

Gordon Parks

American, 1912–2006

Untitled (Man in Hat Holding Little Girl)

c. 1950

Gelatin silver print

10 1/4 x 10 11/16 inches (26 x 27.1 cm)

Purchased with funds contributed in memory
of Magda Krauss, 2001-78-1

Courtesy and © The Gordon Parks
Foundation



Let's Look

Look closely at the people in this picture and describe what you see.

What do you think has brought everyone together? Why do you think so?

How do you think this man is feeling? What could he be thinking?

About the Photograph

Standing in a crowd, an older man holds a young girl in his arm with ease and strength. Our eyes go directly to him; the people in the background are out of focus, but we see every detail of his face. The bright white rim of his hat creates a halo-like shape around his head, further drawing our attention to him. The man looks outward, in the same direction as those behind him. The people are dressed in modest clothes and are of different ages. They stand together, but are not in organized rows. The photograph is unposed, and the individual figures remain unknown to us, leaving us with questions. What has captured their attention? Is it a joyous or serious occasion? What is the relationship between the man and the girl?

Gordon Parks took this picture around 1950, when he worked as a **photojournalist** for *Life* magazine, documenting the effects of poverty and racism, as well as the lives of famous celebrities and politicians. No matter what the subject, Parks's photographs engage us visually and speak to us on an emotional level. Although we don't know the exact story in the picture, we are left with an enduring impression of human dignity and powerful determination.

About Gordon Parks

Born in Kansas, the youngest of fifteen children, Gordon Parks overcame poverty, segregation, and discrimination to become an accomplished photographer, filmmaker, writer, poet, and composer. A self-taught artist, he studied the **Great Depression**–era photographs that he saw in *Life* and other magazines and soon earned a position with the **Farm Security Administration**, documenting social and economic conditions. He became a freelance photographer, moved to Harlem, and was hired by *Life* in the late 1940s, becoming the magazine’s first African American staff photographer. An advocate for the **civil rights movement**, Parks believed in photography as a powerful tool in combating social injustice.



Untitled, 1948, by Gordon Parks
(Courtesy and © The Gordon Parks Foundation)

Curriculum Connections

Art

Art for Social Change (middle and high school)

Gordon Parks believed in the power of art to enact social change on issues such as racism and poverty. What issue is important to you? Take photographs that address a social or political issue that you feel strongly about and write about why you think this issue needs the public’s attention.

Careers in Art: Photojournalism (high school)

What is photojournalism, and how do you pursue a career in it? What skills are required? Research the history of photojournalism and how people train to work in this field.

Language Arts

What Are They Thinking? (adaptable for all grades)

Imagine you could hear the thoughts of the man or girl in this photograph. What would they be? Write an interior monologue for one of these people in a stream-of-consciousness style.

Jesse Owens (high school)

Read Jesse Owens’s “Open Letter to a Young Negro” and discuss the issues that he raises. How might it relate to the mood of the photograph or speak to the common experiences of African American men?

Social Studies

Farm Security Administration (high school)

Like fellow photographers Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, Parks worked for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) early in his career, documenting life during the Great Depression. This organization was established as a way to create jobs. Research the FSA (and related programs) and the artistic production that came out of them. How did art address the social issues of this time?

Lift Every Voice and Sing (middle and high school)

The song *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, originally written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson, became important within the civil rights movement and continues to inspire people today. Listen to a recording of it while looking at Parks’s photograph. What ideas and feelings relate to the image? What similar messages do the picture and song communicate?

A PowerPoint slideshow with all of the resource images can be found on the enclosed CD.