

CORCORAN

GALLERY OF ART • COLLEGE of ART + DESIGN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CORCORAN PRESENTS *GORDON PARKS: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE COLLECTION* October 1, 2011–January 16, 2012

WASHINGTON, D.C.— This fall, the **Corcoran Gallery of Art and College of Art + Design** will present *Gordon Parks: Photographs from the Collection*, an exhibition of 25 works selected from several of Parks's most important photographic essays. The exhibition will feature a selection of his photographic essays from his years as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), a depression-era government agency, and *Life* magazine, which illuminated pressing social issues like poverty, race, segregation, and crime.

In 1997 the Corcoran organized a traveling retrospective, *Half Past Autumn: the Art of Gordon Parks*. The artist subsequently donated to the Corcoran a major collection of his photographs, from which this exhibition is drawn.

Parks (1912–2006) used photography, film, writing, and music to express an enduring message of hope in the face of adversity, but today he is best known for his work as a photojournalist and filmmaker. Parks pioneered the journalistic style of engaging viewers in important issues through the eyes of an individual or family whom he got to know personally. His iconic photograph, *American Gothic, Washington D.C.*, 1942, for example, was made following his personal experience of segregation in Washington; it depicts FSA maid Ella Watson on the job, posed in front of an American flag, holding her tools like the farmer in Grant Wood's painting of the same name. Parks's series *Gang Warfare: Harlem*, 1948, captivated millions of *Life* readers with the story of streetwise Red Jackson, a teenage gang leader he befriended. The exhibition includes several works from both these groundbreaking series.

Born in Fort Scott, Kansas in 1912, Gordon Parks was the youngest of 15 children. Following the death of his mother, Parks left Kansas at the age of 15 to live with his sister in St. Paul, Minnesota. After supporting himself by working as a pianist, busboy, basketball player, Civil Conservation Corpsman, and dining car waiter, Parks began to seriously consider a career in photography in 1937, when he first saw social documentary photographs produced for the FSA. Based in the nation's capital, the FSA was created to assist needy farmers during the dust bowl and photographers



were hired to help promote the FSA's agenda. In 1942, Parks was the first photographer to win the prestigious Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, spurring a move from Chicago to Washington, D.C. for an internship with FSA photography program director Roy Emerson Stryker.

In 1948, after briefly working at the Office of War Information and *Vogue*, Parks became the first African American staff photographer for *Life*, where he remained until 1970. The exhibition includes work from his *Life* series on Harlem (1948), Portugal (1950), segregation in the South (1956), an impoverished Brazilian family (1961), the Black Muslims (1963), and poverty in America (1967).

In 1969 Parks became the first African American to create a major motion picture for a Hollywood studio, directing *The Learning Tree* from a script based on his novel of the same name. He went on to make *Shaft*, *Leadbelly*, and other films that challenged presumptions about African American life. The run of *Gordon Parks: Photographs from the Collection* overlaps with *30 Americans*, a major exhibition of contemporary African American artists at the Corcoran.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Corcoran's hours of operation are as follows: Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.;



Thursday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; closed Monday and Tuesday. Admission to *Gordon Parks: Photographs from the Collection* is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors (62+) and students (with valid ID), children 12 and under, military (with valid ID) and Corcoran Members enter for free. The Gallery will be open and FREE to the public on Monday, January 16, in celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and from November 5–12, 2011, when the Corcoran hosts FotoWeekDC events (see *Corcoran FotoWeek Press Release*).

ABOUT THE CORCORAN

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, a privately funded institution, was founded in 1869. It was America's first dedicated art museum and today is Washington's first and largest nonfederal museum of art. It is known internationally for its distinguished collection of historical and modern American art as well as contemporary art, photography, European painting, sculpture, and the decorative arts. In addition, a dynamic schedule of special exhibitions is complemented and enhanced by a range of educational programming, which together seek to enrich perspectives, support the local arts community, and encourage interpretation. **The Corcoran College of Art + Design** was founded in 1890 and stands as Washington's only four-year college of art and design, offering BFA degrees in Digital Media Design, Fine Art, Fine Art Photography, Graphic Design, Interior Design, and Photojournalism; a BA in Art Studies; a five-year Bachelor of Fine Arts/Master of Arts in Teaching (BFA/MAT); an AFA in Digital Media Design, Fine Art, Graphic Design, and Photography; and MA degrees in Art and the Book, Art Education, Exhibition Design, Interior Design, Master of Arts in Teaching, and New Media Photojournalism. The College's Continuing Education program offers part-time credit and non-credit classes for children and adults and draws more than 2,500 participants each year. For more information about the **Corcoran Gallery of Art and Corcoran College of Art + Design**, visit www.corcoran.org.

Images:

Page one: Gordon Parks, *American Gothic, Washington, D.C.*, 1942. Gelatin silver print, 43 9/16 x 31 7/8 inches. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., The Gordon Parks Collection, 1998.25.003. © The Gordon Parks Foundation.

Page two: Gordon Parks, *At the Poverty Board: Bessie and Kenneth, Little Richard, Norman Jr., and Ellen*, 1967. Gelatin silver print, 16 x 22 1/8 inches. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., The Gordon Parks Collection, 1998.25.190. © The Gordon Parks Foundation.

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