



Alberto Giacometti and His Sculptures, Paris, France, 1951
Photo: © Gordon Parks / Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

Parks's photographs of the artists and luminaries he shot for *Life* are as compelling as his fashion photos. In this show there are portraits of Muhammad Ali, Eartha Kitt, Duke Ellington, Helen Frankenthaler, Ingrid Bergman, and Gloria Vanderbilt—with whom Parks, who married and divorced three times, maintained a decades-long relationship. ("Sometimes she would send me a little poem, which encouraged me to start writing poetry," he told the *Times* in 2000.) There's a fantastic series of Alberto Giacometti, as eerie as his art, frolicking among his metal stick sculptures, and a pair of photos of a ghostly Alexander Calder playing god with his mobiles.

Boy with June Bug, Fort Scott, Kansas, 1963
Photo: © Gordon Parks / Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

When I ask Kunhardt and Cardinale for their favorite pieces, he points to *Boy with June Bug, Fort Scott, Kansas*, a staged 1963 photo of a young black boy laying in a field, holding a piece of string that's tied to an insect scrambling on his forehead. "It's more than just a picture," Kunhardt says. "It's Gordon's life story." Cardinale chooses a 1941 black-and-white portrait of a young Langston Hughes, taken in Chicago at the South Side Community Arts Center. Hughes faces down the camera, his head nestled against a wooden picture frame, his hand jutting through the empty space the frame boxes out. "When this was taken these were two unknown young artists, totally obscure, and they went on to be legends in their fields," she says. "I find that really fascinating."

The portrait mirrors another from 1941 which hangs toward the entrance, so similar that it's likely they were taken at the same time: it's Parks, in his late 20s, face expressionless (no wink, no mischievous smile), fingers curling over his shutter release. His gaze has drifted off to the side—something, perhaps, has caught his eye—but the eye of his camera is staring right back at us.

office

— Art

Gordon Parks: I Am You - Part 1

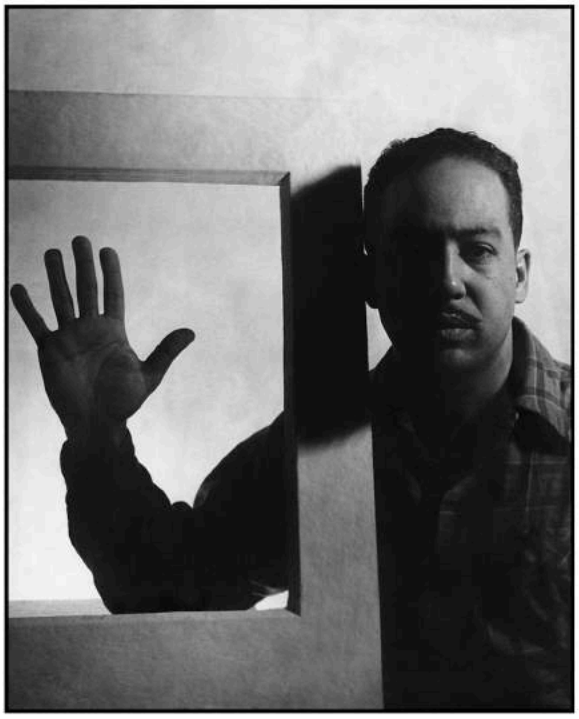
January 12, 2018

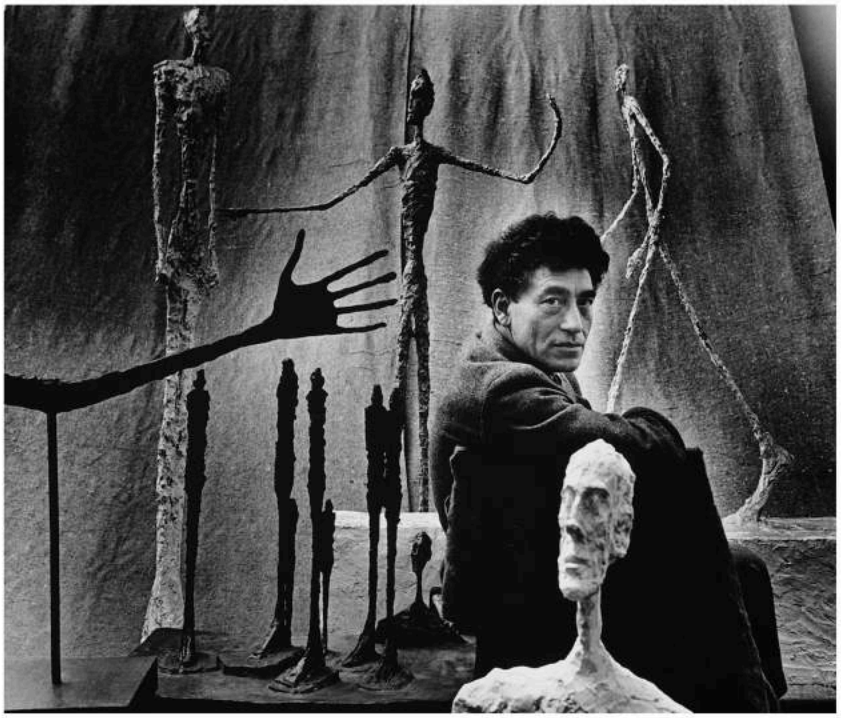
Gordon Parks documented America: its pride and beauty, its brutality and prejudice.

Few artists have accessed the ability to take a concept akin to Civil Rights era culture, something so clearly revolting, and generate something as graceful as Gordon Parks' photographic archive.

Text by Julius Frazer
Photographs courtesy of The Gordon Parks Foundation

Today, the multi-faced artist's impact is as manifest as ever, an evident influence across infinite aspects of American society, from art to activism. In a new exhibition at Jack Shainman in New York City, titled, *I Am You,* Parks' lesser-known images will be presented to the public, bringing together a wide variety of work from various stages throughout his career, from a series of artist portraits in their studios, to a flushed-out offering focusing on his fashion imagery. Not only will Parks' photographs always hold a heralded place in history, but they have already begun to bravely lay the groundwork for a future full of great and active artists.






ONE WAY

Gordon Parks: I Am You - Part 1 will be on view at the Jack Shainman Gallery through February 10th.

KOL
UMN

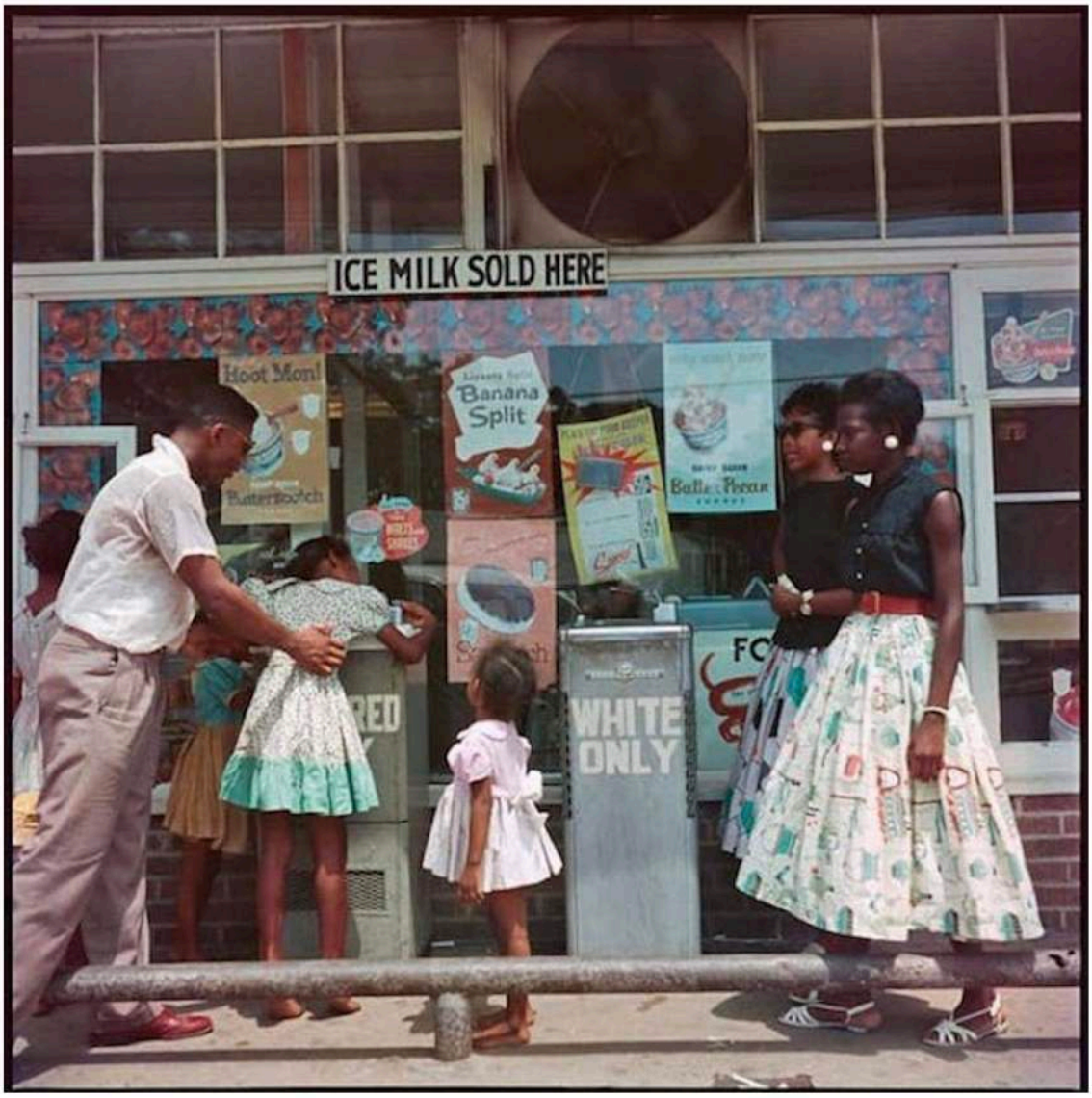
Capturing the Civil Rights Era Through the Lens of Gordon Parks | Daily Beast

JANUARY 15, 2018

KELLY CAMINERO, DAILY BEAST
THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION, FEATURED IMAGE

Gordon Parks was a pioneer of U.S. documentary photojournalism over the course of the 20th century. Parks was attracted to photography at early age when he came across documentary photography of migrant workers published in a magazine.

THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION. IMAGE CREDIT



THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION, IMAGE CREDIT

Outside of his photography career, Parks was also recognized as renowned author, composer, and filmmaker. He used his talents to raise awareness of the beauty and complexities of urban life, and was the first African-American photographer to produce and direct motion pictures. Parks was wholeheartedly committed to social justice and the importance of documenting American culture.

THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION, IMAGE CREDIT

THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION, IMAGE CREDIT

Gordon Parks: I Am You

Gordon Parks, American Boys' Feet on Street, Paris, France, 1951, Courtesy The Gordon Parks Foundation

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to present Gordon Parks: *I Am You* | *Part 1*. As a photographer, film director, composer, and writer, Gordon Parks (1912-2006) was a visionary artist whose work continues to influence American culture to this day. In collaboration with the Gordon Parks Foundation, this first half of a two-part exhibition focuses on Parks' lesser-known bodies of work, such as his elegant compositions of artists in their studios, as well as his timeless fashion photography.

Read more at **www.jackshainman.com**

Information

Jack Shainman Gallery
524 West 24th Street, New York 10011, USA
11 January - 10 February

The New York Times

Courtesy of The Gordon Parks Foundation

Using Photography to Tell Stories About Race

By Maurice Berger Dec. 6, 2017 2

I stood in the lunchroom doorway with my friend Kevin, bewildered. It was our first week at the High School of Music and Art, a West Harlem public school, and we had become instant friends. Still, I did not know where I belonged in a room that had casually self-segregated into racial camps where "minority" teens gravitated to one side, whites to the other.

Apparently, in 1971, the choice was simple for most of our classmates. But less so for me. I knew I wanted to sit with Kevin. But while we both lived in low-income housing projects, we differed in one significant way: Kevin was black and I was white. After a white student told us we did not belong on her side, my mind was made up: We headed to the "Black Side," as we called it, where we ate until the lunchroom gradually integrated during our freshman year.

This story comes to mind whenever I'm asked why I write about race and photography. I return to it because where I sat in that divided lunchroom says a lot about my relationship to race and my lifelong fascination with it. My sister and I were among the few white kids in our predominantly black and Puerto Rican housing project on the Lower East Side. Except for a harrowing stint at a Jewish day school, where I was tormented for being poor, my classmates and my young neighbors and friends, were all people of color. They allowed me into their lives, and I learned a lot from them.

But it was the prejudice they experienced, and I observed, that provided my most eye-opening lesson.

As a Jew, I have known anti-Semitism. As a gay man, I have known homophobia. But neither has seemed as relentless as the racism I witnessed growing up — a steady drumbeat of slights, thinly-veiled hostility and condescension perpetrated by even the most liberal and well-meaning people. It was painful to watch, and as my friends let me know, considerably more painful to endure.

Continually observing this reality shaped how I understood racism: When people told me they had experienced prejudice, I believed them. I had rejected the liberal tendency to defensively dismiss the victim to protect the accused.

My childhood also exposed me to cultures and histories that most white people were oblivious to, even if they lived in an international city. I learned about these things from my friends, classmates, teachers and my socially conscious father. As my activism and passion grew, so did my solidarity with the Lower East Side. But my enthusiasm was dampened at Music and Art, where my poverty again alienated me from some of my teachers and classmates.

"I am amazed at the emotional depth of Dawoud Bey's diptychs of people the same age as the victims of the 1963 Birmingham church bombing — both at the time of the bombings and the present day had they lived. His meditation on the tug between past and present helps us to grasp the enormity of the loss of six innocent lives." Dawoud Bey

Out of embarrassment, I hid my background and interest in race.

My freshman advisor at Hunter College, certain that the study of race was inconsistent with my "cultivated mind," as she put it, persuaded me to focus on art history. My studies in college, and later in graduate school, completed my transformation from Project Boy to Cultured White Man. I was conditioned by my art history professors to believe that only the work of white people mattered. I engaged a mainstream art world — museums, galleries, collectors, and publishers — that viewed artists of color as sentimental or irrelevant at best, but more often as inept and dull. I eventually accepted these racist myths, even as I continued to live in the projects.

But I also experienced another awakening: I learned how to see.

My mentors in art history were rigorous and demanding, teaching me to visually analyze paintings and photographs, both to appreciate their aesthetics and to grasp their underlying cultural meaning. I was trained to "deconstruct" images, to evaluate the ways they advanced an agenda or manipulated or inspired viewers. But my teachers were oblivious to artists and photographers of color and work about race, a deficiency I inherited from them.

Yet my roots tugged at me as I started to miss the ardor and conviction of my youth. The art world that once seemed glamorous and exciting now was insufferable in its casual and deeply ingrained bigotry, elitism and allegiance to wealth. I picked up books by intellectuals ignored by my professors — brilliant race writers, like W.E.B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, and Frantz Fanon, who were deconstructing the world years before the scholars I had been assigned to read in school. I engaged new colleagues and researched new artists. And I began doing projects about race, relearning how to see and comprehend it through pictures.

In the summer of 2012, after a quarter century of publishing articles and books and curating exhibitions that reconciled the insights of my formal education with those of my life, I started writing Race Stories. I think of it as a learning experience, for me and the reader, fostering the racial and visual literacy denied me by my teachers.

My relationship with the art world remains tenuous. While some things have changed — art history has become more inclusive, for example, and a few artists of color have become superstars — the problem of racism persists. Recently, I attended a dinner in an expensive restaurant celebrating a friend's New York museum retrospective, and the scene was typical and dispiriting: A sea of affluent white people dressed in black.

These days, I rarely go to events like this. In their segregation, they bring me back to the contentious lunchroom where, as a bewildered teenager, I pushed beyond the imposed limitations of my race. But in situations like this dinner, there is no "black side" to which I can retreat, no haven that even remotely resembles the life I lived or the one I live now.

In the slideshow above, the author selects and writes about some of his favorite photographs explored in the Race Stories series.

Maurice Berger is a research professor and the chief curator at the Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

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NTS

VOGUE

"I Thought It Would Be Better for You": A Mother, A Daughter, and Racism in America in 2017

NOVEMBER 8, 2017 2:10 PM
by BRIT BENNETT

Department Store, Mobile, Alabama, Photographed by Gordon Parks. The author's mother moved from Louisiana to Washington, D.C., the following decade.

artnet®

Exhibitions

Kendrick Lamar Made a Video Homage to Civil Rights Photographer Gordon Parks. Now the Gordon Parks Foundation Is Returning the Favor.

Lamar's clip for his song "Element." recreates classic Parks images.

Taylor Dafoe, December 8, 2017

Gordon Parks, *Boy with June Bug* (1963). Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation.

Earlier this year, rapper Kendrick Lamar released the video for "Element.," a standout track from his recent album *Damn.* Twitter was quick to point out that some of its striking imagery was familiar. Indeed, the entire video is a tribute to renowned photographer Gordon Parks (1912-2006), known for his depictions of African-American life in the 20th century and for documenting the Civil Rights movement.

Now, seizing the moment, the Gordon Parks Foundation in Pleasantville, New York has opened "Element.: Gordon Parks and Kendrick Lamar," an exhibition that unites Parks's images with those from the video.

Directed by Jonas Lindstroem and The Little Homies (the name under which Lamar and his childhood friend Dave Free direct), the *DAMN.* video brings to life some of Parks's most famous photos in live-action recreations. Its opening shot, for instance, depicts a hand emerging from a shimmering body of water—a nod to Parks's untitled 1963 photo of the same subject.

The clip goes on to reference several others, including Parks's shot of a young boy dragging a June bug down his face (*Boy With Junebug*, 1963), and his picture of a row of boys standing at a barbed wire fence, one pointing a toy gun (*Untitled*, 1956).

Parks first made his mark in the 1940s, when an exhibition of his works in Chicago led to a fellowship with the Farm Security Administration's photography program. There, he joined the likes of Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange as photographers tasked with chronicling the lives of poverty-stricken people in rural America. In 1943, after the onset of World War II resulted in the downsizing of the FSA, Parks took up freelance fashion and editorial work—a path which eventually led to a staff photographer role *at LIFE* magazine.

He would go on to work for two decades at *LIFE*, producing the majority of his best-known work during that time, including all of the photos alluded to in Lamar's video.

"Gordon Parks' work is continuing to have a great impact on young people—and particularly on artists like Kendrick who use the power of imagery to examine issues related to social justice and race in our country," said Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr., the foundation's executive director, in a statement. "With the "Element." music video, Kendrick has helped to call attention to one of the most important artists of our time."

Below, see some of the images from the exhibition, with the corresponding images from the video:

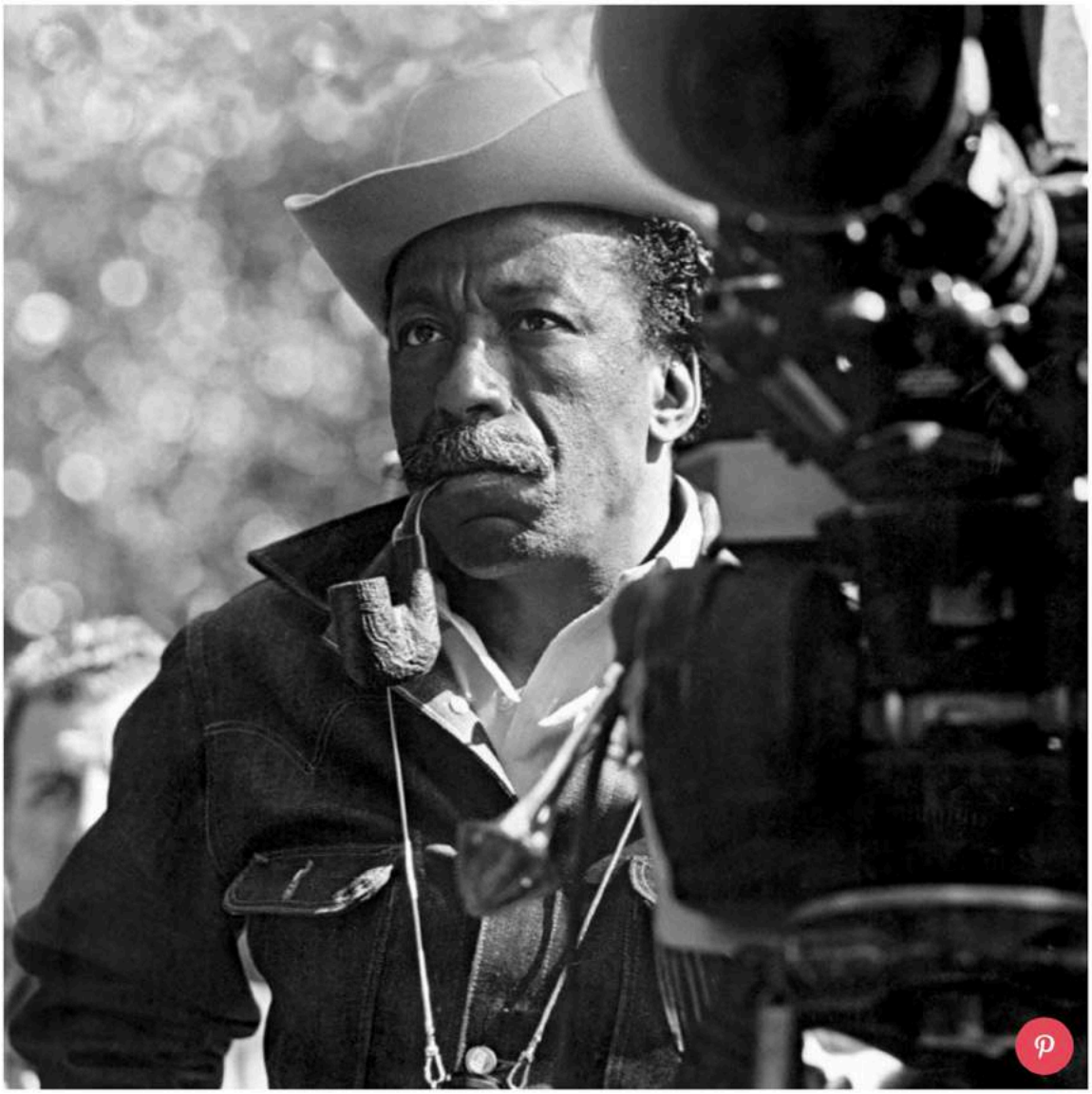
Self-portrait by photographer Gordon Parks. Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation.

Top: Gordon Parks, *Untitled* (1957). Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation.
Bottom: A screenshot of the music video for Kendrick Lamar's "Element."

Top: Gordon Parks, *Untitled* (1956). Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation.
Bottom: A screenshot of the music video for Kendrick Lamar's "Element."

Top: Gordon Parks, *Black Muslims Train in Self-Defense* (1963). Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation. Bottom: A screenshot of the music video for Kendrick Lamar's "Element."

ESSENCE



John D. Kisch/Separate Cinema Archive/Getty Images

RACHAELL DAVIS Dec, 02, 2017

The visual for Kendrick Lamar's single, "Element" from his Grammy-nominated album, *DAMN*, was nothing short of groundbreaking and a new exhibit from the Gordon Parks Foundation is shining a spotlight on some of the images that gave birth to the video's impactful concept.

The "Element" music video was heavily inspired by the extraordinary work of iconic photo journalist Gordon Parks, and included several of his pieces that humanized the struggle, beauty, strength and resilience of African-American life and social justice issues affecting Black communities. The Gordon Parks Foundation is hoping to bring the powerful messaging in both the photos and the music video to the forefront yet again, by way of a new exhibit titled after the song itself.

Gordon Parks Foundation Executive Director Peter Kunhardt spoke highly of Kendrick's conscious effort to expose a new generation to Parks' historic work.

"Gordon Parks' work is continuing to have a great impact on young people," Kunhardt said in a statement. "And particularly on artists like Kendrick, who use the power of imagery to examine issues related to social justice and race in our country. With ELEMENT the music video, Kendrick has helped to call attention to one of the most important artists of our time."

The ELEMENT exhibit will be on display from December 1 - February 10 at the Foundation's exhibition space in Pleasantville, NY.

Gordon Parks

Gordon Parks, Evening Wraps at Dawn, New York, New York, 1956.

Gordon Parks documented America: its violence, its beauty, its pride and its prejudice. During the mid-20th century, his fashion photography and celebrity commissions were tempered with reportage that exposed the nation to its injustices. Many of the themes that concerned him—racism, marginalization, poverty—remain as charged and complex today as they did then.

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Some artists create with a sense of purpose that extends beyond making something beautiful. American photographer Gordon Parks is a consummate example. Over a nearly seven-decade career, he used his camera to document "all the things I dislike about America—poverty, racism, discrimination." And he was consistent: consistently prolific, inspired and committed to fighting inequality. According to his daughter Leslie Parks, "He always wanted to show injustice. That's all he knew, so that's what he took photographs of."

Most people know Parks for his firsts: first African-American man to work at ***Life*** magazine, first to write and direct a Hollywood film (***The Learning Tree*** in 1969)—or for a single iconic photograph or film. Few are aware of the breadth of his creativity, that he was also a self-taught pianist, composer and author of memoirs, poetry, novels and plays. Fewer still appreciate how he brought to the American mainstream the truth—ugly and beautiful—of people rendered invisible because of an unprivileged station in life. A child of those hidden truths, Parks compelled a reluctant America to account for them through images that mesmerized and seemed to ask: "Now that you've seen me, what are you going to do about it?"

Words:
Sala Elise Patterson

Photography:
Courtesy of The Gordon Parks Foundation

Department Store, Mobile, Alabama, 1956.

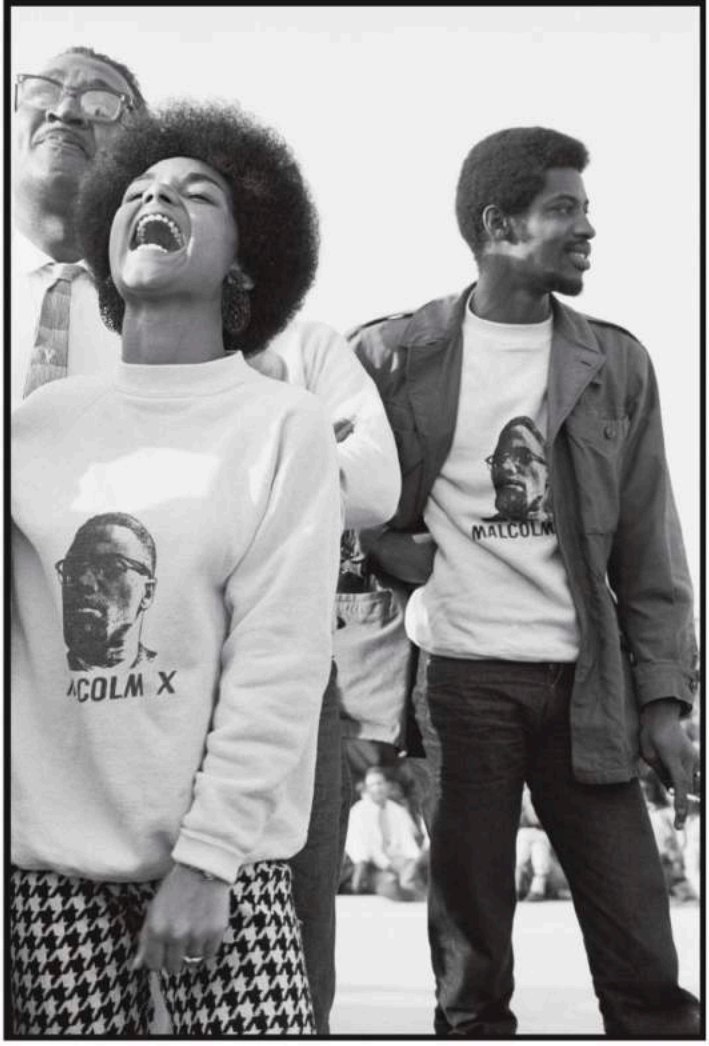
Gordon Parks was born into a poor farming family in rural Kansas, the youngest of 15. His childhood was shaped as much by the stunning natural landscape as it was by the fear, hatred and violence he experienced as a young black man. Despite the hardships of living in segregated America, Parks' mother had great plans for him, placing "love, dignity and hard work over hatred," as he described in his autobiography, ***A Choice of Weapons***. A young Parks responded by approaching life with ambition and purpose. Following his mother's instructions from her deathbed, at 16 he went to live with a sister in St. Paul, Minnesota. "[Go know] another kind of world, one with more hope and promising things," she implored. With the prairies of Kansas in his mind and her words in his ears, he set out.

That love, expectation and a religious upbringing served as a moral compass for Parks in the precarious years right after he left home. These values also eventually defined him as an artist. Even though he began his career as a fashion and portrait photographer, and later shot for major glossies, he never stopped pointing his camera at what was wrong in the world. "He did them concurrently," explains Amanda Smith, assistant director at The Gordon Parks Foundation. She points to two stories Parks shot in 1956: one of a family living in Alabama under Jim Crow segregation, and another, a lush fashion feature. "It's amazing that the same photographer was able to use his camera so effectively for such different things."

"Parks was consistent: consistently prolific, inspired and committed to fighting inequality."

Untitled, ca. 1948 (one of Parks' many self portraits):

Untitled, New York, New York, 1952 offers a behind-the-scenes look at some of Gordon Parks' fashion commissions in the 1950s.



Untitled, Watts, California, 1967, is one of many photographs Gordon Parks shot at civil rights rallies around the USA.

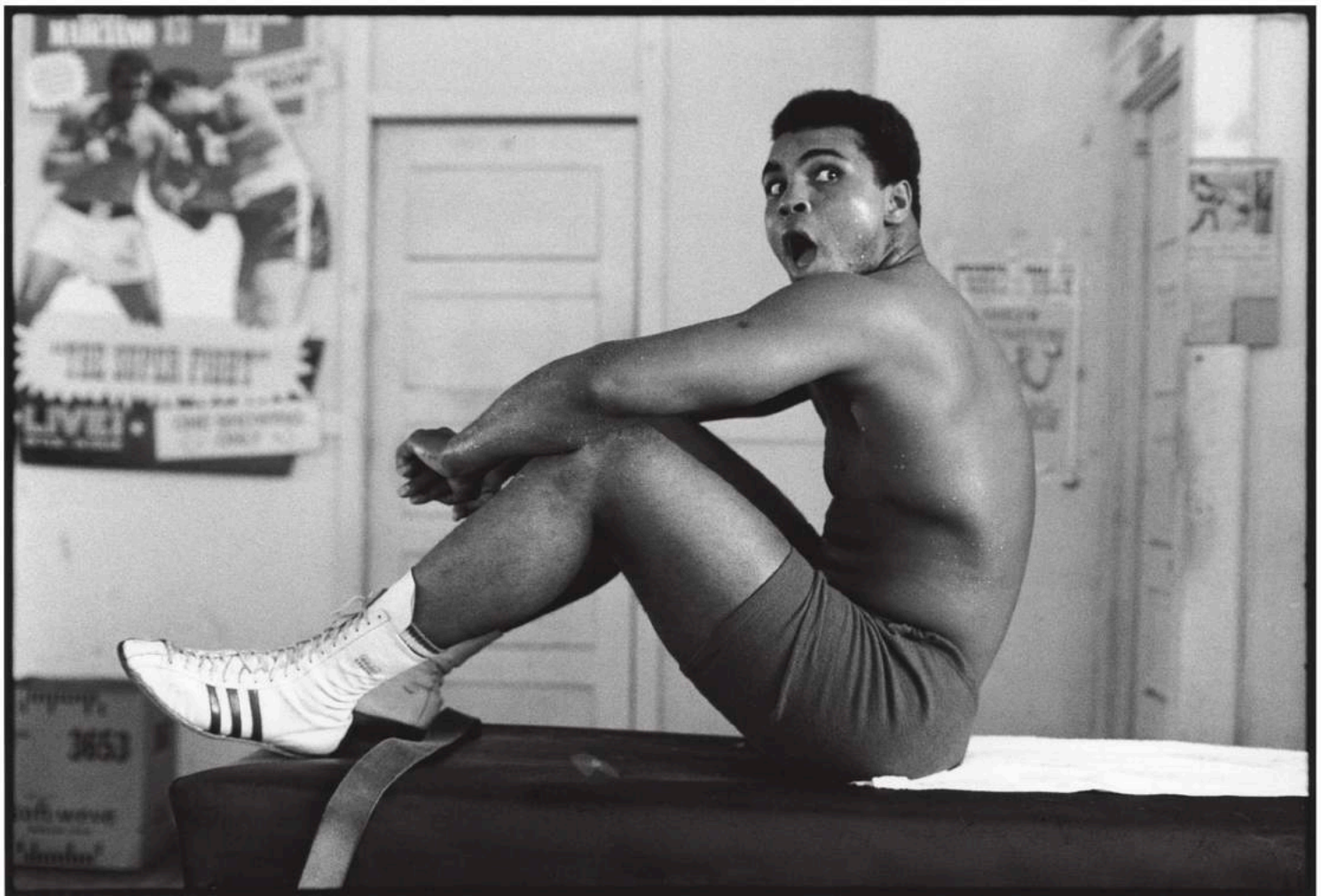
This agility is especially remarkable given that Parks was self-taught. That is not to say he didn't study or approach his work with rigor. Rather, he educated himself into a skilled practitioner, reading "every book on art and photography I could afford." It is difficult to appreciate what it meant for a black man to break color barriers in 1950s America without the benefit of formal education. It is evidence of his determination, ingenuity and the staying power of his mother's words.

Parks' road to photography was circuitous. After leaving home as a teenager, he spent a long decade eking out a living at largely ungratifying jobs. But while working as a waiter on a railroad dining car at the age of 25, he thumbed through a magazine left by a co-worker. "There was a portfolio of photographs in it that I couldn't forget; they were of migrant workers. Dispossessed, beaten by dust, storms and floods... scrounging for work," he wrote. Parks was as mesmerized by what the images documented as by what they communicated —the depth of the subjects' humanity and their misery. He had never experienced so much in individual photographs.

For months, Parks studied the pictures and the names of the photographers who took them: Russell Lee, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and others. They were working for the Farm Security Administration on an initiative that photographed the lives of poor American farmers to "introduce America to Americans," as program director Roy Stryker would say. Little did Parks know that within seven years he would join them at the FSA and lay the foundation for a remarkable career as a documentary photographer.

Ultimately Parks committed to photography because he realized its power to raise the social consciousness of the viewer, even—perhaps, especially—those who saw the world as flawless and fair. After months studying that FSA photo essay, he entered a pawnshop in Seattle and purchased his first camera (a Voigtländer Brillant), some film and a handbook on exposure. Parks started shooting: fashion and portraits and then a series on Chicago's impoverished South Side. Those early efforts won him his first big break in 1942—the prized Julius Rosenwald Fellowship and an invitation from Stryker to train with his idols at the FSA.

"Parks committed to photography because he realized its power to raise the social consciousness of the viewer, even—perhaps, especially—those who saw the world as flawless and fair."



Untitled, Shady Grove, Alabama, 1956, is one of the scenes of Americana for which Parks is celebrated.

Walburga, Baroness von Friesen, Estoril, Portugal, 1951.

While at the FSA, Parks gained "discipline and a sense of direction." It is where he took one of his most celebrated photographs, ***American Gothic*** (1942), which played in image and title on American painter Grant Wood's 1930 painting of the same name. He shot Ella Watson, a black woman who cleaned the FSA offices, broom in hand, mop and American flag in the backdrop. That image came to symbolize the thrust of the then nascent civil rights movement—confronting America's broken promise to its black population.

Parks and his FSA colleagues fed the American imagination with images of African-American life that sharply contrasted with negative stereotypes prevalent at the time. When the FSA closed in 1943, Parks moved briefly to the Office of War Information where he photographed the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African-American military pilots in the US armed forces.

That period was followed by several years as a freelance fashion photographer, most notably for ***Vogue***. There, he showcased a signature aesthetic, which photo historian and Gordon Parks Foundation board member Deborah Willis calls street style. "He situated models in haute couture dresses and stylized suits within the lively city. Readers could imagine themselves in the clothing, either waiting for a bus on Fifth Avenue or experiencing a flat tire on the way to a ball." She adds, "Gordon understood the importance of beauty in everyday life. He recognized desire and found a way to express it in many forms."

In 1948, Parks received the offer of a lifetime: to join Life magazine as a staff photographer. It was at ***Life*** that he cemented his reputation as an extraordinary photojournalist. He shot luminaries (Alexander Calder, Alberto Giacometti, Leonard Bernstein, Ralph Ellison, Muhammad Ali, Ingrid Bergman), religious and social movements (Black Panthers, the civil rights movement, Benedictine monks), fashion and reportage. But perhaps his greatest contribution to the national consciousness was exposing everyday moments in the lives of ordinary black and poor people in rural and urban America.

"America has never fully reconciled the racial injustices Parks captured with his camera."

At ***Life***, Parks became known as a champion of social causes and an authentic public photographic voice about blackness and deprivation. Aaron Bryant, curator of photography at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture says Parks was about more than just civil rights. He was about human rights, using photography to comment on many kinds of discrimination—gender, class, socioeconomic, race, as well as regional. "He makes incredibly clear distinctions between the kinds of oppression that one can be subjugated to, and he can do it all in one photograph or series of photographs," Bryant explains.

Parks' sensitivity and compassion for his subjects allowed them to reveal their most honest selves. "He was always able to make his subjects feel comfortable. He was very charming," Leslie Parks says. Whether shooting Red Jackson, a young gang leader in Harlem; Flavio, a sickly boy living in a favela in Rio de Janeiro; the Fontenelle family, fraying at the seams in Harlem; or segregation in the South, his photos captured the intimate consequences of societal dysfunction. That was critical in 1960s America, Bryant explains, when mainstream media propagated ideals of a universally accessible middle class. "Parks becomes the photographer that defines a genre that interrogates this other America and the myth of the American dream," he says.

Parks would stay at ***Life*** for more than two decades. The impact of that period on his legacy cannot be overstated. He worked for the magazine during its most influential years, which meant his photographs had a large American audience. For many, his stories offered a first-ever look at how stifled fellow Americans were by racial segregation, violence and poverty.

And Parks was shooting at ***Life*** before the era of Photoshop, as photographer Wing Young Huie writes in the foreword to Parks' autobiography, when "photographs were embedded with notions of truth." That extends equally to the suffering displayed and to the dignity of his subjects. Thus, ***Life*** readers took Parks' images at face value, as indisputable, even if they did not connect the human condition on display with the political landscape that made it possible. At its most effective, that kind of photography makes empathy possible and intervention feel necessary.

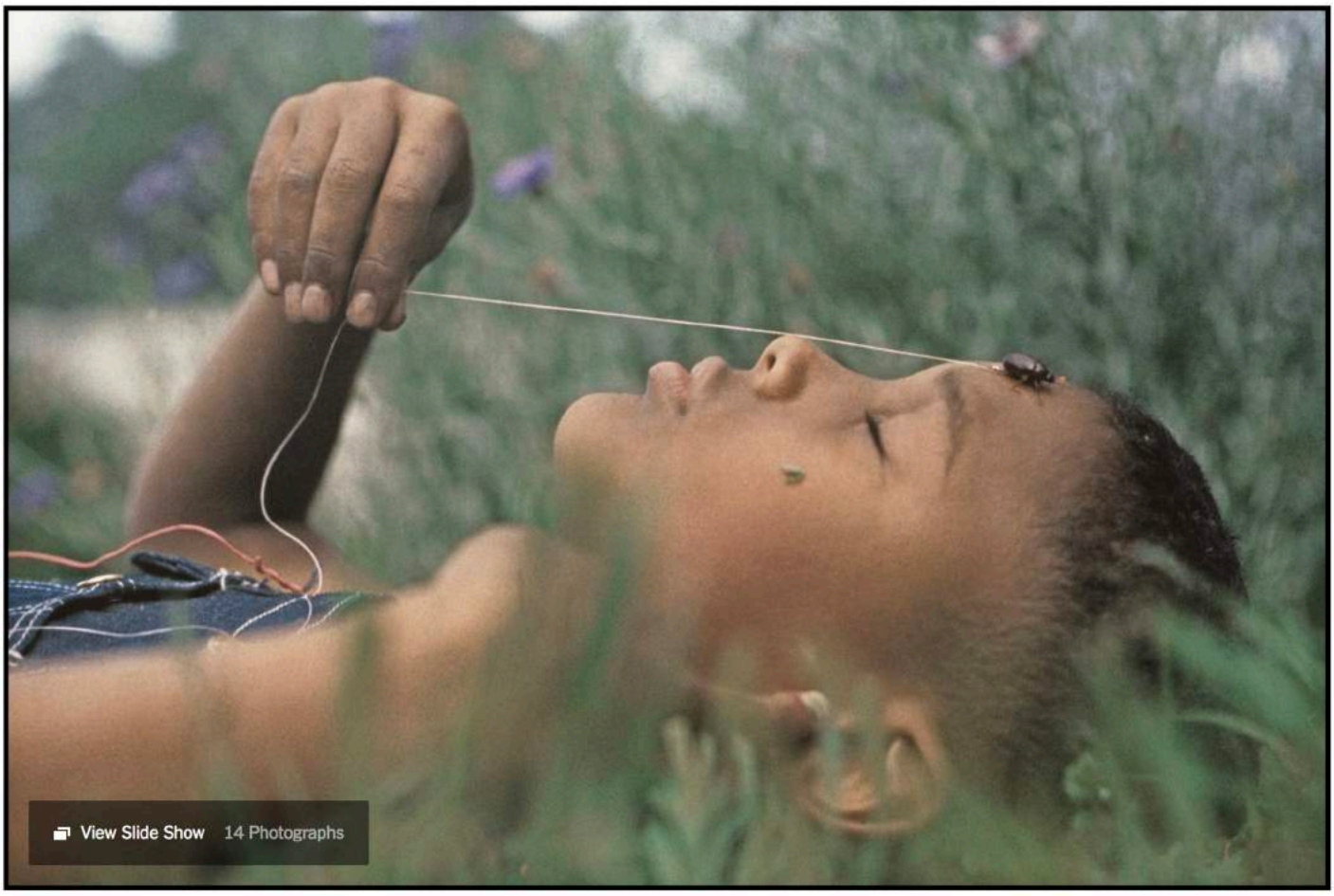
On June 27, 2017, American rap phenomenon Kendrick Lamar released the music video for his song "Element." Poignant and cinematically relentless, it recreates four classic Parks images at key moments. Lamar and his co-directors (photographer Jonas Lindstroem and manager Dave Free) have created a respectful video befitting a musician who, according to ***Rolling Stone***, raps with "cinematic precision" and "talks in colors."

There is a greater message in the gesture, however. As an artist whose music and videos tell stories that are essentially a call to action, Lamar is aligning himself with Parks around a common, aesthetically driven breed of activism. Although very different, both men speak harsh truths about America, many of them the same, even at a distance of decades.

The reality is, America has never fully acknowledged or reconciled the racial injustices Parks captured with his camera. And, it makes efforts to do so only when forced by catastrophic events—Charlottesville, Flint, Charleston, Sanford. Perhaps Parks' legacy, then, is to show us how beauty can create a narrative where words won't. Leslie Parks offers: "Let's not forget what he taught us with his photographs, what he wrote about, the lessons. It's nice to go back and look at his work—and never forget."

The New York Times

LENS
PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO
AND VISUAL JOURNALISM



Gordon Parks, Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

The Cinematic Images of Gordon Parks

By Maurice Berger Aug. 28, 2017 1

When Gordon Parks photographed Duke Ellington during a television appearance in 1960, he took a series of photographs as the musician's image flickered across control room monitors. These striking pictures would mark the beginning of Mr. Parks's long, if relatively forgotten, relationship with television. Over the next 25 years, he directed several television documentaries and films, including a drama based on Solomon Northup's autobiography, "Twelve Years a Slave."

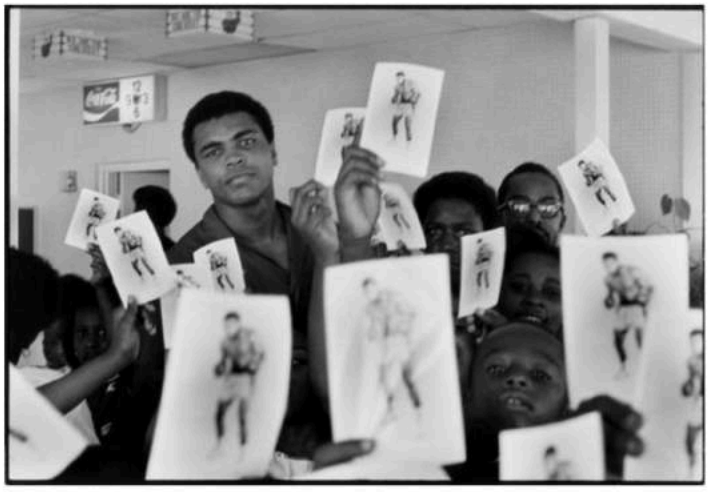
Although Mr. Parks's work in television and film was central to his oeuvre, it remains largely ignored by photo historians and curators. Yet, perhaps more than any mid-20th-century photographer, he understood how much these mediums had conditioned the contemporary eye and mind.

A new exhibition, "Gordon Parks — I Am You. Selected Works, 1942-1978," currently on view at Foam in Amsterdam through Sept. 6, explores how Mr. Parks not only made television and Hollywood films, but also employed cinematic techniques when taking and sequencing photographs. In addition to excerpts from his movies, the exhibition surveys a wide range of his innovative photographs, from editorial and fashion work to civil rights photos and portraits.

Deborah Willis, the photo historian who has written extensively on Mr. Parks, noted that he was never content with exploring one medium. Accordingly, she argues for the importance of looking beyond photography to better assess the impact of his work.

"As artists, photographers, scholars and consumers, we are used to equating photographs with the emotional experience of reading photographic images," said Ms. Willis. "Gordon found other art forms to tell stories about individuals, family life, work and injustice. Thus, he contributed to a broader conversation, exploring other media during a changing time."

The exhibition, organized by Felix Hoffmann, the head curator of the C/O Berlin Foundation, examines individual images, contact sheets and photo essays to show how Mr. Parks's "filmic thinking" challenged photography's imperative to "unite a plot, a situation, and a mood in a single frame." Some of his photographs attempted to transcend these decisive moments, as Henri Cartier-Bresson famously called them, by representing an event in a way that suggested its unfolding over time.



Muhammad Ali in Miami. 1970. Gordon Parks, Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

In the exhibition's catalog, Mr. Hoffmann cited several examples of this, like the linear, frame-by-frame sequencing of a fight scene in a 1948 Life photo essay, "Harlem Gang Leader." Perhaps stymied by the limitations of print, Mr. Parks transformed another photo essay, "Flavio," about a 12-year-old boy's struggle with poverty in Brazil, into a short film, in which he included both footage and photographs. To accentuate the artist's cinematic point of view, "Gordon Parks: I Am You" includes work typically ignored by other exhibitions: excerpts from his work for film and television, including "The Learning Tree" and "Diary of a Harlem Family." By acknowledging this work, the exhibition shows the progression of Mr. Parks's cinematic thinking and acknowledges one of his most important and enduring legacies.

During a period when the circulation of photo-heavy magazines like Life and Look was declining, film and broadcast continued to expand their reach. Mr. Hoffmann argues that Mr. Parks's multidisciplinary efforts — which besides television and five feature films included writing, music and choreography — were also intended to broaden his work's public and cultural reach.

Mr. Parks's debut feature film, "The Learning Tree," the first major Hollywood studio movie directed by an African-American, was a semi-autobiographical, humanistic recounting of black life and racial prejudice in Depression-era Kansas. Released in 1969, the film was lauded for its lyricism and powerful social commentary. "Diary of a Harlem Family," produced for public television in 1968, was similarly praised for its honest and respectful view of urban poverty through the experiences of one family.

Family Day Begins, Rio de Janeiro. 1961. Gordon Parks, Courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation

Although not included in the exhibition, the artist's 1971 feature film, "Shaft," was even more revolutionary. It told the story of a suave African-American private investigator, John Shaft, hired by a Harlem gangster to rescue a daughter kidnapped by Italian mobsters. The film challenged Hollywood's negative and subservient view of African-Americans, introducing the black action hero into mainstream cinema. Its violent content and what some have criticized as stereotypical black characters led some critics to dismiss "Shaft" as a "blaxploitation" film. But its empowered and confident black protagonist, as well as its heroic story line, were trailblazing.

The political content of these movies and programs was also consistent with that of Mr. Parks's civil rights photographs. From their themes of social justice and appeal to empathy — which the artist believed was vital to challenging negative stereotypes by reminding viewers of our shared humanity — to their focus on confident black characters, the films advanced the social issues explored in some of his photographs.

Peter Kunhardt, Jr., executive director of the Gordon Parks Foundation, welcomes this interdisciplinary approach, noting that over the next decade the organization will catalog the artist's films, television programs, music and writing to "help shape a cohesive understanding of his many talents and work."

In the end, to understand these works in relationship to each other, as "Gordon Parks: I Am You" has done, is to grasp the collective brilliance of the artist's work — the power of his imagery, which depicted people of all races in multiple media, to influence a broad national and international audience.

"Gordon's early work as a photographer developed his eye and transitioned him into film directing," said Mr. Kunhardt. "He is often called a 'Renaissance man' because he worked in so many different media, but I like to refer to him as a humanitarian artist who used whatever medium he could to have an impact."

Maurice Berger is a research professor and the chief curator at the Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

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DAZED

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTOS

16th June 2017

Text Niall Flynn

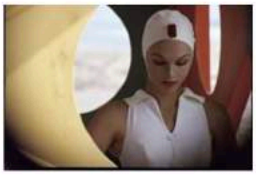
"Untitled", Watts, California, 1967 Photography Gordon Parks, courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

How Gordon Parks broke new ground for Black American artists

A core figure of America's civil rights movement, the photographer/filmmaker recognised the socially transformative power of the camera and harnessed it wholeheartedly

Gordon Parks' I Am You

5 IMAGES



Gordon Parks referred to his camera as his "weapon of choice".

Over a decade since his death at the age of 93, the Kansas-born artist remains a celebrated staple of photojournalism's golden age, his status as one of America's most important, pioneering photographers inarguable. From the moment he purchased his first camera aged 25 – a Voigtländer Brillant, for a grand total of $12.50 – Parks recognised the startling, socially transformative power an image was capable of, and set to work accordingly.

Throughout his career, the self-taught photographer employed his lens to expose injustice and marginalisation throughout America, chronicling the country's deep social, racial and economic divisions for government branches such as the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and the Office of War Information. A stint at *Vogue* followed, before over 20 years as a staff photographer at *Life*, and subsequent forays into filmmaking, composition poetry, painting and more.

Parks was an activist, a humanitarian and a core figure in America's civil rights movement; he routinely shattering glass ceilings for black artists, while using his platform to expose the stark realities of day-to-day inequality on the most momentous of scales. To celebrate the life and work of the famed storyteller, *Gordon Parks - I Am You. Selected Works 1942-1978* will run at Foam from 16 June – 6 September 2017. In conjunction with the exhibition's opening, here are just a few of the reasons why Gordon Parks is as important as ever.

"Department Store", Mobile, Alabama, 1956 Photography Gordon Parks, courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

HE SMASHED THROUGH RACIAL BARRIERS

During his career, Parks made a regular habit of smashing through the barriers placed in front of him. Despite operating at the height of racist attitudes in the 40s, he worked regularly as a fashion photographer for *Vogue* under the editorship of Alexander Liberman, during which he published two books (*Flash Photography* in 1947 and *Camera Portraits: Techniques and Principles of Documentary Portraiture* a year later in 1948). A photo essay published that same year on a young, Harlem gang leader earned him a staff job at *Life* – the first time an African-American had ever held such a role – which he retained for the following two decades. In 1964, he wrote *The Learning Tree*, a semi-autobiographical novel that he adapted for the big screen five years later in 1969. In doing so, he became Hollywood's first ever major black director.

BLAXPLOITATION STARTED WITH HIM

Following the success of the *The Learning Tree*, Parks's next crack at the big screen came in the form of detective flick *Shaft*. Not only was the 1971 film – which introduced the cinema-goers to John Shaft, the 'world's first black action hero' – a critical *and* commercial hit, but it spawned and inspired a series of subsequent movies that would come to be known as Blaxploitation. While cinema had previously exploited black males with damaging stereotypes such as violence and drug use, *Shaft* – and the films that followed – operated in tandem with the empowered self-expression of the black power movement as a no-holds-barred celebration of the black body. In the film's 2000 sequel (starring a certain Samuel L. Jackson as the eponymous hero's nephew and namesake), you can catch Parks in a brief cameo, with Jackson's character greeting him as 'Mr P'.

HE WAS A TOTAL POLYMATH

As well as his photography and filmmaking, Gordon Parks was a multifaceted, cross-discipline creative. Alongside the aforementioned novel *The Learning Tree*, he authored a total of 15 books, including guides on the craft of photography, poetry collections, *Shannon* – a novel about the tribulations of a group of Irish immigrants – and three separate volumes of memoirs. On top of that, he was also a talented oil painter, piano player and composer; in, 1989, he helmed and directed *Martin*, a ballet dedicated to his friend Martin Luther King. Alongside directorial credits for *The Learning Tree* and the original *Shaft*, he also helmed *Shaft's Big Score* (1972), *The Supercops* (1974) and *Leadbelly* (1976), a Huddie Ledbetter biopic.

SOME OF HISTORY'S MOST IMPORTANT FIGURES SAT FOR HIM

Although primarily celebrated for his stark, monochromatic photojournalism, Parks's canon included a range of different colour works – as well as a number of famous, historically significant portraits. Due to his role within the civil rights community, he was able to provide stark, intimate stills of figures such as Malcom X and Stokey Carmichael, while Martin Luther King – a regular subject of his famous black and white photographs – considered him a close friend and confidant. However, perhaps the most well-known of the Kansas photographer's portraits are those of Muhammad Ali. Having met the boxing icon almost immediately afterwards his infamous draft evasion, Parks – as the only black man on *Life*'s staff – was given near-total access to Ali at a time when the famous enigma was, to the public eye, even more distant than ever. The resulting images are a brief yet mystical dive into the boxer's maundering psyche – and remain some of the most intimate images ever taken of him.

HIS PHOTOGRAPHS HELPED CHANGED THE WORLD

Gordon Parks didn't view himself as an activist first, photographer second, or vice-versa. Rather, the two were entangled; his camera was an enabler for social change and he – as a young, black man in racially divided America with the power of publications behind him – recognised the unique opportunity that he had provided for himself. Whether it was *American Gothic* – a haunting image of Ella Watson, a black cleaner, stood motionless in front of the US flag – or *The Restraints: Open and Hidden* – a 1956 photo essay of racial segregation in rural Alabam – Parks was able to enter the places his white contemporaries didn't even know to look. His lens was unflinching, his message clear: if his camera were to be his chosen weapon, then he would be using it effectively. His haunting, unequivocal stills told stories that began those conversations about radical societal change. Gordon Park's camera *was* his weapon of choice – and there wasn't a better shot in all of America.

Gordon Parks - I Am You. Selected Works 1942-1978 will run at Foam from 16 June – 6 September 2017

"Boy and June Bug", Fort Scott, Kansas, 1963 Photography Gordon Parks, courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

TIME

NEWSFEED • PHOTOGRAPHY

Kendrick Lamar Paid Homage to the Iconic Images of Photojournalist Gordon Parks With His 'Element' Video

By **CADY LANG** June 29, 2017

Kendrick Lamar's striking new music video for his track "Element" is a meditation on the complexities, struggles, and triumphs of the black experience in America, something that was further emphasized by his earnest homage to the images of legendary photojournalist and filmmaker Gordon Parks.

When the *DAMN.* rapper's video dropped on Wednesday afternoon, many people were quick to note the footage's striking resemblance to many of Parks' iconic photos of black life in America — from a touching image of a boy with a ladybug on his head that brought to mind Parks' "Boy With Junebug" to a clip of women wearing headwraps that references Parks' famed 1963 photo essay for *LIFE* about Black Muslims, "The White Man's Day Is Almost Over."

The homage wasn't lost on the Gordon Parks Foundation, whose executive director, Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr., told *Okayplayer* that the music video honors the late photographer.

"The Gordon Parks Foundation is pleased to see Kendrick Lamar recognize Gordon Parks' important photography while working at *LIFE* magazine and honoring his legacy," Kunhardt said. "The Gordon Parks Foundation uses Gordon's creative work to educate and inspire young artists."

A pioneer, Parks was a noted as a trailblazer in film, documentary, music, and literature.

feature shoot

50 YEARS LATER, THE COURAGE OF GORDON PARKS

March 13, 2017 by **Ellyn Kail**

Untitled, Shady Grove, Alabama, 1956. © The Gordon Parks Foundation from the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl

The Fontenelles at the Poverty Board, Harlem, New York, 1967 © The Gordon Parks Foundation from the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl

I Am You, the new book of Gordon Parks photographs published by Steidl, The Gordon Parks Foundation, and C/O Berlin, draws its title from a 1967 *Life* photo essay called *A Harlem Family*, in which the photojournalist told the story of an African American couple named Bessie and Norman Fontenelle as they struggled to feed and clothe their nine children. Parks penned the introduction himself, beginning with the following lines:

"What I want. What I am. What you force me to be is what you are. For I am you, staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom […] There is something about both of us that goes deeper than blood or black and white. It is our common search for a better life, a better world."

The book, edited by Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr. and Felix Hoffmann, spans the photojournalist's career from 1942 until 1978. Over the course of those 36 years, Parks documented the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the triumphs and heartaches of Malcolm X, and the rigorous training schedule of Muhammed Ali.

He visited the segregated school he once attended as a child and followed up on the fates of some of his old classmates. He also traveled to Jim Crow Alabama. He photographed the creations of fashion icons like couturier James Galanos, the work of cutting-edge artists, and the forbidden love between film star Ingrid Bergman and director Roberto Rossellini.

The editors of the book offer insights into eighteen of Parks's most extraordinary projects and essays. The most famous images are included, but with the addition of a few photographs published for the first time as late as 2015, this book gives them new life.

Perhaps Parks's spirit shines through most brightly in one small anecdote Hoffmann retells in the book's essay. When his editors at *Life* wondered if his photos from the Rio de Janeiro favelas were "too depressing" and cut parts of the essay because of it, the photojournalist drafted up a resignation letter. In the end, the magazine agreed to publish a twelve-page spread. In the month following its release, the public donated $30,000 for the family in Parks's essay. A boy who with bronchial asthma received treatment in Denver, and it probably saved his life.

Parks's persistence makes us proud in 2017; the photographer loved his country, the world, and its people, and he challenged us to do better. But at the same time, looking at these pictures now comes with a lingering pang and the understanding that not all has been resolved. Those evils he battled— racism, inequality, poverty, violence— remain today.

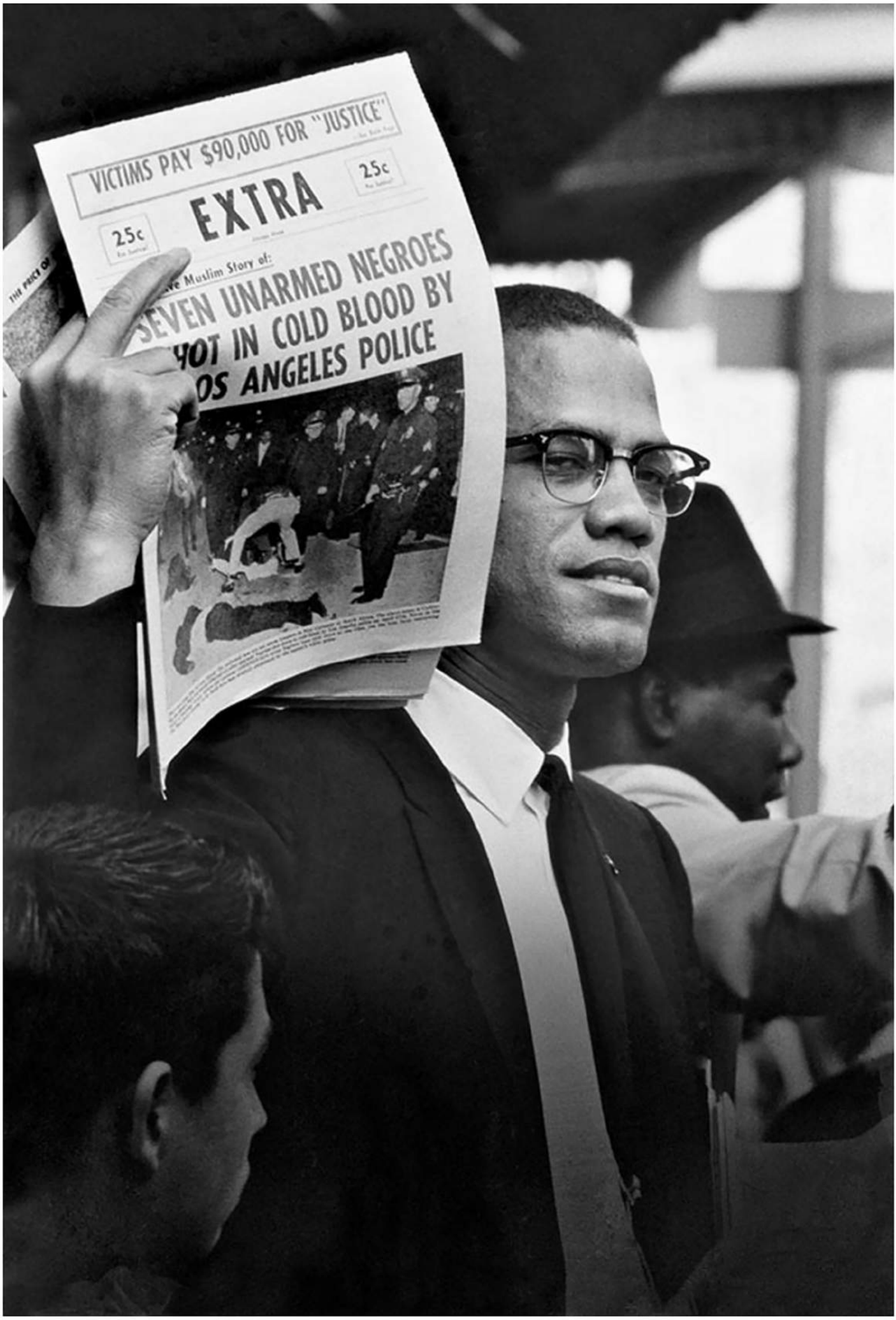
The words Parks used to conclude the introduction to *A Harlem Family* in 1967 are as relevant right now, 50 years later, as they were back then:

"Look at me. Listen to me. Try to understand my struggle against your racism. There is yet a chance for us to live in peace beneath these restless skies."

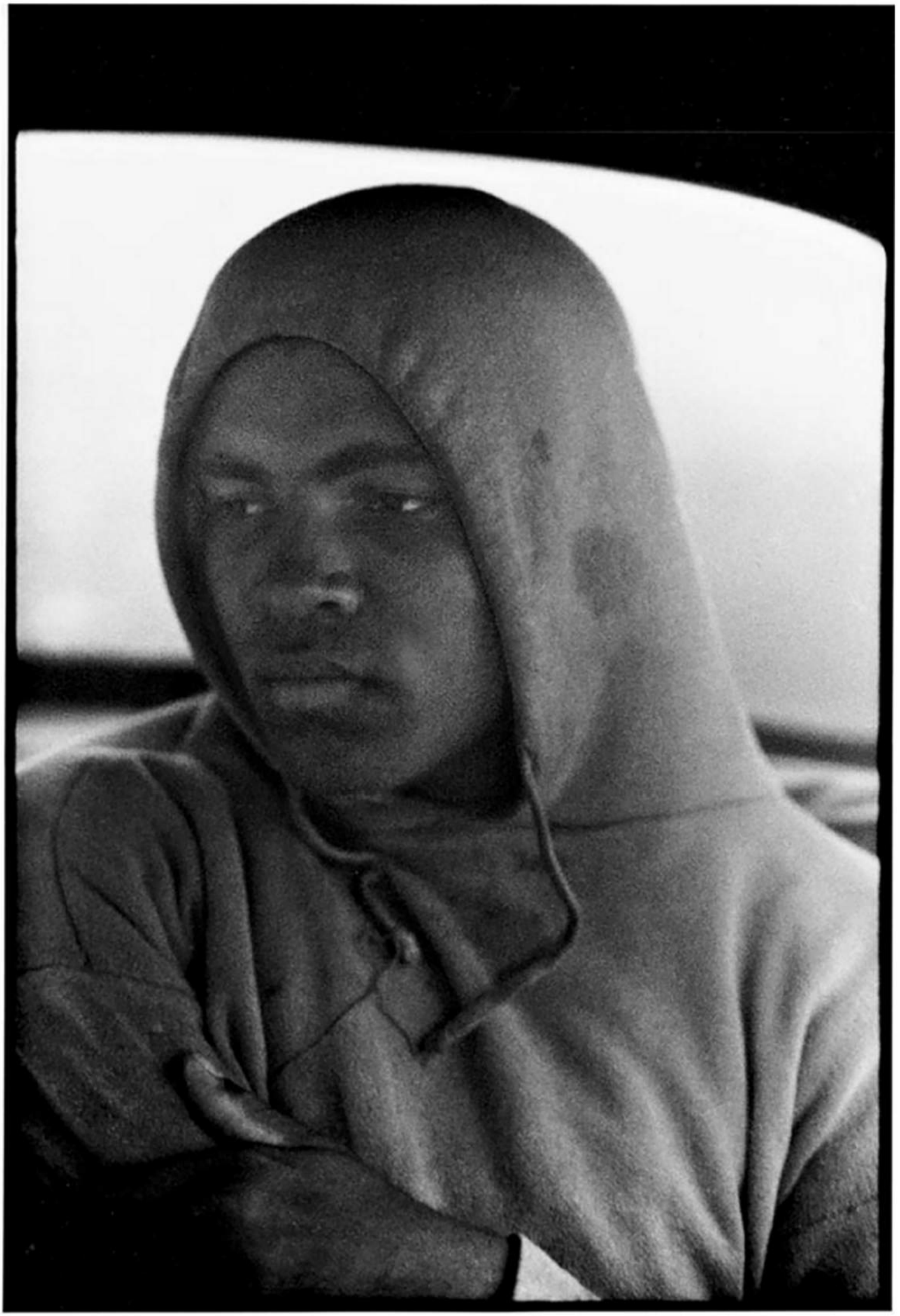
Untitled, Chicago, Illinois, 1950. © The Gordon Parks Foundation from the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl

Jeweled Cap, Malibu, California, 1958. © The Gordon Parks Foundation from the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl

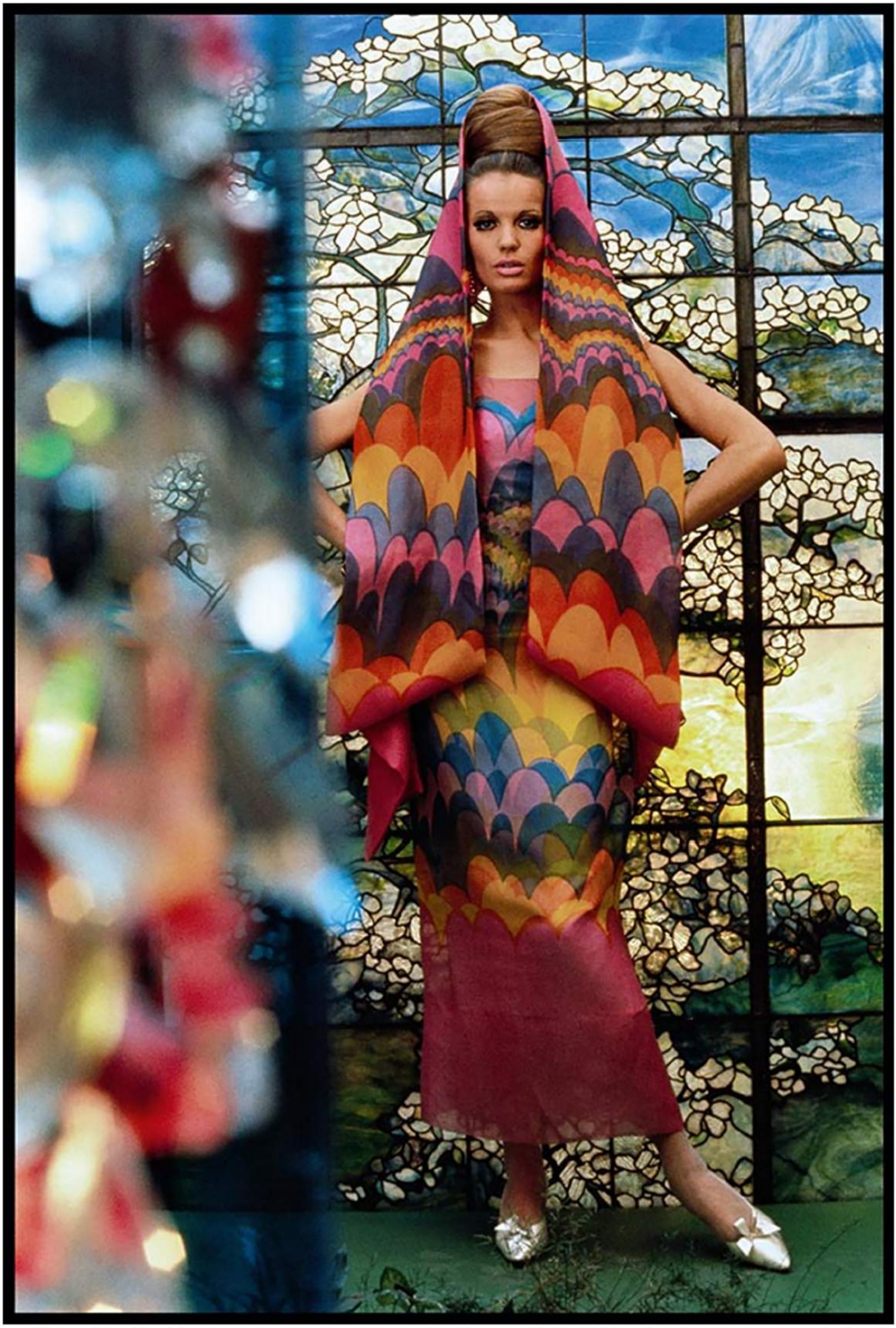
Mr. and Mrs. Albert Thornton, Mobile, Alabama, 1956. © The Gordon Parks Foundation from the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl



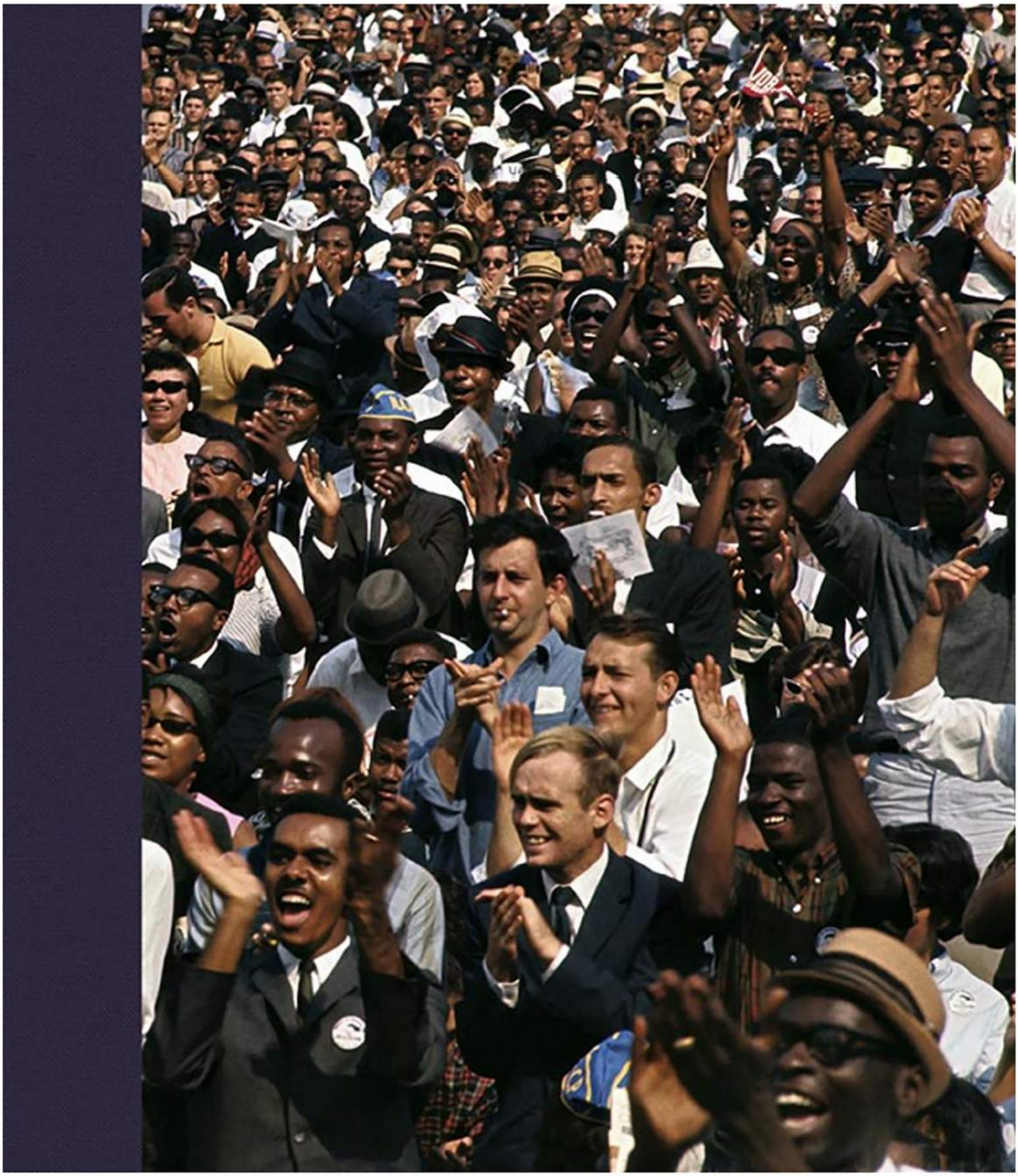
Malcolm X Holding Up Black Muslim Newspaper, 1963. © The Gordon Parks Foundation from the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl



Untitled, London, England, 1966. © The Gordon Parks Foundation from the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl



Veruschka Models Dress by Pauline Trigère for Vogue, 1965. © The Gordon Parks Foundation from the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl



Untitled, Washington, D.C., 1963. Cover of the book I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942–1978 by Gordon Parks, published by Steidl

theguardian

Photography

The incomparable Gordon Parks – in pictures

Wednesday 8 February 2017 11.52 EST

A new book celebrates the breadth of photographer and film-maker Gordon Parks's work, including his images of a racially divided south in the 1960s, his fashion work for Life and Vogue, and the heartbreaking poverty of a Harlem family. I Am You is published by The Gordon Parks Foundation, c/o Berlin and Steidl

Jeweled Cap, Malibu, California, 1958 All Photographs: Gordon Parks/Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

Mr. and Mrs. Albert Thornton, Mobile, Alabama, 1956

The Fontenelles at the Poverty Board, Harlem, New York, 1967

Untitled, Washington DC, 1963

Untitled, Chicago, Illinois, 1950

Untitled, New York, New York, 1957

Untitled, Alabama, 1956

Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1948

Untitled, Shady Grove, Alabama, 1956

Malcolm X Holding Up Black Muslim Newspaper, 1963

ART // BOOKS

In "I AM YOU," Gordon Parks Tells It Like It Is

Steidl presents "I Am You," a collection of some of the best works from the seminal essays of master photographer Gordon Parks.

by Miss Rosen Jan 25th, 2017

Photo: From "I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942-1978 (Steidl/ The Gordon Parks Foundation/ C/O Berlin). Edited by Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr. and Felix Hoffman,

"I picked up a camera because it was my choice of weapon against what I hated most about the universe: racism, intolerance, poverty. I could have just as easily picked up a knife or gun, like many of my childhood friends did," American photographer **Gordon Parks** (1912-2006) revealed.

Also: "Celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." on His 88th Birthday

Parks understood that photography possessed the power to change the way we see and understand the world by speaking a language entirely its own. Seeing is believing, as the old saw goes, which is why representation matters. But representation is only the first step; truth is the pinnacle to which great artists aspire to reach.

Jeweled Cap, Malibu, California, 1958

Parks was not only a master of the medium, he was an activist using his work to propel political and social change throughout the twentieth century. He decided to become a photographer while working as a waiter in a railroad dining car, after observing passengers read picture magazines for pleasure. At the age of 25, he purchased his first camera and began to shoot, never putting his weapon down until the Lord called him home.

For seven decades, Parks documented the world in which he lived, smoothly code switching from Conde Nast to Civil Rights before going on to take it to the big screen with *Shaft* in 1971, helping to bring black filmmakers to the forefront of Hollywood. Throughout it all, he stayed true to himself, representing African American art, culture, and politics on the world stage with grace, strength, and nerve.

Untitled, Alabama, 1956

Parks could photograph top models and socialites for *Vogue* with the same sensitivity and delicacy he brought to the story of segregation in the South. Perhaps it was Parks' dignity and self-respect that enabled him to see people as individuals first, effectively obliterating disgraceful stereotypes. His photographs reveal a man who gazed upon the world and bestowed grace and beauty upon it no matter its form.

And so it is fitting that the newest collection of his photographs is simply titled ***I AM YOU: Selected Works, 1942-1978*** (Steidl/ The Gordon Parks Foundation/ C/O Berlin). Edited by Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr. and Felix Hoffman, the book features a compelling array of highlights from seminal series made for picture magazines over four decades including *Harlem Gang Leader*, ***Back to Fort Scott***, *Alberto Giacometti, Alexander Calder,* ***A Man Becomes Invisible***, *Fashion, Segregation in the South, Duke Ellington,* ***Muhammad Ali***, *The March on Washington,* and *Black Muslims*, among others.

Untitled, Shady Grove, Alabama, 1956

Felix Hoffman writes in the book's introduction, "Photojournalism was–and is—interested primarily in decisive, individual, isolable, often transitory moments. The origins of photojournalism lie in the work of photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson, whose published shots unite a plot, a situation, and a mood in a single frame. The notion of time that underlies such an artistic concept is linear; an image is as open to he previous moment as it is to the next. This approach can be applied easily to singular events. But what if, rather than a specific moment, a more general condition is to be represented, if a repeated occurrence is to be shown in such a way that its recurrent nature is also visible?"

This is where Gordon Parks changed the game, becoming one of the first practitioners of New Journalism decades before the genre was named. Perhaps it was his life experience that enabled him to see that it is impossible, or simply unnecessary, to isolate a single image to tell the story. The continuum of human experience and human history is simply too vast, too complex, and too interconnected to impose arbitrary rules upon it.

Untitled, New York, New York, 1957

Instead, Parks set forth to tell the story as a sequence, just as one would do with a book. While each image beautifully encapsulates a chapter, taken together, the sum of the whole is greater than its parts. Which is one of the reasons *I AM YOU* is utterly magnificent: looking at Parks' essays in sequence creates an astounding effect, one of a man who understood that the truth was far more nuanced than the mass media would have you know. That there are no simple answers to questions but we must continue to ask, to examine with great tenderness whether we are looking at the impact of crime and poverty or music and art.

"I have always felt as though I needed a weapon against evil," Parks revealed, and in the creation of an incomparable body of work he has bequeathed this need to serve the greater good of humanity.

Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1948

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***Miss Rosen** is a New York-based writer, curator, and brand strategist. There is nothing she adores so much as photography and books. A small part of her wishes she had a proper library, like in the game of Clue. Then she could blaze and write soliloquies to her in and out of print loves.*