ON LOCATION for filming of "The Learning Tree," autobiography of Gordon Parks, famed Life Magazine photog, who is producing and directing the Warner Brothers 7 Arts picture. Reading from left: Director Parks, on the boom of a Chapman Titan camera; Kyle Johnson, who as star of the movie plays role of Newt Winger, awaits signal to start action as Joe Wilcots, only colored assistant cameraman holds slate, attractive Carole Lamond, who plays Big Mable in the movie, passes crutched remains of the house in which Parks lived as a child and Eugene Knapp electrician-boomman, awaits director's cue to turn lamps on shooting area.

Filming Gordon Parks' 'Learning Tree' Is A Real-Life Drama

By AL RUTLEDGE

FORT SCOTT — "Let Cherokee Flats be your learning tree."

With this admonishment Sarah Winger armed her teenage son, Newt, for survival in a small, violent, beautiful Kansas town in the mid 1920's.

How Newt manages to survive is the plot of Gordon Parks' best selling autobiographical novel, "The Learning Tree."

Though "The Learning Tree" spans only one year in the life of a black boy in a small white town it touches every human emotion and kaleidoscopes from the joy of young lovers laughing to the roar of a gunshot and agony of a 16-year-old boy dying.

It had been three years since I'd read "he Learning Tree" but that's the way I recalled the book as my plane swooped towards the Municipal Airport in Kansas City, Kan.

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WARNER BROTHERS 7 Arts Studios had adapted the novel to a movie. It was being filmed in a place called Fort Scott, 100 miles south of Kansas City.

Gordon Parks had been born in this town of 10,000 populace, 200 of whom were black. Forty years ago Parks, then just 16, had fled this quiet, peaceful, rural community in stark fear.

Now he had returned bringing with him 100 of Hollywood's best filmmaking craftsmen, a half million dollars in equipment and a $3 million budget.

"The Learning Tree" is uniquely the creation of the genius of Gordon Parks. He wrote the novel, the screenplay, the musical score.

He chose the actors, the crew; he chose the location, he is the producer and the director of the movie, which he hopes to have released in the Spring of '69.

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THEY WERE all there, exactly as they had appeared in the book. Kirky (Dana Elcar), the big white sheriff who rode a motorcycle and carried two guns with which he killed black men and boys at will;

Big Mable (Carole Lamond), the tall, sensuously beautiful prostitute who seduced Newt (Park's counterpart) when he was 14;

Arcella Jefferson (Mira Waters), the cute teenager who became Newt's first love and forsook it for a well-heeled white boy;

Sarah Winger, (Estelle Evans) the wise, and sturdy mother of Newt' who groomed into her son the fiber that makes men great;

Crapper, (Jeffrey Morris), the brutal-sadistic jailer who happily beat all the hope and faith out of Marcus Savage, a 15-year-old boy;

Prissy Winger, (Saundra Sharp), the fussy, cute little sister of Newt whose love for him warmed his heart even as he froze in the cold north wilds;

And there was Newt himself (Kyle Johnson), a boy whose will to survive was greater than all the hardships of being black and poor in America during the Great Depression.

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GORDON PARKS had handpicked each actor because of his character resemblance to the real life people as he recalled them.

In Kyle Johnson, he chose more than an actor. He chose a character and a disposition which so closely resembles his own that the two often communicate without words or gestures.

Gordon Parks is by nature of his history an unusual man.

Not only has he gained world acclaim as one of Life Magazine's most famed photo-journalists, he's the author of several books, the composer of classical works for piano, woodwinds, cellos and the complete orchestras.

Representatives of 53 nations voted him the photo-journalist who has done the most to promote understanding between countries of the world.

He is a genius in conflict with nature. A man who spends every waking hour in the tumult of creation and yet he appears, on the outside, calm, quietly composed and intently observant of things around him.

HIS INNER vibrance is betrayed only by his bold, straight forwardness.

When I arrived on the set Burnett Guffey, the famed cinematographer who won two Academy Awards ("From Here To Eternity" and "Bonnie and Clyde") sat on the boom of a huge $100,000 Chapman Titan camera watching and waiting as Gordon Parks and his star, 16-year-old Kyle Johnson, walked up a stoney path towards the abandoned farmhouse where Parks lived as a boy.

"Well, pal," Parks said looking into Kyle's eyes, "I've lived all this. I've written a book about it. I've written the screenplay about it. I've managed to get it made into a movie, so here we are.

"Now, from this moment on, it's all yours."

For a fleeting moment they stood in silence and then turned and parted. Both apparently understanding something that the hundreds of spectators and workmen watching could only sense.

Back beside Guffey, director Parks yelled, "Action," and the first major motion picture for a major filmmaking studio ever produced and directed by a colored man began to roll.

DIRECTOR AND STARS — Gordon Parks stands behind the five young actors who portray him and his four best friends in his movie, "The Learning Tree." (L-R) Skunk, Robert Goss; Beansy, Carter Vinnegar; Newt, Parks' counterpart, Kyle Johnson; Marcus, Alexander Clarke and Jappy, Stephen Perry.

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MOUNTED astride a prancing, brown quarter horse Gordon Parks spoke briefly of what brought him to this juncture of life.

"The first time I became interested in directing," he said, looking off over the low rolling Kansas plains, "was while on a photographic assignment with Rossilini and Bergman on 'Stromboli.' I watched Rossilini work and I studied, definitively, all of the crafts and craftsmanship that went into that production."

Night eases down like a diamond clustered cloak over Fort Scott. The stars came out so big and bright they appeared within arms reach. The cameras had stopped rolling for the night and Parks was, momentarily, free to relax.

"The motion picture camera," he began while stretched out in a deep cushioned chair, "became a challenge to my experience with a still camera.

"If was a dream,' he added with just a hint of a smile, 'I've always dreamed a lot, and I've always had faith in my dreams. In trying to fulfill them, I've always worked to prepare myself for whatever happened.

"Most everything I know is selftaught; picture making, writing, composing music. I had been putting down words for 10 years before I ever wrote for publication.

"It's the same with writing music and even directing movies."

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AMAZINGLY this man who makes dreams into reality claims to function at only a fraction of what he's capable.

At his "fraction" he has just completed a book which was published in October titled, "A Poet And His Camera": he is in the midst of doing a novel, "Outside Myself," the first work he's done that has not been written about his personal experience.

All the while he's facing the greatest challenge of his life: directing a major motion picture.

"I don't work to full capacity," he insists and somehow you believe him, "I wish I could. I don't think anyone does.

"I work at about 75 percent of my capacity. And I think anyone who works at 75 percent of what their real capabilities happen to be — if they are talented — can be successful."

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FILMING "The Learning Tree" is not only a challenge to the Parks' genius but also to the colored actors and craftsmen who have joined him in Fort Scott for the shooting.

More colored craftsmen of broad and various talents are working on "The Learning Tree" set behind-the-scenes than on any movie before.

"We had hoped to have more," Parks declares, "but we had certain problems. We will work as we can with what we've got and hope what we accomplish will be an inspiration to others."

Those who joined Parks are WB7 (Warner Brothers/7 Arts) assistant painter, Keith Lundy; WB7 wardrobe man, Ermon Sessions; freelance assistant cameraman, Joe Wilcots; freelance hair stylist, Elizabeth Searcy; generator driver, Earl Fierson; WB7 unit publicist, Vincent Tubbs, and boom man, Eugene Knapp.

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KNAPP, a self assured, aggressive individual who is one of only three colored men in the International Guild of Motion Picture Craftsmen, talked about why so few colored people have made inroads in the technical end of the movie industry:

"Guts! Parks set the precedent because he had the guts. More guts than many colored stars like Sammy Davis, Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, each of whom could have done the same thing with just a word."

On racial prejudice: "This is a family industry. There isn't as much racial prejudice as people tend to think. A craftsman is expected to be an expert in his field and all too often the brother is not prepared to handle the responsibility.

"Add that to the fact that he doesn't 'know' how to move or who to see and you get what we've got now."

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OPPORTUNITIES for black people: "The door is wide open but the black man just isn't hip. Warner Brothers has a special department whose job it is to bring black people into the industry.

"They claimed they couldn't find anyone. So a program was set up last summer to bring in 50 kids, train them and work them with the hope that they'll get interested enough to make a career of it.

"But the brothers didn't respond. So I took the list of qualifications around in the Pasadena area myself. Not a white man, but me!

"I took it to CORE, CAA, and all the other poverty program offices. I ran the program down to them and asked them to pick some kids and send them over to Warner.

"Some fat-cat told me that the qualifications would have to be lowered before they could find anybody to send."

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THE QUALIFICATIONS? "A high school diploma with one year of shop!"

The exasperations generated as Eugene Knapp groped to find words to describe the anger he felt. Then, in conclusion, "Not a single black kid took advantage of that program.

"But those same people who couldn't find a black kid with a high school diploma and a year in shop will raise holy hell about how "whitey" is depriving the brothers of a chance to make it."

Alexander Clarke, a young actor who portrays Marcus Savage, the motherless protagonist of "The Learning Tree" reemphasizes the importance of what name performers could do.

"This whole crew is groovin'," he said, "but it grooves because of Mr. Parks. Not only are we doing a job for ourselves but we're putting out for him too.

"It's important to all of us that this picture succeeds because it'll show the famous black stars what they really could have done for their people in a quiet, simple way.

"I don't mean for myself especially, or my pardner (Stevie Perry, a 20-year-old man who has been acting 16 years and who also appears in the movie), but I'm thinking of people like Ermon Sessions the wardrobe man who's been around 20 or 30 years and just getting a break."

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GORDON PARKS is aware of the dual drama which unfolds around him during the filming of his autobiography. But he isn't fazed by it.

"I've always insisted," he declares, "even with Life Magazine, that whenever possible, black people play a roll in my assignments.

"It has worked and worked well. That's what I'm most concerned with."

The milestones which will have been set by the crew, the actors, the producer/director of "The Learning Tree" may never all be known but after its 10-week location shooting schedule is completed, Fort Scott will have become more than just the birthplace of Gordon Parks or the place where a picture was made.

It will have become "the learning tree" for any black man or woman anywhere who can dare to have faith in his dreams.

'Live Again' a TV feature

Nanette Fabray, William Gargan, and former Harlem Globetrotter, Junius Kellogg star in an unusual television series produced by NBC-TV in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

The public service series, called "To Live Again," is being aired in 10 half-hour programs. It describes the problems handicapped persons face and the ways in which they surmount their disabilities through rehabilitation.

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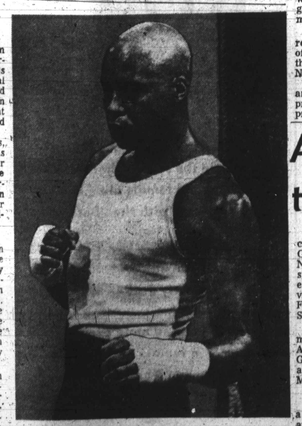
"MANY DISABLED men and women who need these services do not know they are available," said Federal Social and Rehabilitation Administrator Mary E. Switzer. "We hope these programs will encourage them to contact their State vocational rehabilitation agency for the help they need."

Miss Switzer appears on one of the programs. Joseph Hunt, Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration, a Social and Rehabilitation Service agency, is the series host.

The series began showing in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday and will run for two weeks.



NEW BROADWAY STAR — James Earl Jones, long regarded as one of the entertainment world's top dramatic actors, is finally getting notice on Broadway. He is shown in the role of former heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, which he plays in the current hit play, "The Great White Hope."

'Rochester,' Jack Benny reunited

HOLLYWOOD — Gravel-voiced Eddie "Rochester" Anderson makes his first television appearance with Jack Benny in nearly four years when he guest stars on "Jack Benny's Bag" on the NBS Television Network Saturday, pre-empting the second hour of "NBC Saturday Night at the Movies."

Anderson, who played Benny's outspoken valet, for nearly 30 years on radio and television, last appeared with Benny on the latter's weekly NBC-TV series, which ended with the 1964-65 season. Anderson said:

"Mr. Benny and I don't get together much these days because he's mostly off playing concerts or nightclubs or making world tours. But we always exchange Christmas gifts, and he's not as stingy as he pretends to be."

To present 'Elijah'

JACKSON, Miss., — The Department of Music, Jackson State College, will present "Elijah" an oratorio by Felix Mendelssohn on Sunday, at 7:30 p.m. in the Dansby Hall Auditorium at the College. This is the first of a number of choral works to be performed by the 70-voice choir during this college year.

Next to the sun, the giant planets Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune are the largest bodies in the solar system.

Nixon's election lead widening

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Latest returns show President-elect Richard M. Nixon widening his margin Saturday over Hubert H. Humphrey.

With more than 97 percent of the precincts in the nation reported, Nixon showed a lead in popular votes of 30,957,072 to Humphrey's 30,602,198.

George C. Wallace's total vote in the latest results was 9,747,764.

According to the latest figures Nixon had 302 electoral votes and Humphrey had 191. Wallace had 45.

25 stars in Town Hall tribute to W. C. Handy

NEW YORK — A gala 10th anniversary Memorial Concert in memory of the late W. C. Handy, "Father of The BLUES," will be held at Town Hall on Sunday.

Mr. Handy was the composer of "St. Louis Blues," "Memphis Blues," "Joe Turner Blues," "Beale Street Blues" and hundreds of other songs including "Loveless Love" and 50 Spirituals, which he wrote during the last twenty years of his life.

The musical salute is being sponsored by the W. C. Handy Memorial Scholarship Club, Inc., for the purpose of raising funds for the W. C. Handy Scholarship Fund for the Kind.

Mrs. Wilhelmina F. Adams is the general chairman for the Benefit.

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AMONG THE many stars appearing are Arthur Prysock, Dinah Shore, James Earl Jones, Timmie Rogers, Diana Sands, Joe E. Lewis, Gloria Sage, Irving Barnes, Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake and Harry Hershfield.

Also Billy Butler and His 16-piece Orchestra, The Copasetics, The Celestial Choral Group of The Blind, Claretta Fermon, Granville Lee Combo, Billy Frazier, the Jazz Singer, and Carol Mitchell. Master of Ceremonies will be Billy Taylor and Jack Walker of WLIB, Fred Barr and Al Gee of WWRL. Joe Franklin of WORT-TV, Dick Campbell, Joey Adams and Ed Sullivan.

African Dance Company to debut in N.Y. Garden

NEW YORK — The African Dance Company of Ghana will make its first New York appearance in a special nine-performance engagement beginning November 26 in the Felt Forum of the new Madison Square Garden Center.

Consisting of 45 dancers, musicians and singers, the African Dance Company of Ghana recently performed at the Summer Olympics in Mexico City.

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THE TROUPE has made a tremendous impact around the world, barring appeared in Milan, Paris and at the first Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal. J. H. Nketia is the company's director and Albert Mawere-Opoku, its artistic director.

Opoku has studied in the United States under grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Institute of International Education.

He is on the staff of the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana and Head of the Dance Division of the University's School of Music and Drama.

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THE DANCES which inspire the work of the African Dance Company of Ghana have been handed down from generation to generation to thrive today as the traditional Ghanian dances.

The dancers and musicians were drawn from a variety of tribal backgrounds.

S. C. INAUGURAL — Ella Lee, a brilliant young soporano, has been contracted to sing at the inaugural of Dr. M. Maceo Nance as president of South Carolina State College. The installation will be performed Nov. 27. Miss Lee's concert is slated Nov. 26.

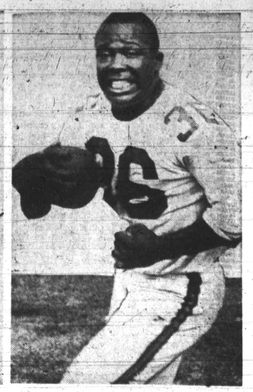
CAMERA'S-EYE VIEW OF SPORTS WORLD

Raymond Chester 37-yd. catch for TD in win over Pirates

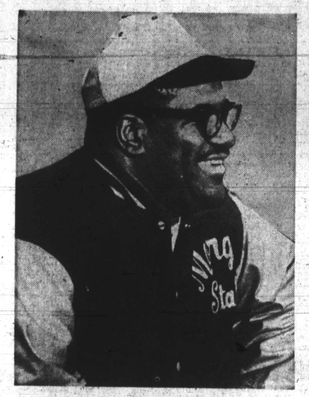
Ed Hayes' kickoff return for 95 yds. It helped bury Hampton, 46-14

Robert Rooks big asset tough Morgan defender

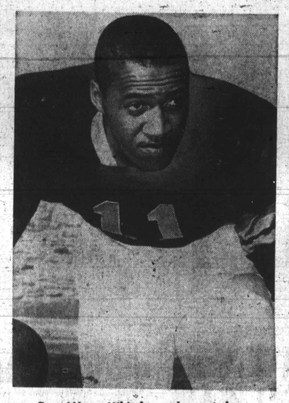
Dave Freeland, Morgan QB



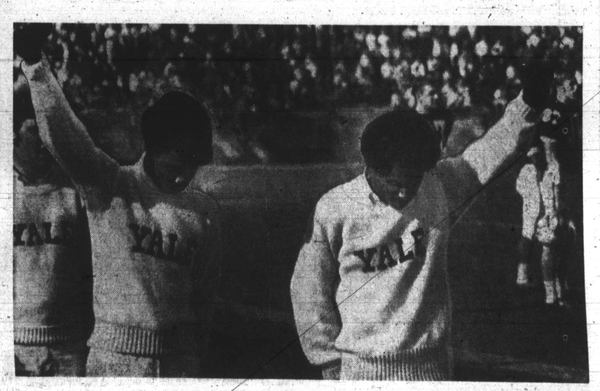
John Fuqua's 2 TD's thrilled homecomers



Morgan's Banks after win over Hampton "It's nice to have pressure off"

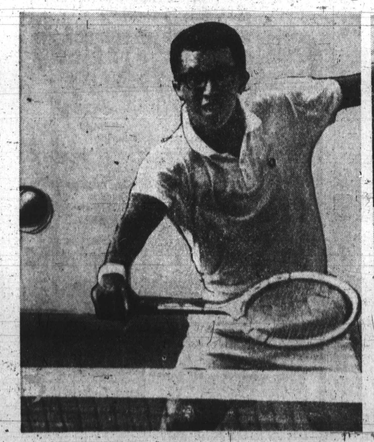


Bears' Henry Whitaker makes switch ex-QB now defensive standout



"Black Power" salute by Yale cheerleaders Greg Parker and Bill Brown

Yes, it's better part of Toledo U. eleven with coach Frank Lauterbur



Davis Cupper Arthur Ashe wins opener vs. India

Wake Forest's Fred Summers

THIS IS AN AFRO SPORTS BONUS

Sprint queen Wyomia Tyus fondles three medals from Olympics

Earl Monroe top NBA scorer

Elgin Baylor second NBA scorer

Dave Bing third NBA scorer