

# Crossroads: The Art of Gordon Parks

January 23 – April 11, 2010

The Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University

## COMMUNITY MEMBERS RESPOND:



Gordon Parks  
*Department Store, Birmingham, Alabama,*  
1956.  
Chromogenic print, 15 ¼ x 15 ¼ in.  
Collection of the Ulrich Museum of Art,  
Wichita State University, Museum  
purchase.

In *Department Store, Birmingham, Alabama*, the contrast between the social discrimination implied in the “Colored Entrance” sign and the apparent social civility of the black woman and little girl, well-dressed beyond that of many whites who probably shop at this department store, is particularly revealing to me. This department store may well be a mecca for Birmingham shoppers, but it reflects societal attitudes toward blacks that are inconsistent with principles of social equity and human dignity, not to mention good business practices.

Despite historical instances in which blacks were described as being inhuman, the black woman and little girl appear to be dressed for a social event far more socially significant than merely shopping—perhaps dining or a theatrical performance. The pursuit of social justice for blacks has sometimes spawned responses from the social majority which imply that whites are somehow treated unfairly. The eyes and facial expressions of both the woman and little girl, plus the woman’s lingerie strap out of place, may suggest that something terrible has happened or may be on the verge of happening! I feel a sense of violation and sadness over the possible danger or humiliation that this family may have experienced.

—Dr. Galyn Vesey  
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