

The Gordon Parks Center for Culture and Diversity
Fort Scott Community College
NEWS RELEASE



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Photographer Howard L. Bingham to receive “Gordon Parks Choice of Weapons Award” at annual Gordon Parks Celebration

Fort Scott—Howard L. Bingham will be the recipient of the Gordon Parks Choice of Weapons Award at the third annual Gordon Parks Celebration of Culture and Diversity this October 4-7 in Fort Scott, Kan. The Gordon Parks Celebration, a component of the Gordon Parks Center for Culture and Diversity, was created in 2004 by Fort Scott Community College to honor Fort Scott native Parks, noted photographer, writer, musician, and filmmaker.

At the culmination of the first year’s events, the Choice of Weapons Award was established in Parks’ honor to be given annually at the Celebration. Named after his autobiography of the same name, the award seeks to honor a recipient who has excelled in at least one area that Parks did and who exemplifies the spirit and strength of character of Gordon Parks. “We are very pleased that Howard L. Bingham accepted our invitation to receive this award.” Jill Warford, the Center’s Executive Director, said. “He is a talented photographer who worked with Mr. Parks and was one of his personal friends. Mr. Bingham exemplifies everything we could have hoped for in a worthy recipient.”

Howard L. Bingham is an accomplished photographer, writer, and humanitarian. Born in Jackson, Mississippi in 1939, he moved to Los Angeles with his parents at age four. He was educated in the city’s public schools, and attended Compton College where he flunked his photography class. Bingham was determined to hone his craft, so he apprenticed at the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, one of the country’s largest black newspapers. After a month, he was hired.

It was while working at the *Sentinel* in 1962 that Bingham was assigned to cover Muhammad Ali, then a brash young boxer from Louisville, who still answered to his birth name, Cassius Clay. Ali was in town to promote an upcoming match to a boxer and Bingham showed up, photographed the event and left. But he ran into Clay and his brother a few hours later on a Los Angeles street. Bingham offered to show the young Clays the town and his impromptu generosity became the first step in a life-long friendship.

Over the years, Howard Bingham toured the globe with Ali, chronicling the athlete-statesman’s every major championship win and loss, personal appearance and diplomatic trip. As Ali’s recognition expanded, so did Bingham’s photographic skills and his reputation for them. Bingham documented many of the most important events and personalities in contemporary times, including the civil rights movement. “Wherever there was a riot, I was there. I covered them all.”

Like Gordon Parks, he was a contract photographer for *Life* magazine. His work has also appeared in *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Look*, *People*, *Newsweek* and *Ebony* among other international publications as well. Bingham met Bill Cosby when he visited the set of *I Spy* with Clay. The actor subsequently created an opportunity for Bingham to qualify to join the Camera Guild in 1969 as a still photographer on *The Bill Cosby Show*. That is how Howard Bingham became the first black person to work on a Hollywood Camera Guild crew. He subsequently worked on various television shows and on such feature films as

The Candidate, All The President's Men, The Electric Horseman and others. In addition to his paid work, Bingham also devoted several unpaid hours to mentoring young African Americans who also wanted to be in the movie industry.

Today Bingham divides his time between commercial assignments and documentary work. Books that he has authored or co-authored include: *Muhammad Ali: A Thirty Year Journey* (1993), *Muhammad Ali's Greatest Fight* (2000), *Ali: The Movie and the Man* (2001), and *GOAT: A Tribute to Muhammad Ali* (2004). Forwards to *Muhammad Ali: A Thirty Year Journey* were written by Bill and Camille Cosby and Gordon Parks among many others. Bingham, who credits Parks as his mentor, met him in 1963 while Parks was taking pictures of Malcolm X. Gordon Parks said of Bingham, "I have deep regard for Howard as an artist and a staunch friend."

When the Muhammad Ali Center opened in 2005 in Louisville, KY, Bingham was honored with the naming of "The Howard L. Bingham Gallery" to showcase his work. Bingham is the 1997 recipient of the ASP International Award, which was presented by the American Society of Photographers. In 1998 he was named Photographer of the Year by the Photo Marketing Distributors Association (PMDA). Bingham also is the recipient of the Kodak Vision Award and Kodak also named a scholarship in his honor.

In 2000, "Main Event: The Ali/Foreman Extravaganza Through the Lens of Howard L. Bingham," originated at UCLA's Fowler Museum of Cultural History and traveled to the Smithsonian and the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis. The exhibit featured photographs of the Ali-Foreman fight in Zaire in 1974 called "The Rumble in the Jungle."

Howard L. Bingham will be honored at a tribute dinner on Friday, October 7. The Celebration schedule will be mailed out soon and tickets for Gordon Parks Celebration events will go on sale September 18. Tickets will be available at the Gordon Parks Center at FSCC and at The Country Cupboard, 12 N. Main, in downtown Fort Scott. For more information contact Warford at 223-2700, ext. 515 or see the website at gordonparkscenter.org.

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