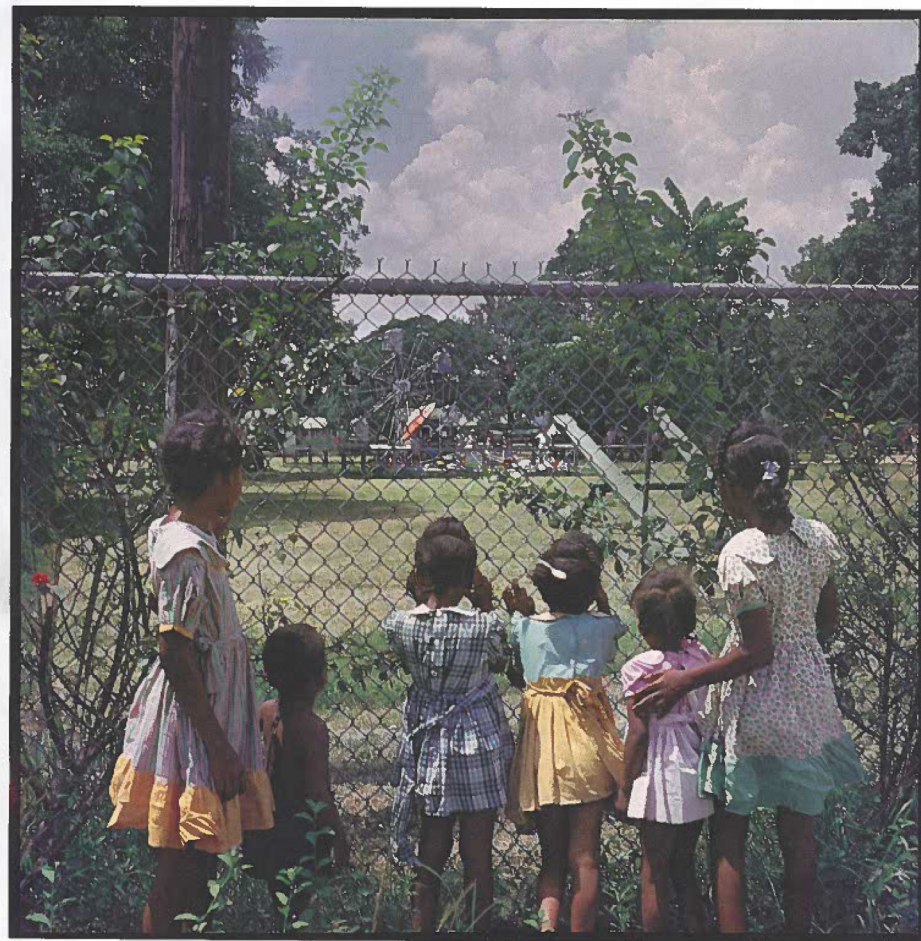




'MR. AND MRS. ALBERT THORNTON, MOBILE, ALABAMA, 1956'



'OUTSIDE LOOKING IN, MOBILE, ALABAMA, 1956'

COURTESY THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION, NEW YORK AND ALISON JACQUES © THE GORDON PARKS FOUNDATION

GALLERY

GORDON PARKS

by JOSH LUSTIG

Gordon Parks was 25 when he first got his hands on a camera. He picked it up in a pawn shop for less than \$12. "It was my choice of weapon against what I hated most about the universe: racism, intolerance, poverty," Parks said in 1967. "I could have just as easily picked up a knife or gun, like many of my childhood friends did."

One of the greatest artists of his generation, Parks was the first Black staff photographer at Life Magazine. Born in 1912, during an unparalleled

period of racial violence and rampant criminality — the era of racial terror lynching — Parks' work unflinchingly holds up a mirror to the hypocrisies of mid-century America: a country where the South was still ruled over by Jim Crow laws, while proclaiming to be the "land of the free".

The current exhibition at Alison Jacques gallery has been curated by attorney Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative. "[Parks'] documentation of poverty in

America, along with his moving exploration of racial segregation, created insights that very much shaped my thinking and work," Stevenson tells me. "As an attorney, I saw race and poverty as powerful forces in America."

Segregation in the South, commissioned by Life Magazine in 1956, is one of Parks' most seminal bodies of work. The two photographs shown here are from the series. What horrors must Mr and Mrs Thornton have witnessed? How many injustices

must their family have been subjected to? Dressed immaculately, they stare straight down the lens of Parks' camera. A portrait made shortly after their marriage in 1906 hangs behind them, and in front of them are photographs of their extended family. There is power in an image. There is power in self-representation. These people know who they are, regardless of what others may say about them.

We are currently living through a similar battle over narrative. "When people allow themselves

to be governed by fear and anger, they tolerate things that should never be tolerated," Stevenson says. Yet for all the pain and injustice that Parks' work exposes, at its heart, there is hope. "His images uplift human dignity and worth in ways that I find inspiring," Stevenson says. "And we need inspiration in these perilous times." ■

"Gordon Parks: We Shall Not Be Moved" is at Alison Jacques, London, until April 11. alisonjacques.com