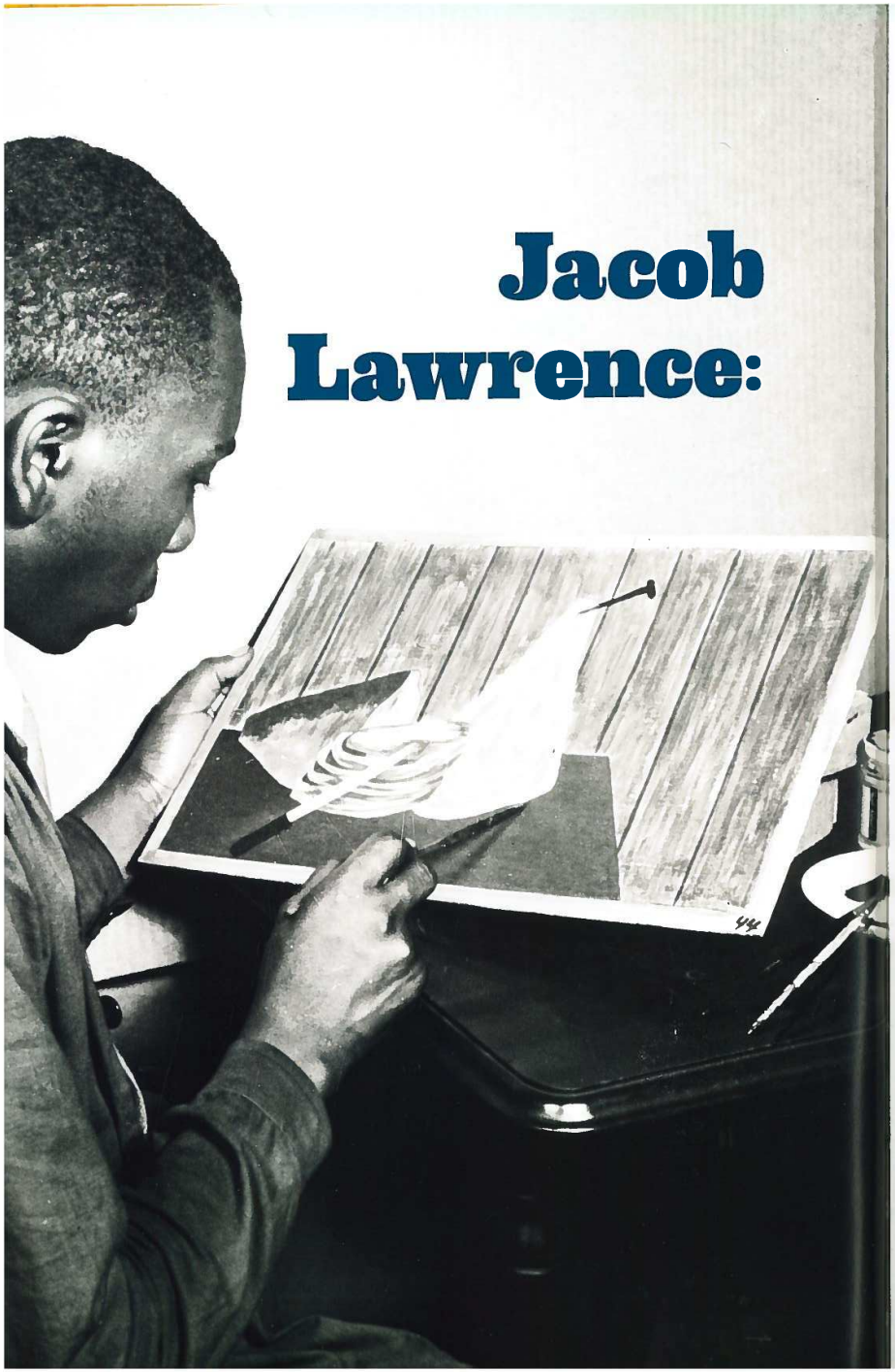

Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series

Leah Dickerman and Elsa Smithgall

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY:
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The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Contents

Fighting Blues

Leah Dickerman

"The Spirituals were born on the plantation; The blues were created on the pavements of the city, in saw mills, in lumber camps: in short, wherever the migrant Negro, fresh from the soil, wrestled with an alien reality."[1]

–Richard Wright, Liner notes for Josh White's album *Southern Exposure*

ne 1941, Edith Halpert, a gallerist who represented
of the leading artists of the American avant-garde,
ıged to meet the critic and philosopher Alain Locke
Harlem Community Art Center, on Lenox Avenue
25th Street in Harlem. Halpert had solicited Locke's
e in shaping an exhibition of work by contemporary
artists for her Downtown Gallery. This outing was
likely when Halpert first saw Jacob Lawrence's newest
s of gouache panels.[2] The artist, then just twenty-
, was a rising star; his innovative multipanel narrative
s on the lives of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick
glass, and Harriet Tubman, significant figures in
an-American history, had already won praise. This
t series, though—sixty tempera panels, each paired
a caption—dealt in an epic way with a near contem-
neous phenomenon and subject of great topicality:
the mass movement of blacks from the South to the North that had begun during World War I, lay in Lawrence's own family background, and had transformed the Harlem community in which he lived. The unusual uptown viewing set off a chain of events took Lawrence's career to a new level of recognition, ecedented for a black artist in the United States.

Harlem Artists' Guild and
t to protest cutbacks
30s. The trio at center
ett (center) and
hind them, in a white
rry Henderson Papers,
hives, Pennsylvania

ovember 1941, twenty-six of the panels were repro-
ed in color in *Fortune* magazine. That same month,
ert showed the series at her Downtown Gallery, and
would also include it in a round-up of work by black
sts, selected with Locke, at her gallery a few weeks later.
re, although the opening festivities were undercut by
oombing of Pearl Harbor, the show was seen by Duncan
lips and Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the curator/directors
espectively, the Phillips Memorial Gallery (now The
lips Collection), in Washington, D.C., and New York's Museum of Modern Art, two of the first public institutions dedicated to collecting and showing modern art in the United States. With Halpert brokering the purchase, each institution soon acquired half of the series, dividing the group of sixty panels between them. After the sale, the full series was shown at the Phillips in 1942, then went on a fifteen-stop tour, organized by MoMA, that concluded with a New York presentation at the Museum in 1944 **(p. 42, figs. 15, 16)**. While these events launched Lawrence's national reputation, the artist himself always maintained that in making the Migration Series, "I wasn't thinking of sales or of a gallery."[3] In comments like this, Lawrence suggests that despite its benefits to his career, and some pleasure in his inclusion in these collections, the conversation among institutional arbiters of modern art—among gallerists, collectors, and curators—had not been his primary focus.

WPA Harlem

Lawrence arrived in Harlem around 1930, at about the age of thirteen, with his mother, sister, and brother. He had spent the early years of his childhood first in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where his mother and Lawrence's father had met after moving up from the South, then in resettlement camps in the hardscrabble mining town of Easton, Pennsylvania. His parents soon separated and his mother moved with Lawrence and his siblings to Philadelphia. After some time spent trying to get a foothold, she went to New York City to find work that could better support them, leaving the children behind in foster homes in Philadelphia, and brought them to New York to join her a few years later. By the time Lawrence got there, Harlem had been hit hard by the Great Depression: black workers were often the first to lose jobs—40 percent of black men in New York were registered as unemployed in 1937, compared with 15 percent of whites[4]—and the neighborhood had lost some of the Jazz Age jubilance of the decade or so before, the period often

called the Harlem Renaissance.[5] But despite the sobered atmosphere, in the later 1930s and early '40s, the years in which Lawrence matured as an artist, Harlem saw a second flourishing of cultural activity, this time with a distinctly new tone.

Harlem's vibrancy during the Depression was in many ways incubated by federal-government New Deal support for cultural programs initiated in the mid-1930s. Between 1935 and 1942, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) spent $11 billion and employed 3 million people nationwide, mostly in the construction of the network of bridges, roads, and dams that would provide the country's civil-engineering infrastructure for the next decades.[6] Yet within this overarching relief program, Federal Project Number One was dedicated to cultural work. It was divided by discipline into four parts—Art, Music, Theater, and Writers—and the division for visual artists, called the Federal Art Project (FAP), was run by curator and arts administrator Holger Cahill, who a few years earlier had done a stint as acting director of MoMA while Barr was on a leave of absence. Separate FAP departments were charged with art instruction, research, and the creation of art for nonfederal public buildings (schools, libraries, and hospitals). The FAP also established over 100 community art centers, which offered gallery spaces and tuition-free classes. Although artists accounted for only a small percentage of those on the WPA payroll,[7] their inclusion there not only assured their continued creative activity through these economically disastrous years but also offered a new conceptual model of the artist: an artist-citizen, working for wages to produce not commodities for a market but cultural artifacts for a public. A note that Lawrence wrote to Locke during his own WPA stint suggests the degree to which he had absorbed this ethos:

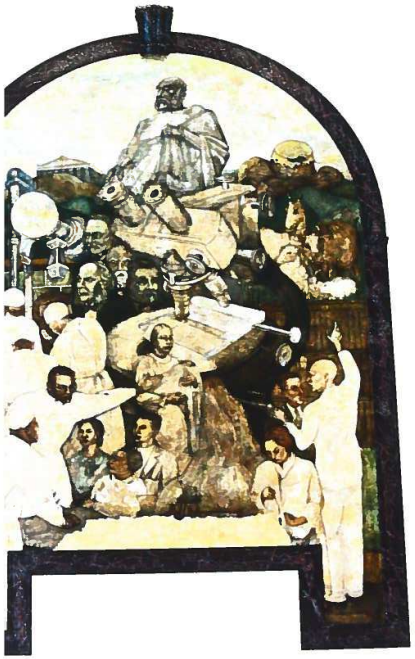
"I think it means much more to an artist to have people like and enjoy his work than it does to have a few individuals purchase his work, and it not have the interest of the masses."[8]

For white artists, WPA programs were intended to replace sources of employment lost during the Depression; for black artists, however, they provided funding on a level that had not existed before. The Depression, paradoxically, gave significant numbers of African-American artists the new ability to work full-time within their disciplines. But the participation of black artists in these programs was not a passive achievement, a simple move to take advantage of available federal funding; it was the result of organized activism. An artist who wanted to join the federal payroll had to document his or her status as a professional, a task made difficult for black artists by their near exclusion from exhibition venues and art-school faculties. "Initially ignorant of African-American artists," wrote the artist Romare Bearden (a friend of Lawrence's from those years) and the art historian Harry Henderson, "WPA administrators refused to hire them until overwhelming evidence from Harmon files, universities, colleges, galleries, and leading white artists demonstrated their existence."[9]

The need to go to the William E. Harmon Foundation—dedicated to championing work by African-American artists through prizes, grants, and Foundation-curated exhibitions, but often patronizing in its policies—rankled many. So too did the relative absence of black artists in supervisory roles on WPA/FAP projects. "We discovered that there was a lot going on in the WPA that we weren't getting the benefits of," recalled Charles Alston, Lawrence's teacher and mentor since his teenage years.[10] Early in 1935, Alston and a handful of others, including the artists Augusta Savage, Gwendolyn Bennett, Aaron Douglas, Norman Lewis, and the bibliophile Arturo Schomburg, founded the Harlem Artists' Guild to champion the interests of black artists, particularly with regard to the new federal programs; Lawrence became a member.[11] The group advocated for WPA commissions and the establishment of a federally supported community art center in Harlem, and protested cutbacks to New York projects (a favorite target of Southern Democrats) and discriminatory practices within the WPA. Guild artists were ready to take to the streets, picketing on a number of occasions **(frontis)**.[12]

The Harlem Artists' Guild could point to important victories. "We succeeded," Alston remembered, "in getting practically everybody who could prove he was somewhat of an artist on the project."[13] The Harlem Community Art Center was the largest of the over 100 art centers built nationwide with federal support;[14] in a sign of its political significance, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt attended the opening-day ceremonies, on December 20, 1937 **(fig. 1)**, which featured an exhibition of WPA works by Guild artists. The Chairman of the Center's Citizens' Committee, A. Philip Randolph, spoke at the opening.[15] As president

1. Left to right: Gwendolyn Bennett, Sarah West, Louise Jefferson, and Augusta Savage with Eleanor Roosevelt at the opening of the Harlem Community Art Center, December 20, 1937. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



Modern Medicine. 1936–40.
9' (5.2 x 2.7 m). Originally
by of the Women's Pavilion,
, Harlem Hospital, New York;
al's Mural Pavilion. Harlem
lew York

of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters—the first predominantly black labor union, founded in 1925—Randolph served as an important advisor and inspiration for black union-organizing. Douglas was named the Center's first president, Savage the vice-president. The previous year, Alston had also received a major commission for a series of murals for the Harlem Hospital **(fig. 2)**, supervising the work of some twenty other artists, including Lawrence's future wife, Gwendolyn Knight. Though he was not officially on the payroll, Lawrence would remember helping Alston to transfer drawings to walls.[16] The Guild stepped in again in February 1936, when the hospital's superintendent objected that there was "too much Negro subject matter" in the design approved by WPA officials.[17] The Guild and the Artists' Union, a left-leaning voice for unemployed artists led by the painter Stuart Davis, jumped to protest: a joint statement reported in the *Daily Worker* declared that the superintendent "was eminently unqualified to act either as a judge of the murals or as spokesman for the Harlem community."[18] The WPA reaffirmed Alston's plan. The extraordinary success that Guild lobbying represented is underscored by the fact that the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters would only win its first, unprecedented contract with the Pullman Company in 1937, after more than a decade of organizing. The Guild, significantly, also provided Harlem artists with on-the-ground training in political activism.

In Lawrence's case the advocacy was also personal. After his first solo show, in 1938, at the Harlem YMCA—scenes of people and places in his Harlem neighborhood **(fig. 3)**—he could claim status as a professional artist eligible for the WPA payroll. Savage worried that he was working odd jobs that distracted him from painting; she escorted him downtown to WPA headquarters to enroll him, only to see him turned down because he was not yet twenty-one. A year later she marched him down again, and successfully signed him up, though he was still shy of the mark—a testament to her persuasive insistence.[19] Too young to be entrusted with the supervision of a mural commission, Lawrence was instead assigned to the easel division, a bureaucracy-imposed limitation of scale that he later credited with prompting him to think in a serial format in order "to tell a complete story."[20] From April 27, 1938, until October 27, 1939, the maximum period allowed on the FAP payroll, Lawrence was required to present two paintings every six weeks in return for a paycheck of $95.44 a month.[21] He recognized the importance of Savage's intervention:

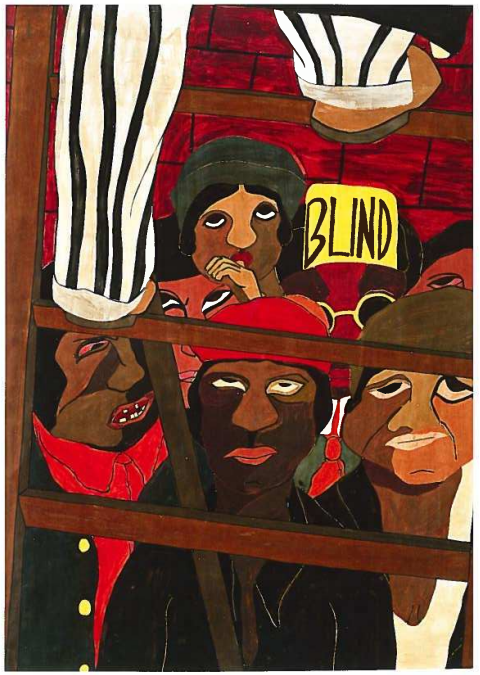
> **"If Augusta Savage hadn't insisted on getting me onto the project, I don't think I would ever have become an artist."[22]**

Ultimately, the flow of federal funding into Lawrence's neighborhood across these years and those immediately previous, in which small amounts of pre-WPA New Deal cultural support were in play, was remarkable. Even before the opening of the Harlem Community Art Center, in December 1937, Lawrence could and did spend time (in some combination of working and hanging out) at the workshops held at: 1) Savage's studio, first at 163 West 143rd Street, later at 239 West 135th; 2) the YMCA at 180 West 135th Street, between Lenox and Seventh avenues; 3) the Harlem Art Workshop, which offered classes

in the basement of the branch of the New York Public Library at 103 West 135th Street in Harlem and later in an old nightclub building at 270 West 136th Street, with teachers including Alston and the printmakers James Lesesne Wells and Palmer Hayden; and 4) Alston's and the sculptor Henry "Mike" Bannarn's studio at 306 West 141 Street.[23] Although there was a wide range in the degree of formal instruction these workshops offered, all of them received federal support toward the costs of salaries, rent, and supplies. The result was a dense complex of working spaces within a few blocks, in which young artists could find an array of materials and forms of guidance, with many of them—Lawrence included—moving fluidly between sites. As an infrastructure for artmaking, this complex of black artist-run workshops and organizations stood in stark contrast to the void of exhibition spaces and art schools in Harlem that Savage remembered encountering on her return from Paris at the beginning of the decade.[24]

Moreover, the WPA's four-channel arts structure brought together artists working in different disciplines. The poet Langston Hughes, for example, ran his Suitcase Theater at the Harlem Community Art Center in spaces adjacent to those for art classes and exhibitions; the activist actor Paul Robeson had an office there.[25] While Alston was conducting classes at the 135th Street library, nearby staff on salary from the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) were working on cataloguing Arturo Schomburg's collection of books and printed matter relating to the history of the African diaspora, which the library had acquired in 1926. (This branch of the library would eventually become the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, now at 515 Malcolm X Boulevard.)

Other writers working on FWP projects in the neighborhood included Richard Wright, a Mississippi-born migrant who had come to New York in 1937 after a decade in Chicago. With Claude McKay, Wright wrote on black history and Harlem for a WPA-produced guidebook to New York City, and he was the Harlem editor of the *Daily Worker*. "In summer the sidewalks are crowded with loiterers and strollers," read the 1939 guide, in a description that evokes Lawrence's own early Harlem scenes, and "the unemployed move chairs to the pavement and set up cracker boxes for checker games. On Lenox Avenue soapbox orators draw crowds nightly . . . one of the speakers being, inevitably, a disciple of Marcus Garvey, leader of the back-to-Africa movement, now in exile in England."[26] Wright pulled strings to get an FWP position for Ralph Ellison, who had recently taken a sculpture class with Savage and was hanging out with Bearden. Ellison interviewed Harlem residents for the folklore division of the FWP, part of an ambitious effort to record the life histories of thousands of ordinary Americans. He would later integrate into his fiction elements of the stories and speech patterns he heard in these interviews. Federal theater projects operated nearby; the home base for the New York Negro Unit of the Federal Theater Project was the Lafayette Theater, at 132nd Street and Seventh Avenue. Key productions included the "voodoo" *Macbeth* (1936), an adaptation of Shakespeare's play set in the nineteenth-century Haitian court of King Henri Christophe, directed by the young Orson Welles; *Turpentine* (1936), a social drama, written by J. Augustus Smith and Peter Morell, that focused on the injustice of Southern labor camps; and *Haiti* (1938), by a white Southerner, William DuBois, which in its New York adaption celebrated the revolutionary overthrow of the French government of the country by L'Ouverture.



3. Jacob Lawrence. *Street Orator's Audience*. 1936. Tempera on paper, 24 1/8 x 19 1/8" (61.3 x 48.6 cm). Tacoma Art Museum. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Roger W. Peck by exchange

4. Members of the "306" group outside 306 West 141st Street, mid-1930s. Standing, left to right: Addison Bates, Grace Richardson, Edgar Evans, Vertis Hayes, Charles Alston, Cecil Gaylord, John Glenn, Elba Lightfoot, Selma Day, Ronald Joseph, Georgette Seabrooke (Powell), Richard Reid. At front, left to right: Gwendolyn Knight, James Yeargans, Francisco Lord, Richard Lindsey, Frederick Coleman. Photo: Morgan and Marvin Smith. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

The impact of the WPA went far beyond tuition-free access to materials, equipment, and training—although that played no insignificant role in allowing someone like Lawrence, a child of migrant parents with little exposure to art at home, to imagine himself as an artist. A broader effect was the creation of a framework for conversational mixing. Savage's studio, the "306" group (of artists frequenting Alston's and Bannarn's studio at 306 West 141st Street; **fig. 4**), and the Harlem Community Art Center provided structures for introducing young artists, often migrants from the South, to members of an established Harlem intelligentsia. Lawrence set himself up in Alston and Bannarn's studio, renting a corner for two dollars a month to give himself a place to paint away from home **(p. 35, fig. 4)**. He would later recall of the space,

> *During the '30s there was much interest in black history and the social and political issues of the day—this was especially true at 306. It became a gathering place. . . . I received not only an experience in the plastic arts—but came in contact with older blacks from the theater, dance, literary and other fields. At sixteen it was quite a learning experience—Katherine Dunham, Aaron Douglas, Leigh Whipper, Countee Cullen, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Alain Locke, William Attaway, O. Richard Reid—hearing them discuss the topics of the day—as well as philosophy and creative processes pertaining to their own fields. Claude McKay was a frequent visitor to 306. He had more than a great interest in Africa, the philosophy of Garvey, U.N.I.A. [The Universal Negro Improvement Association], etc. Augusta Savage was also a strong black Nationalist and champion of black women.*[27]

Lawrence seems in retrospect extraordinarily well mentored—especially by Savage, Alston, and Locke, but also by a broader circle that opened itself to promising youth, despite the frequent difference in class. The tutoring provided, as Lawrence's comments suggest, was political as much as artistic.

Harlem-based artists had to go downtown to pick up their paycheck. As Lawrence told the *Chicago Defender* writer Mort Cooper in 1963, "My real education was with the WPA Federal Arts Project. I met people like William Saroyan, just on the edge of fame. They all used to talk about what was going on in the world. All the artists used to go down to project headquarters on King Street in Manhattan to sign in. We'd meet each other, and talk and talk and talk."[28]

Such payday gab-fests enabled a great deal of exchange between artists, writers, actors, and curators across the boundaries of race. Saroyan was at work on his play *The Time of Your Life*, set in a San Francisco bar, for which in 1940, he would win a Pulitzer, then refuse it in the belief that commerce had no right to judge art. He often traveled uptown to join the conversations at 306. It was also at the WPA offices that Lawrence met Jay Leyda, a young film critic and film curator at The Museum of Modern Art.[29] Leyda would end up playing a special role as a champion of Lawrence's work **(p. 37, fig. 7)**, serving as a sometime agent for his picture sales, introducing him to José Clemente Orozco when the Mexican muralist was working onsite at MoMA in 1940, asking Wright if he might mentor Lawrence, and showing the Migration Series to Barr, who would eventually acquire half of the panels for The Museum of Modern Art.[30] One can imagine that Lawrence might have also met Davis, Arshile Gorky, Ad Reinhardt, Ben Shahn, and many others picking up their pay at the WPA—all enrolled in the same time period.[31]

The Painter as Historian

When asked about his early choices of subjects, Lawrence insisted that they reflected the interests of his community.

"People would speak of these things on the street," he recalled. "I was encouraged by the community to do works of this kind; they were interested in them."[32]

Along with the "librarians," "teachers," and "street corner orators" whom Lawrence often mentioned as playing key roles in his education in black history, one crucial figure was Charles Seifert.[33] Lawrence met Seifert across the street from the 135th Street library at the Harlem YMCA, where the artist liked to shoot pool.[34] There, as Bearden and Henderson recount, he would lecture to all who would listen on "the achievements of Black men in Africa, the golden city of Timbuktu, African use of iron when most of Europe was ignorant of it, [and] the elegant bronze casting required to create the superb art treasures of Benin in Nigeria," and would argue that "Black people were never going to get anywhere until they knew their own history and took pride in it."[35] Seifert had a collection of books and artifacts relating to Africa's culture and diaspora, which he opened to young Harlemites including Lawrence, and in 1935 Lawrence joined a trip he organized to an exhibition of African sculpture at MoMA. Lawrence would recall that "one of his projects . . . was to get black artists and young people such as myself who were interested in art . . . to select as our content black history."[36]

Lawrence also spoke of the importance of the "history clubs" that proliferated in the wake of the Migration, part of a movement to document, research, and teach black history.[37] Carter G. Woodson, one of the first professional scholars of African-American history in the United States, encouraged the growth of the clubs by offering any with more than five members a free subscription to *The Journal of Negro History*, which he had founded in 1916.[38] The Negro History Club at the 135th Street library, which Lawrence seems to have attended, had been founded by Ernestine Rose, the enlightened head librarian at the branch since 1920, and Ella Baker, who two decades hence would become one of the most important leaders of youth in the civil rights movement, playing key roles in Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—one of many links between Lawrence's circles and the mid-century movement.[39] Baker was already developing a profile as a community organizer and activist in the late 1920s. In 1928, soon after arriving in New York after graduation from Shaw University in North Carolina, she organized a Negro History Club at the 135th Street YMCA.[40] In 1930 she joined the Young Negroes Cooperative League, which sought to develop black economic power, then later in the decade found WPA positions both on the Workers' Education Project, which offered classes to enable people to enter the work force, and at the 135th Street library, to help run the Harlem Experiment in Adult Education programs, which focused on black history and culture, and a Young People's Forum that brought in a range of prominent speakers on historical and political topics.

These positions and institutional bases flowed into one another, and Baker coordinated and led classes and workshops in consumer education, labor history, and black history at both the library and the YMCA across the street. These sessions, she would recall, tried to provide the participant with "a more intelligent understanding of the social and political economy of which he is part."[41] Discussions would at times continue outside on the street. At least once, a soapbox orator paid by the library was positioned outside to preach on colonialism, Pan-Africanism, and the struggle for social justice.[42] Baker emphasized the need for political involvement, often leading her protégés to join pickets and signature campaigns. She would recall of these years, "You had every spectrum of radical thinking on the WPA. We had a lovely time. . . . Boy was it good, stimulating."[43] The influence of teachers like Seifert and Baker can be seen in Lawrence's description of his motivation for choosing historical subjects in 1940, when he was occupied with the Migration Series:

"Having no Negro history makes the Negro people feel inferior to the rest of the world. . . . I didn't do it just as a historical thing, but because I believe these things tie up with the Negro today."[44]

With his earlier series on the lives of black leaders, Lawrence had already developed an extensive research protocol unusual for a painter, spending time at the library taking notes on books, journals, and documents **(fig. 5)**. He spoke of choosing both the subjects of his pictures and their captions—at times copied verbatim—from these written sources.[45] Lawrence returned to this process with his Migration Series: in his application for a Julius Rosenwald Fund grant to work on the project when his WPA employment ended, in 1939, he said he needed six months for research. His references for the grant also pointed to his extensive research as a distinguishing and

5. The New York Public Library's 135th Street branch (now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), 1938. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

ary feature of his work.[46] The Fund had been hed by Julius Rosenwald, the Sears, Roebuck e, in 1917, when foundations were still a relatively ilanthropic instrument. The endowment—lly reaching over $70 million—was to be spent ithin twenty years of its founder's death.[47] In 1928, an ambitious program of "genius" grants to ds of black artists, musicians, writers, and other onals. When Lawrence won a grant, he joined st of cultural luminaries who received Rosenwald including Savage (1929, 1930, 1931), Hughes (1931, e composer William Grant Still (1939, 1940), and tralto Marian Anderson (1930).

ıce's earlier series, on L'Ouverture, Douglass, and n, had focused on giving visual form to the heroic es of an extraordinary historical figure. Each had an epic chronicle of its protagonist's transformation ave to leader in the struggle for the liberation of their While the multipanel-plus-caption format that ıce created was novel in fine art, and allowed for arrative development than the traditional portrait ıry painting, representation of the lives of great :al figures was a keen imperative in the work of ıporary black painters. Aaron Douglas, for example, l Tubman in 1931 in an allegorical mode, with arms ed upward, breaking the shackles of bondage Hale Woodruff, who had studied with the Mexican st Diego Rivera, painted a three-panel mural narking the centennial of the *Amistad* slave-ship in 1839.[48] The subject of Charles White's mural *Five Great American Negroes*, made while White was working for the Illinois WPA, was a pantheon of black heroes chosen by a poll conducted by the *Defender* in October 1939: Anderson, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, George Washington Carver, and Booker T. Washington **(fig. 7)**.[49]

ıman. 1931. Oil
2.9 cm). Bennett
:arolina

With the Migration Series Lawrence changed tack: rather than choosing a subject set in the distant past, he picked an ongoing historical phenomenon that had begun just two decades or so before. The flow of Southern blacks to the North had started in the first years of World War I as a small stream; the numbers jumped dramatically in 1916, becoming noticeable to many observers. As early as February 5 of that year, the *Defender* spoke of the "steady movement of race families" out of the South.[50] By the end of 1917, Chicago's three major dailies (the *Tribune*, the *Daily News*, and the *Examiner*) had written no less than forty-five articles on the exodus.[51] More than 437,000 black southerners moved North in the course of the 1910s, and at least 810,000 more relocated in the 1920s, effecting a demographic transformation of the country that thoroughly changed its cities and its political, cultural, and economic life.[52] Moreover, the dual influx of migrants from the Caribbean and the South in the first decades of the twentieth century had turned Harlem, Lawrence's neighborhood, into the country's "race capital," as Locke described it in the introduction to *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro* (1925): a geographic center that gathered and intensified the aspirations of a people. The migration, like the preceding waves of European immigration, was for Locke "a mass movement toward the larger and the more democratic chance," and Harlem the stage for the "resurgence of a race."[53]

Not only was the subject contemporary, but Lawrence also shifted from recounting the lives of great heroes to giving image to the experience of ordinary people. There was precedent for this in the writing of Hughes and McKay, both of whom he had met at 306. Hughes, for example, in his 1940 autobiography *The Big Sea*, described the protagonists of his poetry as

7. Charles White. *Five Great American Negroes*. 1939–40. Oil on canvas, 5 x 12' (1.5 x 3.7 m). Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

"workers, roustabouts, and singers, and job hunters on Lenox Avenue in New York, or Seventh Street in Washington or South State in Chicago—people up today and down tomorrow, working this week and fired the next, beaten and baffled, but determined not to be wholly beaten."[54]

Certainly this change in approach also had something to do with how Lawrence learned about the Migration, through stories told by family, friends, and neighbors. "I grew up hearing tales about people coming up, another family arriving," he recalled. "Out here people who'd been in the North who'd migrated . . . would say, 'Another family came up.'"[55] Lawrence's intimate connection to the subject matter is suggested in panels such as **no. 33**, showing a woman seen in foreshortened perspective from the crown of the head, reading a letter in bed. "Maybe it represents my mother reading a letter or my sister," Lawrence later said.[56] Yet his use of a collective subject in the Migration Series, and the many, mostly faceless figures depicted, may also have something to with the nature of the event: the Migration has been described from early on as the first leaderless liberation movement in African-American history.[57] In 1917, during its first years, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., the powerful pastor of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church, declared, "The masses have done more to solve the Negro problem in fifty weeks without a leader than they did in fifty years with certain types of leaders."[58] The panels of Lawrence's series offered a new kind of history, attentive to the role of ordinary people as actors on the historical stage—akin in many ways to the oral-history projects of the FWP. In images of people reading and receiving information **(panels 20, 33, 34)**, talking **(panels 26, 30)**, taking action by deciding to leave, often in the face of opposition **(panels 41, 42)**, and enduring hardships in order to do so **(panel 27)**, they focus on the many repeated acts of agency that the migrants undertook.[59]

In his Rosenwald application, Lawrence defined his approach carefully, outlining an eight-part structure that largely survives in the finished work. The series would address in turn:

I. Causes of the Migration
II. Stimulation of the Migration
III. The Spread of the Migration
IV. The Efforts to check the Migration
V. Public Opinion Regarding the Migration
VI. The Effects of the Migration on the South
VII. The Effect of the Migration on various parts of the North
VIII. The Effects of the Migration on the Negro[60]

Lawrence's presentation of the causes and effects of the Migration closely follows early writing on the phenomenon—the type of book Lawrence read at the library, such as those by Woodson, Emmett J. Scott (most of his eight sections mirror chapters in Scott's book *Negro Migration during the War*, 1920), Charles S. Johnson, and W. E. B. Du Bois.[61] So do the push-and-pull forces he notes. Writing in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's *Crisis* magazine in 1917, for example, Du Bois had cited the almost biblical accounting of the Migration's seven causes given by the African Methodist Episcopal Ministers' Alliance of Birmingham, Alabama:

judice, disfranchisement [*sic*], Jim Crow cars, lynching, treatment on the farms, the boll weevil, the floods 916."[62] These plagues are essentially those Lawrence sents. He also read literature that grappled with the erience of the Migration: a copy of Jean Toomer's *ne* (1923)—a novel composed of vignettes whose settings ve from the South to the North and back again—was nd among the artist's possessions after his death, cked out of the library in 1939 and never returned.[63]

ey aspect of the Migration Series' shift away from wrence's presentation of the lives of great leaders in his lier narratives is the move from a historical perspective, which the significance of events is read in relation to reater principle such as nation-building, to a socio- ical mode, an attempt to understand the collective ial behavior of a group. The Migration and its impact Northern cities were perhaps the key topics for a neration of black sociologists emerging in the 1920s d '30s. Many of these thinkers had studied with Robert Park, who had helped to establish the field of sociology the United States and had en a major force in stimulating d shaping the direction of search on race relations since s arrival in Chicago in 1914. In e aftermath of the widespread ial violence that erupted in the ban North during the Migration, ack researchers and reformers veloped a new approach to the litics of race, deploying statis- al evidence to define racial sparities in the management crime, labor, and housing. The udy of the Chicago race riot of 19 that Charles S. Johnson, who id trained with Park, prepared r the city's Commission for Race elations is one example.[64] 'right spoke of a sociological rn in his own work: in his troduction to *Black Metropolis: Study of Negro Life in a Northern ity* (1945), a landmark study of hicago's South Side written by ark students Horace R. Cayton, ., and St. Clair Drake, he wrote iat Chicago School sociology had given him a way of understanding and imagining in his fiction the relationship between his characters and their environment.[65]

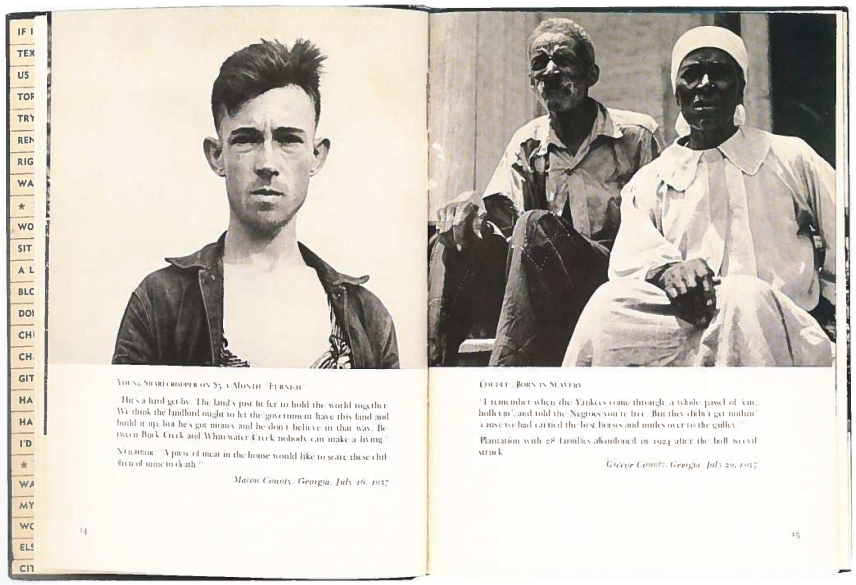
Media Consciousness

At the 135th Street library Lawrence inhabited a papery world full of printed matter—books, newspapers, journals, sociological tracts, historical ephemera. That domain shaped far more than the subject matter and textual components of his work: Lawrence also showed himself to be a keen connoisseur of the visual idiom of modern media culture—of graphic illustration, mechanically reproduced photographs, and cinema.

Lawrence declared his allegiance to the modern print world first of all in his choice of medium. Rather than the oil paint associated with fine art, he chose a tempera paint, a product often used by commercial illustrators because it was fast drying, matte, and opaque—good for producing pictures quickly and creating flat planes of color that would photograph well in reproduction.[66] Lawrence used a relatively small range of colors, leaving them unmixed in order to keep them consistent from panel to panel. Like a printmaker, he layered them in one at a time across all sixty panels, beginning with black, then moving on, color by color, to lighter values.[67] The results—spare images made up of large flat planes of unmixed colors with defined edges—also had the graphic impact of a color print.

8. Romare Bearden. "Why Stay in Dixie? The Watch Dog." Cartoon published in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 20, 1936, p. 4

Lawrence's use of captions for each panel also intimately linked his work to the picture-plus-text formula of images in print. This kind of pairing could be seen in graphic illustrations and political cartoons such as those produced by Alston, Bearden, E. Simms Campbell, and others **(fig. 8)**. Yet perhaps most significant as a model were the illustrated weeklies that had appeared in the 1920s and '30s—magazines like *Fortune*, *Life*, and *Look*. In contrast to newspapers like the *New York Times*, and its use of single images, the photo-magazines offered orchestrated, quasi-cinematic sequences of pictures and text—a word-picture hybrid in which the image was dominant but its meaning was directed by a caption. *Flash* magazine, a picture magazine dedicated to black experience, had had a short-lived run from 1937 to 1939—its founding an implicit recognition of both the importance of the medium and the exclusions of its coverage.



9. Spread from Dorothea Lange and Paul Schuster Taylor. *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York

In the late 1930s, some of the leading photographers who had worked for the illustrated magazines began to produce a variant genre: the photo book. In books, photographers could assert more authorial control over their images than they could within the collective corporate structure of the photo magazine, and could work in a longer format, often with the aim of creating a more coherent and sustained political argument. Several key early examples of this nontraditional image-based reporting—Erskine Caldwell's and Margaret Bourke-White's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), Dorothea Lange's and Paul Taylor's *American Exodus* (1939; **fig. 9**), and James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), all of which address a nexus of themes of poverty, disenfranchisement, migration, and itinerancy—found huge trade distribution.

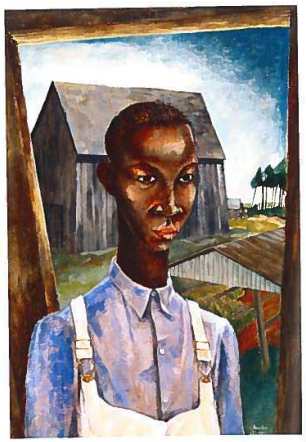
In response to the newly voracious demand for pictures, photo magazines, *Fortune* especially, became the patrons of ambitious photographic and documentation projects. The federal government did too; the Farm Security Administration (FSA), one of several New Deal agencies designed to help farmers impoverished by the economic and agricultural disasters of the decade, launched an ambitious initiative through its Historical Section, directed by Roy Stryker, to send photographers into the field to create

10. Ben Shahn. *Picking Cotton, Pulaski County, Arkansas*. 1935. Gelatin silver print, 7 5/8 x 9 3/16" (19.4 x 25 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Purchase

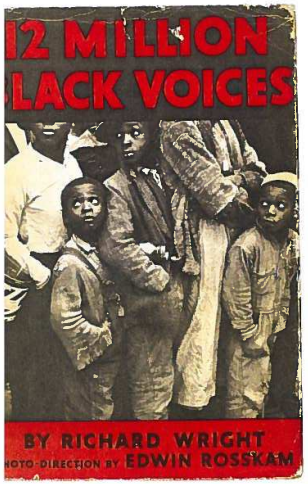
images that would document and explain the plight of farmers to various constituencies. FSA photographers took over 270,000 photos.[68] "There had never to my knowledge . . . been photography underwritten that actually tried to create the portrait of a country in a given period," reflected Edwin Rosskam, Stryker's deputy and a photographer and picture-editor with the FSA.[69] The FSA also shaped a new conception of the way a documentary photograph should look. FSA photographers self-consciously avoided elegant compositions and stylized formal devices in pursuit of what they saw as straight, honest photography **(fig. 10)**. For captions they often used quotations taken directly from conversations with the photographs' subjects, or written to appear so—an effort to give voice to the experience of ordinary citizens that echoes the documentary strategies of other federal agencies, such as the oral-history projects of the FWP. Rosskam described the FSA's goal as "documentation with humanity, rather than documentation that had a certain numerical quality to it."[70]

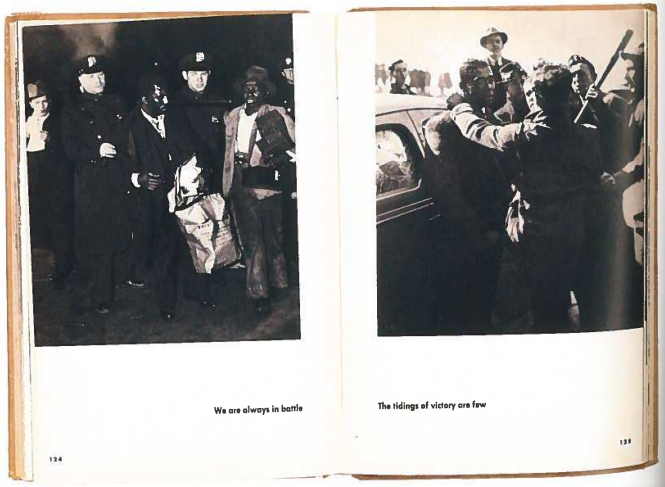
Although FSA images of rural Americans—often on the move as a result of drought, flood, or economic loss—were produced by a federal agency, they permeated the mass media. An extraordinary number of the photographs that appeared in corporate publications such as *Fortune*, *Look*, and *Life* between 1935 and 1940 were drawn directly from FSA photo archives; by 1940, the FSA's Historical Section was placing some 1,406 images a month in such publications, free of charge.[71] As important as the saturation of the media world with pictures of impoverished and often itinerant rural Americans was the way this image stream reflected a mainstream embrace of a new, socially engaged documentary approach.

That enthrallment with FSA photo-culture was strong in Lawrence's circles is suggested by Alston's course of action. Inspired by conversations at 306 about the plight of Southern blacks, he applied for a Rosenwald grant to travel to the South—which he had not seen since his family's own move north in 1915, when he was a small child—to work on a project contrasting "the Northern industrial and metropolitan Negro with his Southern and rural brother."[72] Arriving there in early 1940, he joined up with Giles Hubert, a sociologist and two-time Rosenwald grant-holder now working as an FSA inspector, and accompanied him on his rounds, playing the role of FSA photographer. "We both wore khakis, and I had a camera, so I was never questioned whether I was official or not," Alston would remember. "We went into all of these rural places and I took photographs, hundreds of photographs, and I really saw the South." Alston used the photos he brought home with him as the basis for a series of paintings of black Southerners **(fig. 11)**.[73]



11. Charles Alston. *Tobacco Farmer*. 1940. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 21 x 15" (53.3 x 38.1 cm). Private collection, New York





12, 13. Cover and spread from Richard Wright, with photo-direction by Edwin Rosskam. *12 Million Black Voices*. New York: Viking Press, 1941. Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University

The logic of FSA documentation of the lives of rural Americans led North to urban centers—to show, as Rosskam understood it, "where migration went to. Migration went to the city."[74] He enlisted Wright as a partner in preparing a photo book that would contrast black life in the South and in the North, and the two spent time in Washington, poring over photographs in the FSA archive. Then Rosskam, Wright, and FSA photographer Russell Lee traveled to Chicago together, along with Rosskam's and Wright's wives, to photograph the South Side. Wright's sociologist friend Cayton served as their guide. The final book, *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (1941), showcased large photographic reproductions—images taken largely by FSA photographers but also a few drawn from news agencies or taken by Wright himself—in spreads with simple captions **(figs. 12, 13)**. Wright's text addressed an implicitly white reader in prose that took on the cadence of speech:

> **"Each day when you see us black folk upon the dusty land of the farms or upon the hard pavement of the city streets, you usually take us for granted and think you know us, but our history is far stranger than you suspect, and we are not what we seem," he began.**[75]

That *12 Million Black Voices* was seen as an important corollary for Lawrence's Migration Series would soon be made explicit in the design for the traveling exhibition, organized by MoMA, that followed the acquisition of the series by MoMA and The Phillips Collection: five of the photographs reproduced in *12 Million Black Voices* were shown enlarged along with Lawrence's panels at all the venues.[76]

Yet the orchestrated sequence of images and captions in Lawrence's work—like those of the photo stories in the picture magazines themselves—is also inherently cinematic. Leyda recognized the affinity: Lawrence said that the film curator had taken to his work because of the cinema-like development of its serial panels. "I thought of doing it that way for that reason," Lawrence quietly confirmed.[77] Lawrence's friendship with Leyda seems key in this regard. In 1933, Leyda had traveled to the Soviet Union to study with the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein; returning to New York three years later, he joined the staff of The Museum of Modern Art and helped to acquire prints of *Battleship Potemkin* for its collection in 1938 and 1939. He would soon become one of the first and most important scholars of Russian avant-garde cinema: when he met Lawrence at the WPA, he was translating Eisenstein's theoretical writings, which would be published as the book *Film Sense* in 1942. Significantly given Lawrence's relationship with Leyda, the structure of the sixty panels of the Migration Series differs markedly from the continuous flow of his earlier historical narratives—images of trains, railway cars, train stations and their waiting rooms, and people arriving at or departing from them with their bags appear again and again, serving as a repetitive motif. There are fourteen such images in total across the sixty panels of the series. This rhythmic intersplicing of congruent bodies of images, the juxtaposition producing both aesthetic and ideological meaning, resembles nothing so much as Eisenstein's montage: the Soviet filmmaker's cutting back again and again to the baby carriage in the thrilling Odessa Steps sequence of *Battleship Potemkin* is the most famous example **(fig. 14)**. The analogy with cinema in Lawrence's work offered a way of representing time: while his early series suggest historical development and resolution, the temporal mode of the Migration Series is continuous. The measured reappearance of the train image implies constancy—a motion that will not stop. "And the migrants kept coming," reads the final panel. In the Migration Series Lawrence joins such avant-garde structural strategies with a keen consciousness of popular mass-media forms to rework traditional models of history painting.

14. Still from Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin*. 1925. Black and white, 75 minutes. The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive

Our Struggle

Lawrence's choice of the Migration as a subject—and his representation of racial injustice in both the North and the South—was bound up with a key shift in political mindset. In the years around 1939 to 1941, when Lawrence began his deep study of the Migration and conceptualized and worked on the series, figures in his orbit were testing new forms of protest politics in the cause of racial justice. They were turning, as Randolph put it, "from industrial to political action."[78] Before and after taking over the Abyssinian Baptist Church from his father, in 1937, for example, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., used it as a base for community organizing, conducting crusades against lynching, and for employment equity and affordable housing, with an arsenal of tactics that included pickets, mass meetings, rent strikes, and company-specific leafletings and boycotts **(fig. 15)**. His activities reached new levels of attention with a series of high-visibility

"Don't Buy Where You Can't Work"

campaigns conducted after the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed the right to picket establishments with discriminatory hiring practices in 1938, overturning the decisions of the lower courts. Then, in early 1941, after failing to win concessions from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt toward ending discrimination in the defense industries and armed forces, Randolph called for 10,000 black citizens—the number committed to going was subsequently upped to

Powell, Jr., with a group
on strike, Harlem. 1940. Photo:
Jin Smith. Photographs and
chomburg Center for Research
The New York Public Library,
Tilden Foundations

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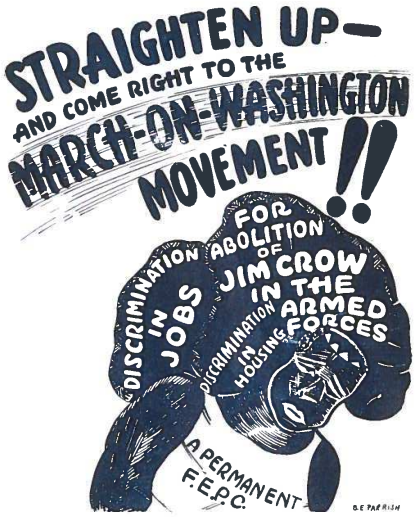


16. B. E. Parrish. Flyer for March-on-Washington Movement. 1941. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

50,000—to join a March on Washington on July 1, 1941 **(fig. 16)**. Late in the game—on June 25, less than a week before the planned march—Roosevelt issued an executive order establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee, leading to the action's cancellation. The emergence of these new tools for political organizing, predicting the tactics of the mid-century Civil Rights Movement, may well have been the ultimate legacy of the Migration itself: as the black Department of Labor official George Edmund Haynes had written in 1919, not only had the Migration served to "break down much of [the black population's] timidity," but had also generated "the united demand . . . for the removal of race discriminations in public courts, public conveyances and for provision in city and country for the same facilities of community improvement for them as for others."[79] The Migration led, such thinking suggests, to mass political consciousness.

In the cultural sphere too, a sequence of events took place in these years that signaled a new willingness to use the most visible stages for daring statements of social protest. One bold act followed another in short order. In 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to allow Anderson to sing before an integrated audience at Constitution Hall, in Washington, D.C., and the city's Board of Education declined a request to move the concert to a white public high school. The Marian Anderson Citizens Committee—composed of several dozen organizations, including Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Washington Industrial Council–CIO, the American Federation of Labor, and the National Negro Congress, as well as church leaders and others—picketed the Board of Education on February 20, organized petitions, and planned a mass protest at the next Board of Education meeting. The furor caused by these protests attracted the attention of Eleanor Roosevelt, who resigned from the DAR, writing in a public letter,

"You had an opportunity to lead in an enlightened way and it seems to me that your organization has failed."[80]

17. Marian Anderson singing at the Lincoln Memorial, April 9, 1939. Marian Anderson Collection of Photographs, 1898–1992, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

With the First Lady's support, Anderson instead took the stage in the open air, performing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial before an audience of 75,000 and millions more listening by radio at home **(fig. 17)**.[81]

That same year in New York, Alston's great friend Billie Holiday debuted "Strange Fruit" as her signature song at the close of her regular sets at Café Society. The place was a special one: it was New York's first interracial night club. Both performers and audiences were integrated, and anyone displaying prejudice was quickly shown the door. Habitués ranged from Robeson to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., and sometimes his mother, Eleanor, too. While lynching is not mentioned explicitly in the lyrics of Holiday's set piece—which first appeared in the union magazine *The New York Teacher* as a poem written by a Bronx high school teacher, Abel Meeropol—the metaphor in lines like "Southern trees bear a strange fruit/ Blood on the leaves and blood at the root" was clear. When Holiday's label, Columbia Records, refused to record the song, fearing the retribution of Southern distributors, she persisted, negotiating a one-time release to record it with her friend Milt Gabler at Commodore (a label associated with the left-wing magazine *New Masses*) in 1939 **(fig. 18)**. The disk went on to sell over a million copies and played an influential role in inaugurating the genre of civil rights protest songs. Jazz composer and critic Leonard Feather has called "Strange Fruit" "the first significant protest in words and music, the first unmuted cry against racism."[82]

In 1941, the blues singer Joshua White (today better known as Josh White) recorded *Southern Exposure: An Album of Jim Crow Blues*, a disk of six songs written by White in collaboration with the poet Waring Cuney, all attacking Jim Crow segregation and racial injustice in terms that were perhaps more forthright about the facts than anything yet recorded **(figs. 19, 20)**. The liner notes were written by Wright—the most famous black writer of the time, given the recent acclaim for his novel *Native Son* (1940). The title track, set to the tune of "Careless Love," offers a Southern sharecropper's lament that resonates with Lawrence's Migration Series:

18. Billie Holiday in a Commodore Records recording session, April 20, 1939. With bassist Johnny Williams, trumpeter Frankie Newton, and saxophonists Stan Payne and Kenneth Hollon. Photo: Charles Peterson

Lord, I work all the week in the blazin' sun, [three times]

Can't buy my shoes, Lord, when my payday comes.

I ain't treated no better than a mountain goat, [three times]

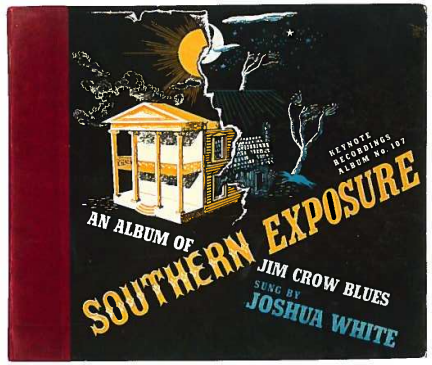
Boss takes my crop and poll tax takes my vote.

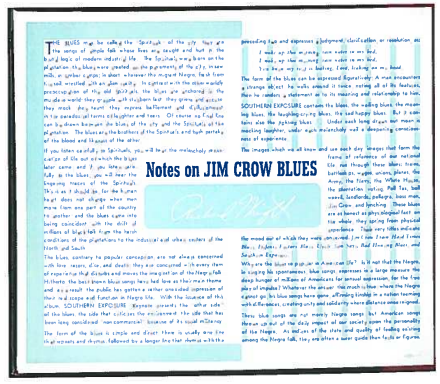
I'm leaving here 'cause I just can't stay, [three times]

I'm goin' where I can get more decent pay.

Wright introduced White's songs with the idea that "the blues, contrary to popular conception, are not always concerned with love, razors, dice and death. *Southern Exposure* contains the blues, the wailing blues, the moaning blues, the laughing-crying blues, the sad-happy blues. But it also contains the fighting blues."[83] The release party celebrating these "fighting blues," held at the Harlem hangout Ralph's Bar and Grill that September, was attended by several hundred members of the black cultural world: Lawrence's friend Bearden was there, and it is easy to imagine that Lawrence himself could have been too—he would recall listening to White in interviews.[84] The record's impact was far-reaching: President Roosevelt himself—struck by the song "Uncle Sam Says," with its refrain "Let's get together and kill Jim Crow today"—invited White to play all six of its songs at a special concert for a select group of guests. This was the first command performance at the White House by a black artist. When Halpert sat down to plan the December 8 opening of the Downtown Gallery exhibition that was to feature Lawrence's Migration Series, the First Lady was to be the honored guest and White was to perform. "Joshua Whyte [*sic*] will be grand!," Locke wrote to Halpert.[85] The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7 preempted this coming together of cultural and political power.

These events and others, including the publication of Wright's own, phenomenally successful *Native Son*, suggest the degree to which something markedly new was happening as the decade turned from the 1930s to '40s: a form of concerted testing of the power of culture to address issues of race on the national stage. To some degree this involved a linking—implicit





19 & 20. Cover of Josh White's album *Southern Exposure: An Album of Jim Crow Blues*, with interior liner notes by Richard Wright and design by E. Simms Campbell. New York: Keynote Recordings, 1941. Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries

r explicit—of art with political action: the refusal to allow nderson to sing, for example, led to marches and petitions hat prompted the involvement of Eleanor Roosevelt, and resident Roosevelt's interest in the song "Uncle Sam Says," nd his invitation to White to play at the White House, ame just months after Randolph had readied thousands to narch on Washington. Such correspondences speak to the nedia savvy shown by these artists in their use of publicity, adio, and recordings, and perhaps to a new receptivity n the part of their audiences as well. The words of Anderson, Holiday, White, and Wright reached millions—ruly mass audiences—and played a key role in moving attention to racial injustice out of the black press and into broad consciousness.

Lawrence was certainly aware of these models, and during the period when he was working on the Migration Series, he too participated in a grand display of the political power of culture. In December 1940, White and the Golden Gate Quartet appeared together in a concert at the Library of Congress to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment, which had abolished slavery in the United States. Locke, the poet Sterling Brown (former national editor of Negro affairs at the FWP), and Alan Lomax (the musicologist who ran the Library's folk-song program) offered wry and often pointed commentary from the stage. White closed the concert with his song "Trouble."

"Well, I always been in trouble," he sang to the gathered crowd, "'cause I'm a black skinned man/Said I hit a white man, locked me in the can."

Just a year after Anderson had been denied the stage at Constitution Hall, the event offered an ambitious, federally supported showcase of contemporary black cultural achievement. In addition to White's concert it included classical music, the display of historical documents related to the emancipation from slavery and other key events in black history, and an exhibition of contemporary art by black artists selected by Locke and Cahill. Among the works exhibited were five panels from Lawrence's Tubman series.[86]

Both Halpert and Locke, it seems, saw that Lawrence's work too might be positioned to address a mass audience. In a telegram of June 1941, Halpert asked Locke to phone Deborah Calkins, the assistant art editor at *Fortune*.[87] Within the month, *Fortune* had offered to publish a group of the Migration panels. Alston, who drew illustrations for *Fortune*, *The New Yorker*, and other magazines in these years, would recall that he worked with Calkins on the selection of images.[88] The appearance of panels from the Migration Series in the November issue put Lawrence's work before a vast audience. It also set it adjacent to the photo stories and graphic art that had shaped his approach to painting; his media consciousness must have made his integration into the pages of a picture magazine seem natural. *Fortune*, a notable part of Henry Luce's media empire, was an expensive magazine, selling for a dollar a copy during the Depression, and had become an important venue for the publication of both photo stories and modern graphic art by artists such as Davis, Rivera, and Fernand Léger.[89] Nevertheless, the inclusion of twenty-six full-cover images over four spreads **(pp. 38–39, figs. 9–12)**—at a time when color reproduction was still luxurious—was extraordinary, unheard of for a young black artist. Even years later, Lawrence would say, "I don't think I've had anything bigger than that."[90]

Perhaps more startling still was the text, in which America's best-known business magazine took the country's industrialists to task for race-based labor discrimination. Despite the title *Fortune*, and a distribution aimed at captains of industry, the magazine had often chosen to play the role of capitalism's conscience, supporting liberal social ideals such as New Deal remedies, unionism, civil liberties, and antifascism. The short essay that accompanied Lawrence's images was unsigned; like most pieces in the magazine's pages, it had been written collectively by *Fortune*'s editorial team, but it seems to have been shaped by Locke. The philosopher wrote with great pleasure to his friend Peter Pollack, the director of the South Side Community Center in Chicago,

> *I have seen the Lawrence Fortune lay-out. It is one of the most imposing things I have seen. The story, stressing social significance of the migrations is a masterpiece. Was done by the whole staff at several of our suggestions. The new masses [the journal* New Masses*] couldn't have done this thing better, and in this plutocratic magazine. I just can't believe it.*[91]

The *Fortune* essay put forth a strong indictment: in the South that the migrants left behind, "an average of fifty-six Negroes were being lynched every year," and America's treatment of the Negro was used by Hitler "as prime

propaganda to convince people that U.S. democracy is a mockery."[92] And this was just ramping up: the final paragraph was the clincher, setting Lawrence's images in relation to a specific set of political demands.

> *A few months ago the Negro A. Philip Randolph, head of the Pullman porters union, announced plans for "A March on Washington" to protest against discrimination facing Negroes in the army, in industry, in every phase of the defense program. Fifty thousand Negroes pledged themselves ready to march July 1st. Then on June 25 President Roosevelt issued an executive order to end discrimination and to implement it the [Office of Production Management] established its Committee on Fair Employment Practice with two Negro members. Randolph's 50,000 marchers primarily wanted jobs, of course, but they also wanted more—the chance to belong. The reasons for their hunger in both respects are elaborated in the captions accompanying the pictures.*[93]

In this context Lawrence's panels were linked not only to political goals but also to a larger willingness to mobilize collectively—an elaboration of rationale, but also of future threat.

While Lawrence cannot have anticipated the presentation of the Migration Series in the pages of *Fortune*, this definition of a new activist consciousness served as an extension of his own thinking. The series was conceived as an ingenious form of political speech—a call for action. Explaining his motivations as an artist in 1940, Lawrence said,

"We don't have a physical slavery, but an economic slavery. If these people, who were so much worse off than people today, could conquer their slavery, we certainly can do the same thing. . . . I'm an artist, just trying to do my part to bring this thing about."[94]

Notes

Many specific intellectual debts are acknowledged in the footnotes, but I would like to express my particular gratitude to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Patricia Hills, Elizabeth Hutton Turner, and Ellen Harkins Wheat for the foundation they have provided—it has shaped this essay in many ways—and for their insistence on the historical significance and continuing relevance of Lawrence's Migration Series. Isabel Wilkerson's magisterial history *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010) prompted me to turn my attention to Lawrence's work—her book balances a sense of the macro-phenomenon with the intimacy of individual experience as Lawrence's series does. Jodi Roberts, Jennifer Harris, Rebecca Lowery, and Christine McKay all made important contributions to the research for this essay.

1. Richard Wright, liner notes for Joshua White, *Southern Exposure: An Album of Jim Crow Blues* (New York: Keynote Recordings), album no. 107, shellac recording, 1941.
2. Edith Halpert, telegram to Alain Locke, n.d. Folder 37, box 164-33, Alain Leroy Locke Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. See also Patricia Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern: The Art of Jacob Lawrence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 48, and Diane Tepfer, "Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery Downtown, 1926–1940: A Study in American Art Patronage," PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1989, pp. 131, 139.
3. Jacob Lawrence, interview with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., June 1992, quoted in Elsa Smithgall, Gates, and Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *Jacob Lawrence and the Migration Series from The Phillips Collection* (Washington, D.C.: The Phillips Collection, 2007), p. 3. A similar statement appears in a taped interview with Turner, Seattle, Washington, October 3, 1992. Transcript in The Phillips Collection Archives, Washington, D.C.
4. See Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Or Does it Explode: Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 66.
5. Some scholars have drawn attention to problems inherent in the term "Harlem Renaissance," a period generally seen to have come to a close either with the Crash of 1929 or the Harlem Riots of 1935. They stress instead a greater geographic terrain, the significance of interracial conversations, and a broader periodization. See for example George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 1–28.
6. See Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art* (Hamilton, N.Y.: Gallery Association of New York State, 1977), p. 8.
7. Ibid., p. 5.
8. Lawrence, letter to Locke, n.d. Folder 26, box 164-44, Alain Leroy Locke Papers.
9. Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists from 1872 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), p. 174. Bearden and Henderson's book is based on both extensive interviews and Bearden's own memory and experience; it is full of contextual details often absent from other scholarly accounts.
10. Charles Henry Alston, in an oral-history interview with Harlan Phillips, September 28, 1965. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
11. Ibid.
12. See **frontis.** An article and accompanying photograph by Morgan and Marvin Smith also ran in the *New Amsterdam News* showing Harlem Guild artists Vertis Hayes, Ronald Joseph, and Gwendolyn Knight picketing Federal Art Project headquarters on December 19, 1936: "WPA Rehires 96 Strikers; New Plan On: Relief Workers Must Show Need to Stay on Roll." *New Amsterdam News*, December 19, 1936, p. 24. See Hills, *The Art of Jacob Lawrence*, p. 34.
13. Alston, in an interview with Camille Billops and Ivie Jackman, January 27, 1975, in *Arts and Influence 1996*, vol. 15, ed. Hatch, Hamalian, and Judy Blum (New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, 1996), p. 32.
14. See Terry Gips, entry on Augusta Savage in "Narratives of African-American Art and Identity, The Driskell Center, University of Maryland: http://www.driskellcenter.umd.edu/narratives/exhibition/sec3/sava_a_02.htm. For the number of art centers see Francis V. O'Connor, "Introduction," in O'Connor, ed., *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society Ltd, 1973), p. 20.
15. A list of members of the committee is provided in a group interview with Walter Christmas et al., "Harlem Artists' Guild and Harlem Community Art Center," *Artist and Influence 1987*, vol. 5, ed. Leo Hamalian and James V. Hatch (New York: Hatch-Billops

ction, 1987), p. 47. Randolph's speech is reported in "Harlem's Art Center," gest, January 1, 1938, p. 15.
e Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern*, p. 34.
e "Harlem Hospital Rejects Murals by Negro WPA Artists," *Daily Worker*, uary 24, 1936, later quoted in *Art Front* 2 (April 1936):3, and in Hills, *Painting m Modern*, p. 34.
id.
e story is told in several places, including Lawrence, in an oral-history interview Carroll Greene, October 26, 1968, Archives of American Art.
awrence, in the interview with Turner, p. 22. The passage is partially published in hgall, Gates, and Turner, *Jacob Lawrence and the Migration Series* , p. 32.
ills, *Painting Harlem Modern*, p. 38, citing the Jacob Lawrence file, box 16, Francis nnor Papers, Archives of American Art.
awrence, quoted in Bearden and Henderson, *A History of African-American ts*, p. 297.
awrence was not a student in Savage's workshop, but as the story of her marching down to enroll in the WPA suggests, she was a strong presence in his life. His inter- s mention the importance of her studio as a gathering place in this period, and it through her that he met Knight, a young artist working there whom he would later ry. Lawrence studied under Alston first at the Utopia Children's House, then at the em Art Workshop in 1932–34. Funding for the Harlem Art Workshop ended after uary 1, 1936, but the library continued efforts to support the program and Lawrence ns to have continued his involvement: his work was included in a group show of k by Harlem Art Workshop artists sent by the 135th Street library to the Pearl Street ghborhood House in Waterbury, Connecticut, in 1936. Program description for lem Art Workshop and exhibition checklist, February 13, 1936, folder 6, box 7, 135th Branch Records, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, hives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library. Alston and Lawrence would in close association for some time, with Lawrence renting a corner of Alston's and ry Bannarn's studio at 306 West 141st Street and unofficially assisting Alston on his A mural commission at the Harlem Hospital in 1936. The 135th Street YMCA was a orite haunt of Lawrence's, a place to play pool, attend Charles Seifert's lectures on can history, and, in 1938, stage his first solo show. For more on these institutions, ir activities, and the government and private funds that supported them see Hills, *nting Harlem Modern*, pp. 17–23.
Savage's recollection is noted in "Mrs. Roosevelt Feature Guest at Art Center, New k," *New Amsterdam News*, December 25, 1937.
See Deborah Cullen, "Robert Blackburn: American Printmaker," PhD diss., City iversity of New York, 2002, p. 67.
Federal Writers' Project, *New York City Guide: A Comprehensive Guide to the Five roughs of the Metropolis—Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Richmond*, 39, reprinted as *The WPA Guide to New York City: The Federal Writers' Project guide 1930s New York*, with an introduction by William H. Whyte (New York: New Press, 92), p. 263.
Lawrence, in an interview with Jeff Donaldson, January 8, 1972, in Donaldson, "Gen- ation '306,'" PhD diss, Northwestern University, 1974, quoted in Hills, *Painting Harlem dern*, p. 87. Alston recalled of conversations in his studio, "We'd meet and have just ll sessions, knockdown, drag out. Some of them were pretty rough. But it was sort a forum. . . . I don't think any of us realized the value of these things but there was a mendous exchange of ideas." Alston, in the interview with Phillips.
. Lawrence, quoted in Mort Cooper, "Portrait of a Negro Painter," *Chicago Defender*, ay 18, 1963, p. 9.
. See Bearden and Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists*, p. 297.
. Lawrence discusses Jay Leyda's introducing him to José Clemente Orozco in the terview with Turner, p. 14. Leyda, letter to Wright, April 18, 1941. Folder 21, box 5, Jay yda Papers, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York Uni- rsity. In *A History of African-American Artists*, p. 301, Bearden and Henderson note at it was Leyda who first showed Barr the Migration Series.
. Lawrence recalled, "When I went on the Project I had the good fortune to meet any more people, not just the Negro people but other artists as well." Lawrence, in e oral-history interview with Greene. Alston similarly said, "Artists like Gorky and uart Davis. . . . I'd stand in line for my check with them. . . . That's the way it was for erybody." Alston, in the interview with Phillips.
2. Lawrence, in conversation with Ellen Harkins Wheat, February 3, 1984, quoted in Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 1986), p. 42.
33. See Lawrence, in the interview with Turner, quoted in Smithgall, Gates, and Turner, *Jacob Lawrence and the Migration Series*, p. 30; Lawrence, in an oral-history interview with James Buell and David Driskell, February 4, 1982, Amistad Research Center, Museum Services Files, Tulane University, p. 1; and Lawrence, in the oral-history interview with Greene.
34. See Bearden and Henderson, *Six Black Masters* (New York: Zenith Books, 1972), p. 104.
35. Ibid.
36. Lawrence, quoted in Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter*, p. 35.
37. "There was quite a bit of interest in black history at that time—street corner orators talking about social issues and things of that kind. . . . We had Negro history clubs in the schools and the libraries." Lawrence, in the interview with Buell and Driskell. In an unpublished manuscript written in conjunction with an exhibition of his John Brown series at the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1971, Lawrence recalled, "It was in a Negro history club and our nearly all black schools that I first heard the stories of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey and John Brown and many others." Quoted in Ellen Sharp, "The Legend of John Brown and the Series by Jacob Lawrence," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 67, no. 4 (1993):21.
38. See *Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 2 (April 1919):237.
39. See Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 69, and J. Todd Moye, *Ella Baker: Community Organizer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), pp. 36–37.
40. "The Negro History Club was organized at the 'Y' branch October 23 [1928], with fourteen members." *New Amsterdam News*, October 31, 1928, p. 9. "Miss Ella Baker, who gives a course in Negro Life and History at the Y.M.C.A. was guest of honor Monday evening at the regular meeting of the Chi Tau Upsilon Girls' Club," "Club Chats," *New Amsterdam News*, March 13, 1929, p. 4.
41. Ella Baker, quoted in Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, p. 95.
42. See Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, p. 69.
43. Baker, quoted in ibid., p. 94.
44. William E. Harmon Foundation, "Jacob Lawrence Biographic Sketch," November 12, 1940, p. 2. Reel 5577, frame 390, Downtown Gallery Records 1824-1974, bulk 1926-1969, Archives of American Art.
45. Requesting a renewal of his Rosenwald grant in March 1941, Lawrence writes, "The explanatory notes, to be selected from my research notes, will, I feel, take me about a month to get in shape." Jacob Lawrence file, folder 1, box 429, Rosenwald Collection, Franklin Library Special Collections, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. A press release put out by the Harmon Foundation on February 25, 1941, recounts, "Most of [Lawrence's] research has been done at the Schomburg Library in New York where he reads books and takes notes. He often goes through his notes two or three times to eliminate unimportant points. From these notes he blocks out the whole series he is working on in pencil. . . . This is later elaborated in paint." Jacob Lawrence file, folder 1, box 429, Rosenwald Collection. Hills speaks of Lawrence's use of phrases taken verbatim from John R. Beard's biography of Toussaint L'Ouverture; see Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern*, p. 61.
46. Helen Grayson, for example, offered that Lawrence's "extensive research in his subject matter is quite remarkable considering his lack of training." Charles Rogers spoke of "scholarship so sound," and Locke praised Lawrence's "careful library reading and research." See Grayson, "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," January 26, 1940; Rogers, "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," n.d.; and Locke, "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," January 23, 1940. Jacob Lawrence file, folder 1, box 429, Rosenwald Collection.
47. See Daniel Schulman, ed., *A Force for Change: African American Art and the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009). An exh. cat. for the Spertus Museum, Chicago.
48. The mural was made for and remains at the black liberal-arts college Talladega College, in Alabama.
49. See Andrea D. Barnwell, *Charles White* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2002), p. 3. Originally made for the George Cleveland Hall Library on Michigan Boulevard in Chicago, the mural is now installed in the Law Library at Howard University.
50. *Chicago Defender*, February 5, 1916, quoted in James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners and the Great Migration* (Chicago: at the University Press, 1989), p. 168.
51. Grossman, *Land of Hope*, p. 168.
52. James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 15.
53. Locke (signed A.L.), "Harlem," *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*, *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (special issue; March 1925): 629, 630. This essay was published in revised form in *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: A. and C. Boni, 1925), p. 7.
54. Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 1940 (reprint ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 264.
55. Lawrence, in the interview with Gates, quoted in Smithgall, Gates, and Turner, *Jacob Lawrence and the Migration Series from The Phillips Collection*, p. 3.
56. Ibid. p. 19.
57. See Grossman, *Land of Hope*, and Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York: Viking, 2010).
58. "Hold Big Migration Meeting in New York," *New York Age*, July 5, 1917, quoted in Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents*, (Boston: Bedford, and New York: St. Martin's, 2003), p. 11.
59. Lawrence's focus on such acts of agency was noted in the discussions of our exhibition's advisory committee, and especially by James Grossman and Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts. (The advisory committee was a group of artists, writers, historians, and others who met at the Museum three times in conjunction with our preparations for the show.) Grossman's history of the Great Migration, *Land of Hope*, emphasizes the choice to leave home as a self-conscious and politically significant act.
60. Lawrence, "Plan of Work," January 3, 1940. Folder 1, box 429, Rosenwald Collection.
61. Among the books that Lawrence read, as Hill demonstrates, were Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1918) and Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration during the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920). Six of Lawrence's section headers, as Hills points out, are quotations from Scott's *Negro Migration during the War*. See Hills, "Jacob Lawrence Migration Series: Weaving of Pictures and Texts," in Turner, ed., *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series* (Washington, D.C: The Rappahannock Press in association with The Phillips Collection, 1993), pp. 144, 148. In the oral-history interview with Greene, Lawrence describes his research at the Schomburg: "And this is where I think I read many of the books, like books of Du Bois, books of—well, he was one of my favorites—and many books like this. And this is how this story developed." In 1941, Mary Beattie Brady, Director of the Harmon Foundation; Edwin R. Embree, Director of The Rosenwald Fund; and the sociologist Charles S. Johnson attempted to broker a collaboration between Lawrence and Johnson; their correspondence from October of that year, as well as the fact that Johnson was included in the famous *New Negro* anthology (1925), compiled by Lawrence's champion Locke, suggests that the artist was probably familiar with Johnson's work as well. Jacob Lawrence file, folder 1, box 429, Rosenwald Collection. See also Locke, ed. *The New Negro*, pp. 278–98.
62. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Migration of Negroes," *Crisis* 14, no. 2 (June 1917):63–66.
63. See Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern*, p. 141.
64. Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: at the University Press, 1922).
65. Wright, "Introduction," in *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: at the University Press, 1993), pp. xvii–xxxiv.
66. See Elizabeth Steele, "The Materials and Techniques of Jacob Lawrence," in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle DuBois, and Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000), p. 248.
67. Ibid., p. 250.
68. See Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, p. xii.
69. See Edwin and Louise Rosskam, in an oral-history interview with Richard Doud, August 3, 1965. Archives of American Art.
70. Ibid.
71. See Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 7.
72. See Schulman, "African-American Art and the Julius Rosenwald Fund," in Schulman, ed., *A Force for Change*, p. 60.
73. Ibid. See also Bearden and Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists*, p. 264.
74. Edwin Rosskam, in the interview with Doud. Rosskam is speaking of the photographer Russell Lee, who had been working for the FSA: "he couldn't do migration without showing, finally, where migration went to. Migration went to the city."
75. Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States*, photo direction by Edwin Rosskam (New York: Viking Press, 1941), p. 10.
76. See Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern*, p. 131. See also Lonnie G. Bunch III and Spencer R. Crew, "A Historian's Eye: Jacob Lawrence, Historical Reality, and the Migration Series," in Turner, ed., *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series*, p. 27.
77. Lawrence, in the interview with Turner, p. 22, says, "I thought of [the series form] because it was the only way I could tell a complete story, you deal with Toussaint L'Ouverture, or Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, their lives are so big, so all encompassing that I couldn't see a way to do this in one or two paintings so I thought of the series form and I guess that's why Jay Leyda took to my work because he thought of doing it in terms of a film where you do, you carry it on like a person would develop a film and I thought of doing it that way for that reason, I wasn't going to be given a wall." Passage published in partial form in Smithgall, Gates, and Turner, *Jacob Lawrence and the Migration Series*, p. 32.
78. Randolph, "Why Should We March?," *Survey Graphic* 31 (November 1942):488.
79. George Edmund Haynes, "Effect of War Conditions on Negro Labor," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 8, no. 2 (February 1919), quoted in Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration*, p. 23.
80. Eleanor Roosevelt, letter to Mrs. Henry M. Robert, Jr., president general of the Daughters of the American Revolution, February 26, 1939. Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
81. See Edward T. Folliard, "Ickes Introduces Contralto at Lincoln Memorial; Many Officials Attend Concert," *The Washington Post*, April 10, 1939.
82. Leonard Feather, liner notes for *Billie Holiday: Strange Fruit*, Atlantic Records SD 1614, 1972. As early as 1939, *New York Post* writer Samuel Grafton wrote of the song, "If the anger of the exploited ever mounts high enough in the South, it now has its Marseillaise." Quoted in Dorian Lynskey, "Strange Fruit: the first great protest song," *The Guardian*, February 15, 2011. See also Edwin Moore, "Strange Fruit Is Still a Song for Today," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2010, and David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography of a Song* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).
83. Wright, liner notes for White, *Southern Exposure*.
84. On Bearden see Ellen Harold and Peter Stone, "Josh White," available online at www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/ce_alanlomax_profile_josh_white.php (consulted October 19, 2014), and Elijah Ward, *Josh White: Society Blues* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 14, The Phillips Collection Archives, Washington, D.C. The transcript gives the name as "Josh Lee (ph.)," which seems to be a mistake given the context.
85. Locke, letter to Edith Halpert, n.d. Folder 37, box 164-33, Alain Leroy Locke Papers.
86. Library of Congress, *75 Years of Freedom: Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Proclamation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Govt., 1943). This show offered an important precedent for Halpert's show a year later at the Downtown Gallery, including her choice of Locke as an advisor.
87. Halpert, telegram to Locke, n.d. Folder 37, box 164-33, Alain Leroy Locke Papers.
88. See Bearden and Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists*, p. 264.
89. In the meetings of our exhibition advisory committee, Henry Finder, the editorial director of *The New Yorker*, discussed the important role *Fortune* played as a patron of and platform for a socially conscious modern graphic art.
90. Lawrence, in the oral-history interview with Greene.
91. Locke, letter to Peter Pollack, n.d. ("Tues"). Folder 4, box 164-78, Alain Leroy Locke Papers. See also Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern*, p. 129.
92. "' . . . And the Migrants Kept Coming': A Negro Artist Paints the Story of the Great American Minority," *Fortune* 24 (November 1941):102, 108.
93. Ibid., p. 109.
94. William E. Harmon Foundation, "Jacob Lawrence Biographic Sketch."