

**#21 August 2017 Cameraderie  
Gordon Parks (1912-2006)**



Gordon Parks: photographer, musician, writer, film director. He was at the zenith of all artistic activities he essayed. Read more about Parks on Wikipedia here, for his entire story: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon\\_Parks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Parks).

Parks was one of the many photographers who worked for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), photographing the plight of poor Depression-era farmers from 1935-1944. Other famous names among them were Dorothea Lange (Cameraderia, March 2013) and Walker Evans (Cameraderia, October 2014).

See the FSA story in brief in the Wikipedia article, here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farm\\_Security\\_Administration#Photographers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farm_Security_Administration#Photographers). If you don't want to read from Wikipedia, here is a short quote from a research paper by Juliet Gorman, (May 2001) available in Oberlin College's archives at <http://www2.oberlin.edu/library/papers/honorshistory/2001-Gorman/FSA/>:

*Contrary to popular association, photography was not the primary work of the Farm Security Administration. The FSA was a New Deal agency designed to combat rural poverty during a period when the agricultural climate and national economy were causing great dislocations in rural life. The photographers who worked under the name of the FSA were hired on for public relations; they were supposed to provide visual evidence that there was need, and that the FSA programs were meeting that need. Beyond serving this institutional image, the photographers were to document aspects of "the American way of life" that caught their eye. This looser and farther-reaching mission ultimately accounted for the vast file of photographs (over 80,000 black and white images) that is now considered **one of the most famous documentary photography projects ever** [emphasis mine].*

*In its various institutional incarnations from 1935 to 1944, the project employed itinerant photographers, ranging at times from only a few to the more generous figure*

*of over twenty. Some of the more famous names [were] Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, Walker Evans and Russell Lee.*

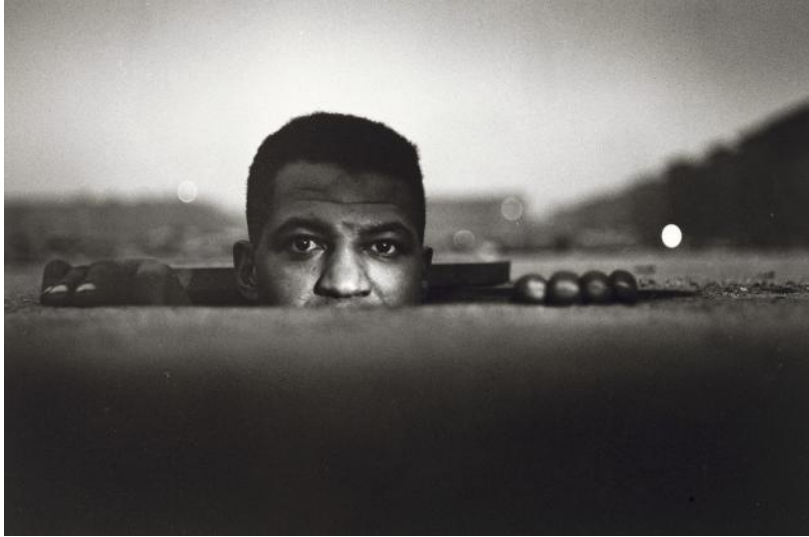
All the FSA photographs (175,322) are in the public domain and available for viewing and downloading at the Library of Congress website, at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>.

Parks photographed extensively for Vogue and Life (the first black photographer for either), interestingly being both a fashion photographer in one case and a frequent social justice documentarian in the other case. See his Wikipedia biography for the detailed story: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon\\_Parks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Parks).

Parks devoted a great deal of his photographic artistry to social justice causes, during his FSA period, and after. Here are two of his best-know images. Breaking with my custom of discussing and interpreting the images, I think I am going to say nothing at all about them, except to ask you to look, think, and feel.



*American Gothic, Washington, D.C., 1942*



*Emerging Man, Harlem, New York, 1952*