

## Topic Page: [Parks, Gordon, 1912–2006](#)

Summary Article: **Gordon Parks (1912–2006)**

From *African American Almanac*

*Photographer, Composer, Writer, Director*



Gordon Parks was born on November 30, 1912, in Fort Scott, Kansas. After the death of his mother, Parks went to St. Paul, Minnesota, to live with relatives. While there he attended Central High School and Mechanical Arts High School. Despite having fond childhood memories of his father on the family farm, Parks had a dysfunctional upbringing that lasted into young adulthood. Parks worked at a large variety of jobs including janitor, busboy, and semi-pro basketball player. Always interested in the arts, Parks also tried sculpting, writing, and touring with a band, but these artistic endeavors were largely without focus.

In 1933 Parks joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, and in the late 1930s, while working as a railroad porter, he became interested in photography as a medium in which he could finally focus his considerable artistic talents. After purchasing a used camera, Parks worked as a freelance photographer and as a photo-journalist. In 1942 he became a correspondent for the Farm Security Administration, and from 1943 to 1945 he was a correspondent for the Office of War Information. After the war he worked for Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, and in 1948 he became a staff photographer for *Life* magazine. He soon achieved national acclaim for his photographs, and in the mid-1950s he began doing consulting work on Hollywood productions. In the 1960s Parks began doing television documentaries, and in 1966 he published his biography, *A Choice of Weapons*.

Parks is also the author of *The Learning Tree* (1963), *Born Black* (1971), *Gordon Parks: Whispers of Intimate Things* (1971), *Moments without Proper Names* (1975), *To Smile in Autumn* (1979), and *Voices in the Mirror* (1991). In 1968 Parks produced, directed, and wrote the script and music for the movie production of *The Learning Tree*. Parks also directed and scored the movies *Shaft* (1971), *Shaft's Big Score* (1972), *The Super Cops* (1974), and *Leadbelly* (1976).

Parks was the recipient of the NAACP's Spingarn Medal (1972), the Rhode Island School of Design's Presidents Fellow Award (1984), and Kansan of the Year (1986); and in 1988 President Ronald Reagan presented him with the National Medal of Arts. In 1989 Parks received from the Library of Congress the National Film Registry's classic film honor for *The Learning Tree*; that same year he received the New York Mayor's Award. The Library of Congress acquired Parks's personal papers and archives on July 7, 1995. Parks died in 2006 of cancer.

**APA**

Chicago

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Gordon Parks (1912--2006). (2012). In L. Bracks, *African American almanac : 400 years of triumph, courage and excellence* . Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/parks\\_gordon\\_1912](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/parks_gordon_1912)

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## APA

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## Chicago

"Gordon Parks (1912–2006)." In *African American Almanac*, by Lean'tin Bracks. Visible Ink Press, 2012. [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/parks\\_gordon\\_1912](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/parks_gordon_1912)

## Harvard

Gordon Parks (1912--2006). (2012). In L. Bracks, *African American almanac : 400 years of triumph, courage and excellence* . [Online]. Canton: Visible Ink Press. Available from: [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/parks\\_gordon\\_1912](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/parks_gordon_1912) [Accessed 18 October 2019].

## MLA

"Gordon Parks (1912–2006)." *African American Almanac*, Lean'tin Bracks, Visible Ink Press, 1st edition, 2012. *Credo Reference*, [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/parks\\_gordon\\_1912](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/parks_gordon_1912). Accessed 18 Oct. 2019.