

Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America

By Carole Boston Weatherford

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His white teacher tells her all-black class, You'll all wind up porters and waiters. What did she know? Gordon Parks is most famous for being the first black director in Hollywood. But before he made movies and wrote books, he was a poor African American looking for work. When he bought a camera, his life changed forever. He taught himself how to take pictures and before long, people noticed. His success as a fashion photographer landed him a job working for the government. In Washington DC, Gordon went looking for a subject, but what he found was segregation. He and others were treated differently because of the color of their skin. Gordon wanted to take a stand against the racism he observed. With his camera in hand, he found a way. Told through lyrical verse and atmospheric art, this is the story of how, with a single photograph, a self-taught artist got America to take notice.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 1–3—This picture book biography of Gordon Parks highlights the growth of his career as a photographer. Despite receiving little encouragement at school, Parks not only excelled at photography but also wrote novels, penned poetry, and composed music. The rich, varied text ("Boiling mad, Parks vows to lay bare racism with his lens.") is complemented by the illustrations, which sharply contrast Parks's life—mostly shown in full color—with sketches of his photographs—in black-and-white or sepia tones. Parks's career, which began with fashion shots and portraits, took off when he landed a job working for the Farm Security Administration in Washington, DC. There, he became keenly aware of the inequalities between blacks and whites and began to document these differences. When his boss directed him to talk to Ella Watson, a cleaning lady in the building, he photographed her at home with her family and produced his most famous photograph: *American Gothic*. An author's note provides additional information and includes reproductions of four of Parks's photographs. While the book gets off to a choppy start, moving very rapidly over the photographer's early life, it provides a much-needed portrait of a talented individual and views of his work. **VERDICT** This effective overview is a solid addition for those looking to beef up their biography collections. Fans of Weatherford's *Leontyne Price: Voice of a Century* (Knopf, 2014), *Becoming Billie Holiday* (Wordsong, 2009), and *I, Matthew Henson: Polar Explorer* (Walker, 2007) will appreciate this attractive offering.—Myra Zarnowski, City University of New York

Review

"This effective overview is a solid addition for those looking to beef up their biography collections." Starred Review, *School Library Journal*, February 1, 2015

"This is a promising vehicle for introducing young children to the power of photography as an agent for social change, and it may make them aware of contemporary victims of injustice in need of an advocate with a camera." *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, May 2015

"Created with a certain elegance of line, Christoph's artwork includes many haunting, beautifully composed scenes." *Booklist*, February 1, 2015

"Christoph's spreads echo the pared narrative with a muted palette and modest styling, but their impact is powerful." Starred Review, *Publishers Weekly*, December 22, 2014

"Weatherford writes in the present tense with intensity, carefully choosing words that concisely evoke the man. Parks' photography gave a powerful and memorable face to racism in America; this book gives him to young readers." Starred Review, *Kirkus Reviews*, January 1, 2015

About the Author

Carole Boston Weatherford is the author of several acclaimed poetry collections and poetic biographies, including *Sugar Hill* and *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*, winner of a Caldecott Honor, the Coretta Scott King Award for Illustration, and the NAACP Image Award. She teaches at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina. Jamey Christoph studied illustration at the Ringling College of Art and Design. His illustrations have appeared in a variety of major publications and in several award-winning children's books. He has also received multiple recognitions from the Society of Illustrators and Communication Arts. He works out of his home in Maryland and loves a sunny day on the Eastern Shore

with his two crazy dogs, Spencer and Owen.

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Judith Rayl:

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