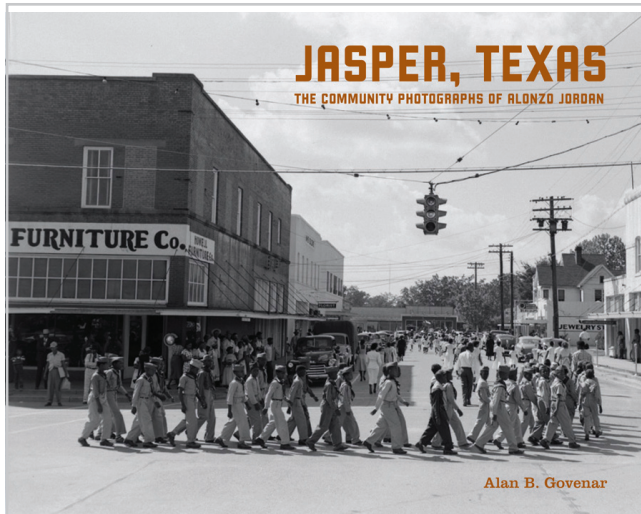




International Center of Photography

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media release



## ***Jasper, Texas: The Community Photographs of Alonzo Jordan***

An ICP/Steidl publication  
by Alan Govenar,  
with a contribution  
by Bob Ray Sanders

12 x 9 3/8 inches  
160 pages  
110 b+w plates, 40 illustrations

The small East Texas town of Jasper was traumatized by the killing of forty-nine-year-old African American James Byrd, Jr. on June 7, 1998, in one of the most brutal race crimes in U.S. history. The protracted media coverage that ensued did not for the most part reveal the stark past and complicated social life of this segregated community. Little known were the photographs of Alonzo Jordan (1903–1984), who had made Byrd's high school graduation portrait, and had worked for more than forty years to document African Americans in Jasper and in the surrounding rural areas.

*Jasper, Texas* challenges existing formalistic approaches to the study of vernacular photography by exploring Alonzo Jordan's distinguished career as a community photographer. A barber by trade, Jordan was also a Prince Hall Mason, a deacon in his church, an educator, and a local leader, who took up photography to fill a need he recognized. Over the years, he chronicled the world of black East Texas in which he lived and worked, focusing on those civic events, social organizations, schools, churches, and activities that were integral to the daily life of the people he served. At a time when racism and discrimination undermined the fundamental rights and aspirations of African Americans, Jordan countered the degrading images that were insidious in advertising, as well as in newspapers and magazines. He created photographs that not only affirmed the identities of his subjects, but strengthened self-esteem by enabling people to see themselves as individuals and in relation to others. The photograph in this context was more than a neutral documentary tool; the image personified the experience it represented and became a vital component of the social fabric of family and community.

**Alan Govenar** is a writer, folklorist, photographer, and filmmaker. He is the founder of Documentary Arts, a non-profit organization that presents new perspectives on historical issues and diverse cultures. Govenar is the author of eighteen books, including *Texas Blues: The Rise of a Contemporary Sound*, *Stompin' at the Savoy: The Story of Norma Miller*, and *The Early Years of Rhythm and Blues*. His book *Osceola: Memories of a Sharecropper's Daughter* won First Place in the New York Book Festival (Children's Non-Fiction). The off-Broadway premiere of his musical *Blind Lemon Blues*, co-created with Akin Babatunde, received rave reviews in *The New York Times* and *Variety*. **Bob Ray Sanders'** journalism career spans three decades and three media: newspaper, television, and radio. He is currently Vice President/Associate Editor and a Metro columnist for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. He has received some of journalism's most prestigious honors, among them being: three PBS Awards; a regional Emmy Award; a National Association of Black Journalists award for Best TV Sports Feature; and a National Headliner Award for outstanding investigative reporting.