





humanitarianism. They also helped rally support for the burgeoning civil rights movement, for which Parks himself was a tireless advocate as well as a documentarian.

Parks was a modern-day Renaissance man, whose creative practice extended beyond photography to encompass fiction and nonfiction writing, musical composition, filmmaking, and painting. In 1969 he became the first African American to write and direct a major Hollywood studio feature film, *The Learning Tree*, based on his bestselling semi autobiographical novel. His next film, *Shaft* (1971), was a critical and box-office success, inspiring a number of sequels. Parks published many books, including memoirs, novels, poetry, and volumes on photographic technique. In 1989 he produced, directed, and composed the music for a ballet, *Martin*, dedicated to the late civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.

Parks spent much of the last three decades of his life evolving his style, and he continued working until his death in 2006. He was recognized with more than fifty honorary doctorates, and among his numerous awards was the National Medal of Arts, which he received in 1988. Today, archives of his work reside at a number of institutions, including The Gordon Parks Foundation, Pleasantville, New York; the Gordon Parks Museum in Fort Scott, Kansas, and Wichita State University in Wichita; and the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Smithsonian Institution, all in Washington, D.C.