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25 Parks, Gordon A. (1912-), Collection, 1968-2004
.5 linear feet and oversized

INTRODUCTION

A collection of photographs, biographical materials, posters, and other items pertaining to the career of Gordon Parks. The materials in this collection mostly concern two movies directed by Parks; The Learning Tree and Leadbelly. A checklist of Parks' published works held by Pittsburg State University is appended to this page.

DONOR INFORMATION

Materials pertaining to The Learning Tree were donated by Gordon Parks and by Paramount Studios in 1969. Other materials in the collection were obtained by purchase and by gift from various donors at Pittsburg State University.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born November 30, 1912, in Fort Scott, Kansas, Gordon Parks overcame the difficulties of poverty, racism, and being poorly educated to achieve success as a photographer, writer, film director, and composer. His first professional endeavors were as a free-lance, self-taught, fashion photographer. In 1941 his photographs of the ghettos of Chicago earned him a Julius Rosenwald fellowship. This was followed by an apprenticeship with Roy Stryker in the Farm Security Administration in 1942. In 1948 Parks was hired as a Life magazine photographer, a position he held for over twenty years.

In 1963 Parks published his autobiographical novel, The Learning Tree. Translated into nine languages, this extremely popular work about a black family in 1920s Kansas, became the vehicle for Parks' directorial talents in 1968. This first film was followed by Shaft, Shaft's Big Score, and his most controversial work, Leadbelly.

Since 1947 Parks has also published numerous works of non-fiction, fiction, and poetry. His second autobiographical volume, To Smile in Autumn, covers the years from 1943 to 1979. A third autobiographical volume, Voices in the Mirror, was published in 1990.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The materials in this collection provide a limited view of the activities of Gordon Parks. The bulk of the collection consists of photographs relating to the film version of The Learning Tree. The collection is arranged in four series: **Biographical**; **The Learning Tree**; **Leadbelly**; and **Miscellaneous**.

The **Biographical Series** includes information about Parks copied from standard reference works, a number of articles and clippings that date from 1968 to 2004, and portrait photographs of Parks.

The **Learning Tree Series** includes a script of the movie autographed by Gordon Parks. The photographs in this series include movie stills provided by Paramount Studios and numerous images of the movie's production during its filming in southeast Kansas. Also included are several related press releases from Pittsburg State University.

The **Leadbelly Series** contains an original advertising cut used by magazines and newspapers for promotional purposes and an original theater poster. Also included is an article by Barbara Kevles titled “The Marketing of Leadbelly,” that discusses the history of the film and the controversy surrounding its advertisement in 1975.

The **Miscellaneous Series** includes dust jackets from two of Parks’ published works and an exhibition announcement regarding Parks’ photography.

FOLDER LIST

Biographical Series

- f. 1 Reference works
- f. 2 Articles and Clippings, 1968-1970
- f. 3 Articles and Clippings, 1976-1989
- f. 4 Articles and Clippings, 1995-2004
- f. 5 Portraits

Learning Tree Series

- f. 6 Movie Script, 1968
- f. 7 Photographs – Movie Stills
- f. 8-10 Photographs – Production Images
- f. 11 Press Releases

Leadbelly Series

- f. 12 Advertisement cut for magazines and newspapers
- f. 13 Theater poster
- f. 14 “The Marketing of Leadbelly” by Barbara Kevles, Cineaste, Fall 2003

Miscellaneous Series

- f. 15 Dust jackets
- f. 16 Exhibition announcement

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CHECKLIST OF BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS

Bush, Martin H. The Photographs of Gordon Parks (Wichita, KS: Wichita State University), 1983

Easter, Eric, et. al., eds. Songs of My People: African Americans, A Self-Portrait (Boston: Little, Brown and Company) {Introduction by Gordon Parks}, 1992

Eastman Kodak Company. The Joy of Photography (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company), 1979 [Photographs and biography of Gordon Parks pp. 60-67]

Halpern, Daniel, ed., Antaeus 61 (New York: Ecco Press), {Autumn 1988} 1988.
[Includes selections from Gordon Parks' diary]

Kansas State University. The Gordon Parks Collection: Kansas State University, Department of Art (Manhattan, KS: The Department), [1983]

Logan, Fern. The Artist Portrait Series: Images of Contemporary African American Artists (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 2001

Paramount Pictures. Leadbelly: Paramount Press Book and Merchandising Manual (Paramount Pictures Corporation), 1975

Parks, Gordon. Arias in Silence (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1994

_____. Born Black (Philadelphia: Lippincott Company), 1971

_____. A Choice of Weapons (New York: Harper and Row), [1966]

_____. A Choice of Weapons (New York: Berkley Publishing Company), 1967

_____. A Choice of Weapons (New York: Harper and Row), [1973]

_____. Flash Photography (New York: Franklin Watts), 1947

CHECKLIST OF BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS (continued)

- _____. Flavio (New York: Norton), 1978
- _____. Glimpses Toward Infinity (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1996
- _____. Gordon Parks: Whispers of Intimate Things (New York: Viking Press), [1971]
- _____. Half Past Autumn: A Retrospective (Boston: Bulfinch Press), 1997
- _____. In Love (Philadelphia: Lippincott), 1971
- _____. The Learning Tree (New York: Harper and Row), [1963]
- _____. The Learning Tree (New York: Fawcett), 1963
- _____. The Learning Tree (New York: Fawcett Crest: Ballantine), 1989
- _____. A Poet and His Camera (New York: Viking Press), 1968
- _____. Shannon (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1981
- _____. Voices in the Mirror: An Autobiography (New York: Doubleday), 1990
- Siskind, Aaron. Harlem Documents: Photographs 1932-1940 (Providence, RI: Matrix Publications) {Foreword by Gordon Parks}, 1981
- U. S. Camera. Volume 6, Number 9 (December 1943). Contains "Gordon Parks' Photographs," pp. 16-19