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**Virginia Museum of Fine Arts presents Gordon Parks: Back to Fort Scott
Exhibition opens July 23, 2016 featuring work by noted *Life* magazine photographer**

An exhibition featuring works by the noted African American photographer Gordon Parks will be on view from July 23 to October 30 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The 42 photographs that comprise *Gordon Parks: Back to Fort Scott* examine the realities of life under segregation in 1950s America.

As the first African American photographer hired full time by *Life* magazine, Parks was frequently given assignments involving social issues affecting black America. For an assignment on the impact of school segregation, Parks returned to his hometown of Fort Scott, Kansas to reconnect with childhood friends – all of whom went to the same all-black elementary school – though only one was still living in Fort Scott at the time. To hear their stories, Parks traveled to Kansas City, Saint Louis, Columbus, Detroit, and Chicago, and his narrative shifted its focus to the Great Migration north by African Americans. The resulting series of photographs were intended to accompany an article he planned to call “Back to Fort Scott,” but his story was never published. Organized around each of these cities and families, *Gordon Parks: Back to Fort Scott* features previously unpublished photographs as well as a seven-page draft of Parks’ text for the article, and presents a rarely seen view of the everyday lives of African American citizens years before the civil rights movement began in earnest.



[Husband and Wife, Sunday morning, Detroit, Michigan, 1950, Gordon Parks (American 1912-2006), Photograph, gelatin silver print]

A section of the exhibition is exclusive to this presentation. *Parks at Life: Works from VMFA’s Collection* includes eight photographs by Parks that appeared in subsequent photo essays for *Life*, and copies of those issues will also be on display.

“We are honored to present an exhibition featuring works by Gordon Parks, one of the most celebrated African American artists of his time, whose photographs reveal so much about this significant moment in our nation’s history.” VMFA Director Alex Nyerges said. “We are also pleased that this exhibition gives us an opportunity to highlight photographs by Gordon Parks from our own collection alongside those from the Gordon Parks Foundation.”

About Gordon Parks and The Gordon Parks Foundation

A groundbreaking photographer, musician, writer, and film director, Gordon Parks allowed his talents to shape the public’s understanding of pressing social issues. Several of his photo essays that were published in *Life* magazine introduced millions of readers to ideas that challenged, as well as changed, the way they saw their nation and themselves. A pioneer among black filmmakers, Parks wrote and directed *The Learning Tree* (1969), which was based on his autobiography, and directed

the popular movie Shaft (1971), which exemplified the blaxploitation genre and had an award-winning soundtrack. The Gordon Parks Foundation permanently preserves his work, makes it available to the public through exhibitions, books, and electronic media, and supports artistic and educational activities that advance what Gordon described as "the common search for a better life and a better world."

About the Exhibition

Gordon Parks: Back to Fort Scott opens in the Evans Court Galleries at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on July 23, 2016. VMFA will also offer a series of related programs throughout the run of the exhibition that explore topics such as the history of documentary photography, and discuss race and representation as revealed in Parks' work. The line-up culminates with *The Learning Tree*, a film written and directed by Parks that explores his childhood and was filmed in Fort Scott. The first major Hollywood feature written and directed by an African American, *The Learning Tree* was also among the first 25 films to be preserved by the U.S. Library of Congress in the National Film Registry.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

VMFA's permanent collection encompasses more than 35,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years of world history. Its collections of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, English silver, Fabergé, and the art of South Asia are among the finest in the world. With acclaimed holdings in American, British Sporting, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist, and Modern and Contemporary art – and additional strengths in African, Ancient, East Asian, and European – VMFA ranks as one of the top comprehensive art museums in the United States. Programs include educational activities and studio classes for all ages, plus lively after-hours events. VMFA's Statewide Partnership program includes traveling exhibitions, artist and teacher workshops, and lectures across the Commonwealth. VMFA, a certified Virginia Green attraction, is open 365 days a year and general admission is always free. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit www.vmfa.museum.

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