



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2006 Volume I: Photographing America: A Cultural History, 1840-1970

Gordon Parks' Photography: Breaking Down Racial Barriers with Real Life Stories

Guide for Curriculum Unit 06.01.04
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My unit on Gordon Parks' photography focuses on about a dozen black and white photographs he took during the 1940s through the 1960s, a tumultuous time of war and civil strife in our history. I have devised what I will call a *way of looking through the lens* that Parks looked through, ultimately, to sharpen my students' visual skills, understanding, and communication skills, as they interact with the photographs of Parks from World War II through the Civil Rights Movement. The photographs I feature confirm his uncanny ability to both underscore racial prejudice and break down racial barriers with a camera.

Because the at-risk high school students I teach are most comfortable with clear expectations and a format usually in the form of a handout to begin their activities, I have crafted a set of "essential questions" that they will answer for each photograph we view. Students will participate in testing these questions out on our first photographs and make revisions if necessary. They will record their findings on a graphic organizer designed for this purpose. This, however, is just the beginning of their interaction with the photographs of Gordon Parks.

Ultimately, students will engage in their own photography project, following it through just as they have for each of Parks' photographs.

(Recommended for American Photography and Literature, and English, grades 7-12.)

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