

Jack Shainman Gallery Announces *Gordon Parks: Voices in the Mirror*

Jack Shainman Gallery | 46 Lafayette Street
On View September 18-November 7, 2026
Opening September 18, 6-8PM



Gordon Parks, *At Segregated Drinking Fountain, Mobile, Alabama*, 1956. Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to announce *Voices in the Mirror*, an exhibition that revisits images by Gordon Parks through the reflections of the people and families he photographed. For the very first time, the families of **Muhammad Ali** and **Malcolm X**, among others, have reflected on the photographs Parks made and their enduring power. Marking the 20th anniversary of The Gordon Parks Foundation, *Voices in the Mirror*—titled after Parks' final memoir published in 1990—also looks deeply at the collaborative relationship between Parks, his subjects and their families as he documented the struggle for equality alongside the perseverance of Black excellence.

Reaffirming the importance of Parks' legacy in the 21st century, the exhibition provides fresh insight into his work, as memory and anecdote animate photographs long-since analyzed, studied and examined, revealing levels of detail and depth previously unavailable. Written reflections include those from **Kathleen Cleaver** (*The Black Panthers*, 1970), **Kate Clark Harris** (*The Doll Test*, 1947), **Kyle Johnson** (*The Learning Tree*, 1969) and **Cora Taylor** (*Segregation in the South*, 1956), each direct subjects of Parks' photographs. Additional reflections have been provided by **Lonnie Ali**, widow of Muhammad Ali; **Qubilah Shabazz**, daughter of Malcolm X; Gloria Vanderbilt's son, CNN Anchor **Anderson Cooper** and Ingrid Bergman's daughter, actress **Isabella Rossellini**. Contributions have also been made by filmmaker **Ava DuVernay**; **Bryan Stevenson**, Founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative; **Alice Walker**, author of *The Color Purple* (1982), and her daughter **Rebecca Walker**; **Thelma Golden**, Ford Foundation Director and Chief Curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem; **Deborah Willis**, University Professor and Chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University; artist **Hank Willis Thomas**; and **Ambassador Andrew Young**, who participated in the 1963 March on Washington that Parks photographed.

"Over the last twenty years, The Gordon Parks Foundation has built relationships with many of the people that Gordon Parks photographed and got to know personally. We are honored to have so many of their stories brought together in an exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, one that will allow us to continue learning from them, so that the past may continue to inspire us," said Peter W. Kunhardt, Jr., Executive Director of The Gordon Parks Foundation.

In 1947, **Kate Clark Harris'** parents, Dr. Kenneth Clark and Dr. Mamie Clark, were photographed by Parks as they conducted their 'doll tests'—groundbreaking experiments that revealed the psychological effects of segregation on African American children. The tests were conducted using several dolls, all identical except for skin color, that were put before Black children, aged 3–7, who were asked to identify which one they preferred. The majority preferred the white doll, leading Drs. Clark to conclude that 'prejudice, discrimination and segregation' damaged their self-esteem and caused Black children to develop a sense of inferiority. In *Doll Test, Harlem, New York* (1947), Parks' photograph shows a young boy in the midst of the test and pointing at a white doll held next to a black one. Harris remembered these tests and their psychological toll at length, concluding with the following sentiment: "One of the things that Gordon was so good at is getting beyond the surface and getting the feelings beneath. And so the pictures convey that, you can't ignore it—you can't."

As one of his many projects for the magazine throughout his life, in the summer of 1956, *Life* sent Parks to Alabama to document the daily realities of Black Americans living under Jim Crow laws in the rural South. Eschewing a journalistic approach that focused on the leaders and momentous events of the struggle for civil rights, Parks' empathetic approach instead portrayed the common humanity of his fellow Americans going about daily life in unjust circumstances. In *At Segregated Drinking Fountain, Mobile, Alabama* (1956), Parks photographed a young girl being helped up to drink from the 'colored only' water fountain in front of a general store, as two women look on. In excerpts of her full remarks, one of these women, **Cora Taylor**, remembers the moment and the photograph: "I wondered what was going on, because you didn't know who to trust and who not to trust. I let my mother know about the photograph, in case anything went wrong. A few weeks later I saw the picture in *Life* magazine, and I just couldn't believe it."

One of Parks' most indelible portraits, *Eldridge Cleaver and His Wife, Kathleen, Algiers, Algeria* (1970), was made while on assignment for *Life* to report on the Black Panthers and their leaders. After serving a prison term, Cleaver was on parole when authorities ordered him back to prison because of his involvement in a Panther-police incident. He subsequently fled the country and moved to Algiers, where Parks met and interviewed him and his wife **Kathleen Cleaver**, who reflected on that time and the power of photography, excerpted here: "This photograph was taken in a very remote, isolated place. If you saw where we lived, it was not that historic. That's the joy of photography—you isolate what's important."

Accompanying these intimate stories are the insights from those who collaborated or worked with Parks during his life and were able to observe both his working methods and his personal character, such as Academy Award-winning filmmaker **Ava DuVernay**, who worked as a publicist for Parks' 2000 documentary, *Half Past Autumn*. Encapsulating the importance and poignancy of Parks' work, DuVernay's words offer a powerful summation of what the chorus of contributors to *Voices in the Mirror* articulate in their own singular way: "He did not bring elegance to Black life. He captured the elegance that is Black life."

About The Gordon Parks Foundation

The Gordon Parks Foundation supports and produces artistic and educational initiatives that advance the legacy and vision of Gordon Parks—recognized as the most significant American photographer of the 20th century, as well as a writer, musician and filmmaker, who used the arts to further "the common search for a better life and a better world." The Foundation was co-founded in 2006 by Parks with his longtime friend and editor at *Life* magazine, Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., to preserve his creative work and support the next generation of artists advancing social justice.

Through exhibitions, publications and public programs, organized in collaboration with institutions internationally and at its exhibition space in Pleasantville, New York, the Foundation provides access to and supports understanding of, the work and contributions of Gordon Parks for artists, scholars, students and the public. The Foundation's archive houses Gordon Parks's photographs, negatives, contact sheets, publications and a selection of ephemera related to his work in photography, film, music and writing. The archive also includes collections by related artists.

Drawing inspiration from the pivotal role of a fellowship Parks received early in his career, the Foundation's educational and grant-making initiatives are core to its mission and year-round activities. Through fellowships, prizes and scholarships, the Foundation provides vital support to artists, writers and students—current and future generations of creatives whose work continues his legacy. These initiatives are made possible through The Gordon Parks Arts and Social Justice Fund, established by the Foundation in 2019.

About Jack Shainman Gallery

Jack Shainman Gallery has been dedicated from its inception to championing artists who have achieved mastery of their creative disciplines and are among the most compelling and influential contributors to culture today. For nearly four decades, the Gallery has earned a reputation for introducing international artists to American audiences and for developing young and mid-career artists who have

gone on to gain worldwide acclaim. The gallery has presented the first New York exhibitions of artists Nick Cave, Hayv Kahraman, Kerry James Marshall, Meleko Mokgosi, Richard Mosse, Toyin Ojih Odutola, Hank Willis Thomas and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, among many others. Today, Jack Shainman Gallery is celebrated for its multicultural roster of emerging and established artists and estates who engage in the social and cultural issues of their time.

The Gallery was founded in 1984 in Washington, D.C. by Jack Shainman and Claude Simard (1956-2014). Soon after opening, the Gallery relocated to New York City, first in the East Village before moving to Soho and finally, in 1997, to its current location at 513 West 20th Street in Chelsea. In 2013, the Gallery opened two additional exhibition spaces, one in Chelsea at 524 West 24th Street, which operated until 2022, and a second in a converted 30,000 square foot building in Kinderhook, NY known as The School, which continues today. The gallery's newest flagship location in Tribeca at 46 Lafayette Street opened in January 2025.