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"Outside Looking In," taken by Gordon Parks in Mobile, Ala., in 1956. (Photo by Gordon Parks, courtesy of the Mount Dora Center for the Arts)

Personal Perspective

“Personal perspectives are important because they reveal much about the person making the comments.” [Lester, Paul. *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* (p. 146).] As a fan of Gordon Parks photography, one could find themselves angry over this photo because of its history. However, the composition of this photograph by Parks to be beautiful. This photograph is cherished for the visual cues of color, form, depth, and movement. It is a haunting picture, looking at the longing of children wanting to play, but cannot because they have the wrong color skin.

Historical Perspective

“Knowledge of a medium’s history allows you to understand current trends in terms of their roots in techniques and philosophies of the past.” [Lester, Paul. *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* (p. 146).] “Outside Looking In” is a visually stunning photograph featuring a handful of well-dressed African American children watching Caucasian children enjoying a playground. This photograph’s historical perspective takes place in Parks’ life when for the Farm Security Administration was documenting social conditions. For a person viewing this photo with today’s mind, they

would wonder why the children are not playing the playground they are secretly coveting. However, anyone familiar with segregation and America in the 1950s would understand why the children are watching from a distance and are not allowed to play with the children on the playground. Segregation is a concept that African Americans learn at an early age, the explanation of why they cannot do what those children are doing.

Technical Perspective

“With an understanding of the techniques involved in producing an image, you are also in a better position to know when production values are high or low, when great or little care has been taken, or when much or little money was spent to make the images.” [Lester, Paul. *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* (p. 147).] Not much is said about Gordon Parks’ camera or technical capabilities. However, Gordon Parks was a self-taught photographer. He purchased his first film camera, a Voigtländer Brilliant, from a pawn shop. The camera was a pseudo- twin-lens reflex camera, box camera. The viewfinder could not be used to focus, making focusing done by an estimate of distance from the subject. Developing the film could take hours if you knew how to do it yourself, or weeks if depending on someone else to develop the film. Thinking about how meticulous and precise a person would have to be to take a photo with this camera, a modern user would not have the patience. Many of today’s cameras are digital with instant pictures shown right on the camera, uploaded directly to the internet straight from the camera. In addition, many cellphones are equipped with better resolutions and faster and easier to distribute, without having to develop film.

Ethical Perspective

“Doing your job and not causing unjust harm has been called the “ethics mantra.” As long as those professional obligations are met, the first part of the mantra is satisfied. But to be considered ethical, you must also make sure that any harm that may ensue must be justified.” [Lester, Paul. *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* (p. 148).] At the time this photograph was taken, The Farm Security Administration wanted a documentation of the social conditions in which its citizens resided in. While a person would want the Golden Rule to apply, society was not conducive with the idea. Minorities were often separated from their Caucasian peers. Often they lived in impoverished conditions, unable to use the same facilities, and disregarded for basic services like healthcare, banking, and holding a management position. This photograph captures the unethical behavior of America, without being an unethical photograph. Historical perspectives can often defend ethical perspectives because of the lack of refinement and lack of equality.

Cultural Perspective

“Symbolism may be analyzed through the picture’s use of heroes and villains, by the form of its narrative structure, by the style of the artwork, by the use of words that accompany the image, and by the attitudes about the subjects and the culture

communicated by the visual artist.” [Lester, Paul. Visual Communication: Images with Messages (p. 155).] Gordon Parks’ photograph of “Outside Looking In” is a typical Us vs Them visual. It does not need words to describe the culture of separatism. There is no “Separate But Equal” stance for this photo. Sure, another playground could have been built for colored children, but that would be redundant. Ethics would tell a person with a heart that the children could all play together. However, the culture of America at the time was “separate” but not “equal”.

Critical Perspective

“A critical perspective allows the viewer to use the information learned about a medium, its practitioner, and the image produced to make more general comments about the society that accepts or rejects the images.” [Lester, Paul. Visual Communication: Images with Messages (p. 157).] Considering this photograph was taken in the 1950s, developed in color, and curated for all these years, “Outside Looking In” is a relevant photo today as it was back then. While policies now allow Blacks and Whites to live amongst each other, along with other ethnic and religious groups, there are still times when segregation and separatism rears its ugly head. The recent event of Ahmaud Arbery resembles to message in this photo, which is there are things you cannot do because you are not the right color. Arbery was Black and jogging through a White neighborhood in Brunswick, Georgia, when he was confronted by two residents who followed him in a truck and killed him. These children in this photo would have met the same fate if they attempted to do something as vital as breathing to kids, just play. This is why this photo can ignite hatred and anger, but also incite learning and correcting such behavior in those who are touched by the inequality and want better. This makes “Outside Looking In” a very important visual, even today.