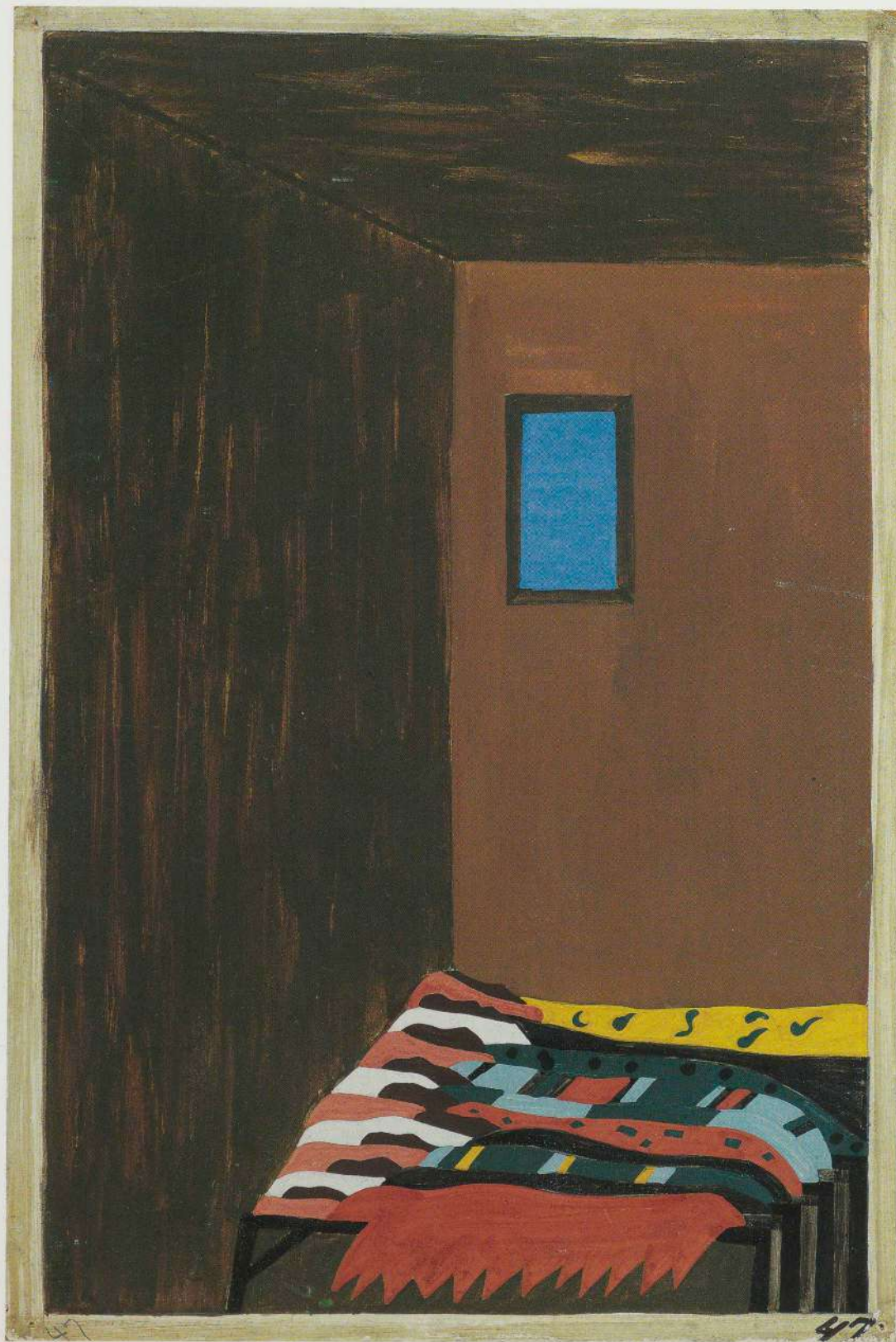




46



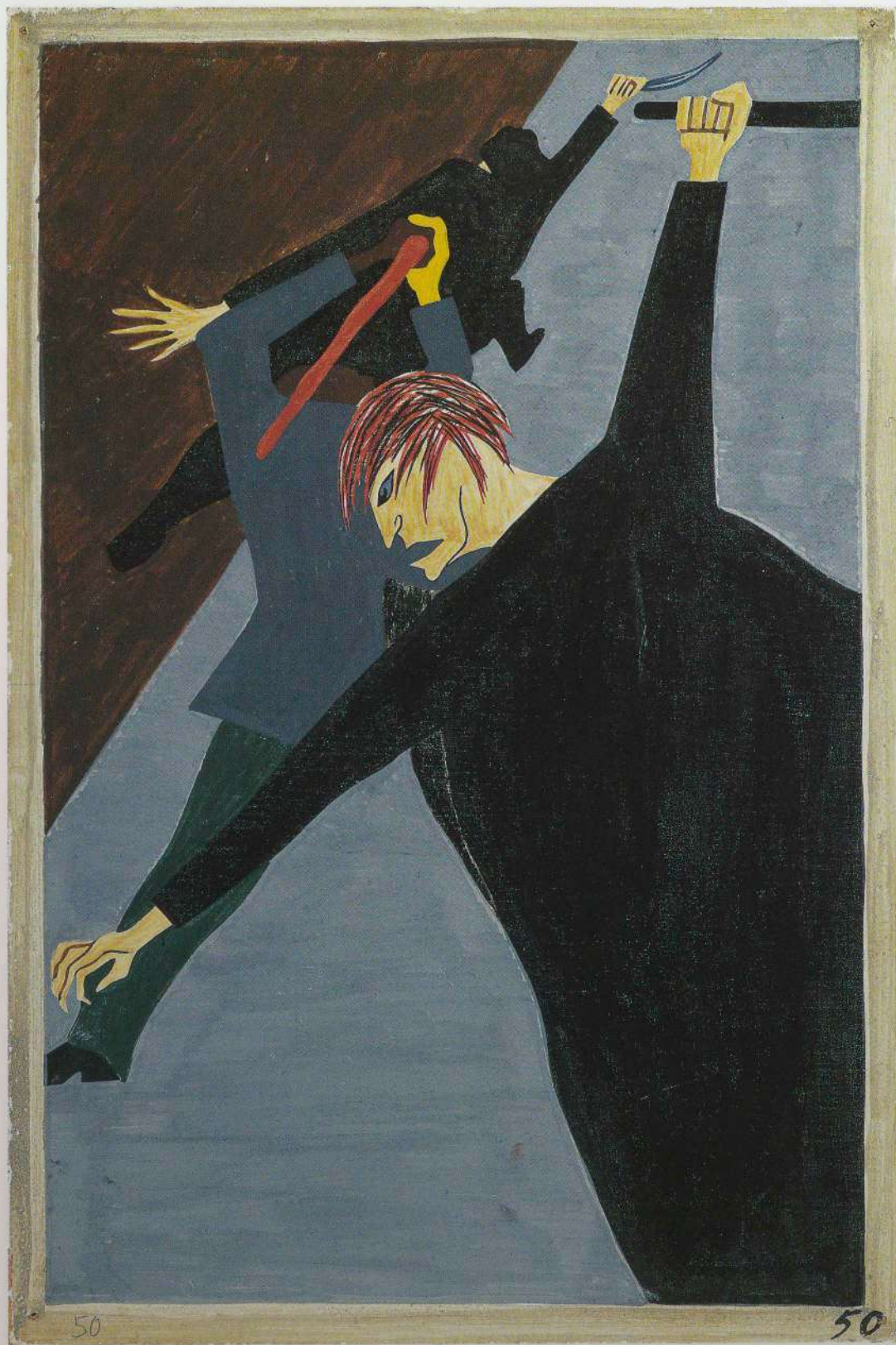
47. As well as finding better housing conditions in the North, the migrants found very poor housing conditions in the North. They were forced into overcrowded and dilapidated tenement houses.



48. Housing for the Negroes was a very difficult problem.

49. They also found discrimination in the North although it was much different from that which they had known in the South.





50. Race riots were very numerous all over the North because of the antagonism that was caused between the Negro and white workers. Many of these riots occurred because the Negro was used as a strike breaker in many of the Northern industries.



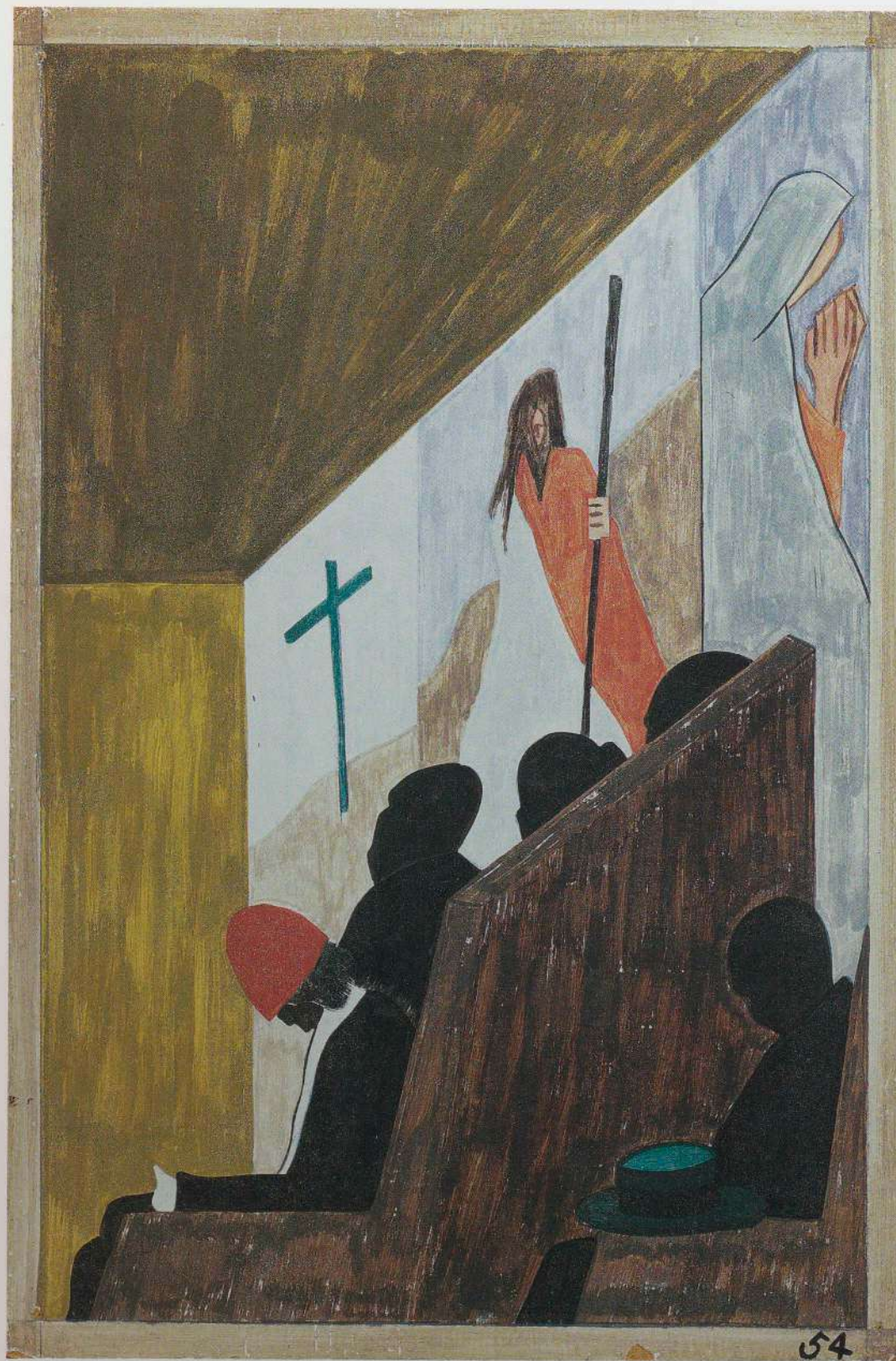
51. In many cities in the North where the Negroes had been overcrowded in their own living quarters they attempted to spread out. This resulted in many of the race riots and the bombing of Negro homes.

52. One of the largest race riots occurred in East St. Louis.



53. The Negroes who had been North for quite some time met their fellowmen with disgust and aloofness.





54. One of the main forms of social and recreational activities in which the migrants indulged occurred in the church.



55. The Negro being suddenly moved out of doors and cramped into urban life, contracted a great deal of tuberculosis. Because of this the death rate was very high.



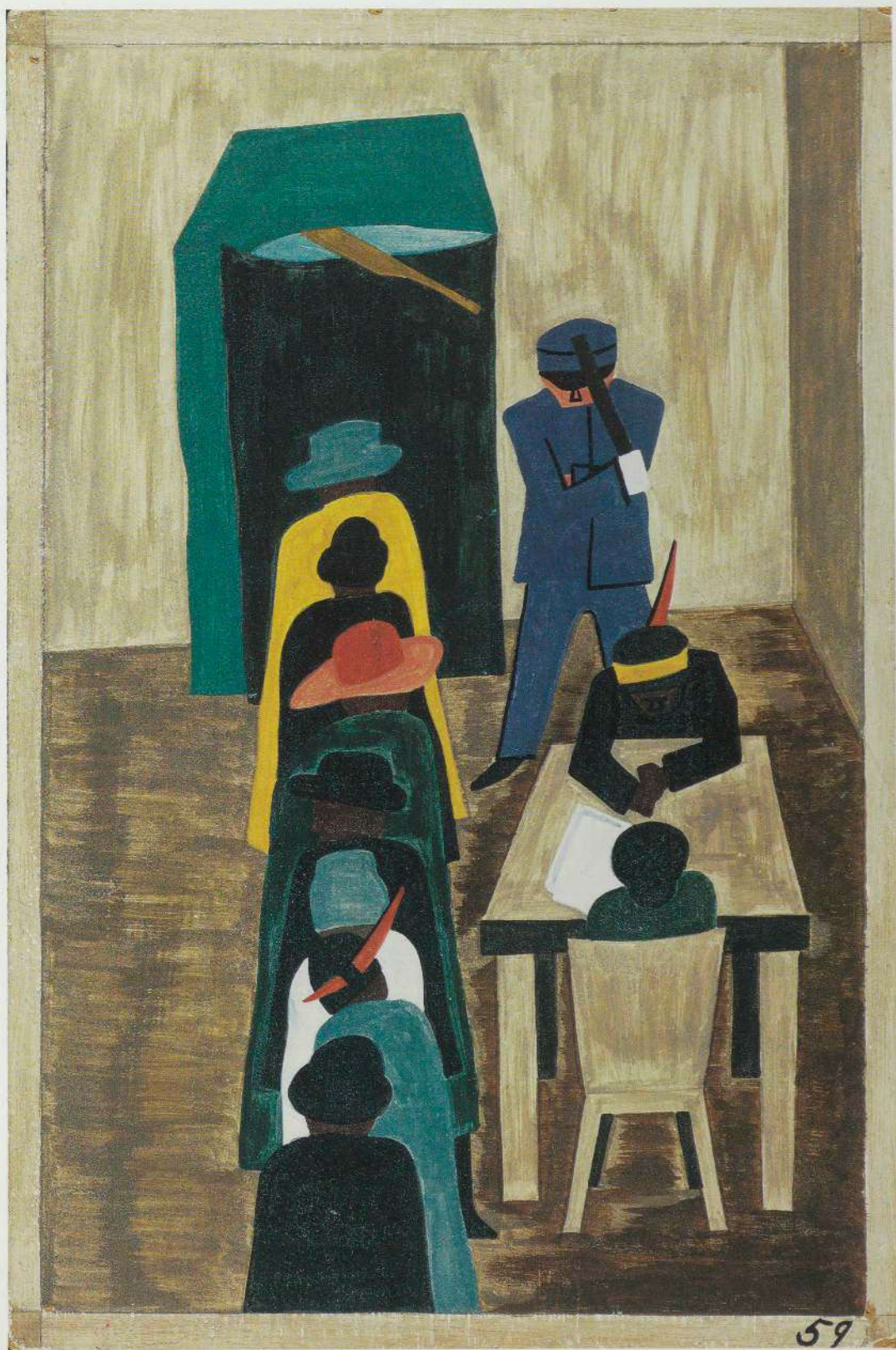
56. Among one of the last groups to leave the South was the Negro professional who was forced to follow his clientele to make a living.



57. The female worker was also one of the last groups to leave the South.



58. In the North the Negro had better educational facilities.



59. In the North the Negro had freedom to vote.

60. And the migrants kept coming.





Edith Halpert in her living room, ca. 1940s (Downtown Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

Edith Gregor Halpert: Impresario of Jacob Lawrence's *Migration* Series

DIANE TEPFER

When Alain Locke, Howard University professor of philosophy and theoretician of the Harlem Renaissance, showed Jacob Lawrence's *Migration* series to Edith Gregor Halpert, founder of New York's pioneering commercial Downtown Gallery, Halpert was so dazzled that she arranged for *Fortune* magazine to publish part of the series as a portfolio, made plans to show the entire series at her gallery, and prepared to enlist special patrons to carry out her mission of properly "placing" the series. As impressive as this reception and later "placement" in The Phillips Memorial Gallery and The Museum of Modern Art was some fifty years ago, the activity was entirely in character for Edith Halpert, an extraordinary dealer of American art.

Lawrence and his aesthetics appealed intensely to Halpert because, like Lawrence, she was an American original, and as a woman, a Jew, and an immigrant, she too had contended with outsider status. Halpert's formative years reveal similarities with Lawrence's. Both came to Harlem as children with their mothers and a sibling, both were precocious and hardworking, and both became extremely successful. In 1906 Edith Gregor Fivosioovitch (1900–70) came to America from Odessa, Russia, and settled in Harlem, then a center of middle-class immigrant Jewish life. Her widowed mother opened a candy store, where Edith first learned merchandising. An aspiring artist, Edith enrolled at the age of fourteen in the National Academy of Design; by seventeen she was supporting herself by working in advertising at department stores. In 1918 she married the early American modernist artist Samuel Halpert. In 1926 she combined her department store marketing skills with the entrée into the art world she had acquired from Sam and his friends: instead of making art herself, she opened an art gallery.¹

Halpert was in pursuit of a new definition of American art and a new constituency. Her Downtown Gallery was located in Greenwich Village, where many artists worked, away from the intimidating atmosphere of traditional uptown galleries. Its nontraditional mission was to make American art available to all at low prices. Before the Downtown Gallery opened, most dealers specialized in European art or, at the very least, in artists who had worked in Europe. In 1926 there was no Whitney Museum of American Art, no Museum of Modern Art, and the Phillips Memorial Gallery had just begun to show modern art and its sources. By the end of her first season, Halpert had learned two things: a market for contemporary American art existed all over the United States, and the best way to make that art accessible was to place it in the museums that were opening or expanding everywhere.

From the outset Halpert astutely made connections with a variety of influential people and devised ways to involve them in her efforts. Her most significant and successful strategy was to use nineteenth-century folk art, such as Edward Hicks's *Peaceable Kingdom*, and indigenous forms, including weather vanes, to help finance the work of living artists and to serve as what Halpert termed "American ancestors." With Holger Cahill, later director of the Federal Art Project, she formulated a program to collect, publicize, and market folk art in the Downtown Gallery's American Folk Art Gallery. The gallery's most consequential client was Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.), who would found The Museum of Modern Art with two women friends within a year and a half after meeting Halpert. From Rockefeller's substantial collection, purchased from Halpert, Cahill organized exhibitions of "Primitives" (1930) and "American Folk Art" (1931) at the Newark Museum and "Art of the Common Man" (1932) at The Museum of Modern Art.

Rockefeller also gave commissions to Downtown Gallery artists, including Charles Sheeler, Marguerite Zorach, and Ben Shahn, and financial help, often anonymously with Halpert's intercession, to Hale Woodruff, Arshile Gorky, and others. One of the most ambitious of Halpert's many strategies to promote the welfare of living artists was the vast First New York Municipal Art Exhibition in 1934, for which she negotiated space in Rockefeller Center from Nelson Rockefeller in exchange for the endorsement of Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, which Halpert duly secured.

Holger Cahill brought Halpert to Washington during the summer of 1936 to package traveling exhibitions assembled from the various state art projects. The Exhibition and Allotment Program Halpert directed was located in Studio House, the school of the Phillips Memorial Gallery; Duncan Phillips, a regular visitor to the Downtown Gallery and sometimes a client, was a great supporter of the Federal Art Project. From among thousands of works by young artists, Halpert helped plan the landmark exhibition "New Horizons in American Art," shown at The Museum of Modern Art. For the Downtown Gallery she selected a crop of promising artists from outside New York. The work ranged from the social commentary of Jack Levine's figure paintings to the eerie unpopulated precisionist landscapes of Edmund Lewandowski.

In the midst of the depression, the Downtown Gallery mounted several financially successful shows. Halpert's taste and inclinations stretched from the social statements of Ben Shahn's *Sacco and Vanzetti* series to the rediscovery of the stunning late-nineteenth-century trompe l'oeil still-life painter William Harnett. At the beginning of the 1940–41 season Halpert moved the gallery uptown to a handsome townhouse at 43 East 51st Street, which she converted into a stylish and up-to-date setting for art. The gallery retained its progressive values, but the move signified Halpert's desire for Establishment acclaim for the Downtown Gallery and the art and artists she showed there.

In 1941 Halpert read *The Negro in Art*, the recently published volume by Alain Le Roy Locke, which was illustrated with a large selection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art.² She became especially ardent about the nineteenth-century artists she encountered for the first time, perceiving them as "background material" for the contemporary Negro artists she already knew through her

"W.P.A. contacts." Halpert enthusiastically wrote Locke in June 1941 that she wanted to "introduce Negro art in a large inclusive exhibition" with his consultation.³ Her approach would be similar to her successful promotion of nineteenth-century white artists as the "American ancestors" of the contemporary artists she handled. The exhibition would involve an educational component to "demonstrate to the public the valuable contribution made by American Negro artists,"⁴ displaying one painting by each of five little-known artists—Edward M. Bannister (1828–1901), Robert S. Duncanson (1821–71), Edwin A. Harleston (1882–1931), William H. Simpson (1818–72), and Henry O. Tanner (1859–1937)—together with works by contemporary "Negro" artists.

Halpert's collaboration with Locke had begun more than ten years earlier. Between 1929 and 1931 the Downtown Gallery joined other cultural mavericks and philanthropists in supporting an artistic residency in France for Hale Woodruff, whom Locke had introduced to Halpert in 1927.⁵ As the visionary of the "New Negro Movement," Locke declared the power of art based on the rediscovery of cultural roots in Africa rather than on images of the "happy slave" or on styles merely assimilated from Western culture.

Locke responded eagerly to Halpert's proposal, and he worked with her for six months on this monumental project.⁶ Their collaboration would have a notable consequence: the art of Jacob Lawrence would eagerly be taken into the canon of significant contemporary Americana.

Shortly after Locke's response he brought her photographs of the work of Jacob Lawrence. It is surprising that Halpert was not yet aware of Lawrence's work, for the twenty-three-year-old artist had already received professional recognition. He had participated in three one-artist exhibitions and more than ten group exhibitions, and his work, although firmly based on his experience of his own heritage and community, had already reached a specialized cross-over audience. He had been a scholarship student at the progressive American Artists School between 1936 and 1938. His forty-one-panel *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series (1937–38) had been given an entire room in the Baltimore Museum of Art's 1939 exhibition "Contemporary Negro Art" and was next shown in New York in a solo exhibition at the De Porres Interracial Center. The following year, Lawrence was awarded second prize in the art exhibition accompanying the Chicago

American Negro Exposition. In New York, he had a one-artist exhibition at Columbia University's East Hall, where the *Toussaint* series was again shown.⁷

Closer to Halpert's milieu, admirers of Lawrence were to be found at The Museum of Modern Art. Jay Leyda, assistant curator of the Film Department, liked the narrative format of Lawrence's historical series and encouraged him in his work. He introduced Lawrence to passionate expressionist film, such as von Stroheim's *Blue Angel*, and to other art professionals, including Lincoln Kirstein, director of Ballet Caravan; Holger Cahill; José Clemente Orozco, the Mexican muralist; Dorothy Miller, assistant curator of painting and sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art; and possibly Alfred Barr, founding director of the museum. Leyda also supported Lawrence's successful application for his first Rosenwald fellowship in 1940 and solicited recommendations for it from his colleagues.⁸

Jacob Lawrence's fellowship, which was renewed in 1941 and 1942, supported his research at the Schomburg Collection and the painting of the *Migration* series. The fund created by Julius Rosenwald, an extraordinary and innovative philanthropist, gave more than four hundred fellowships to African Americans between 1928 and 1948; the largest group of fellows were in the fine arts. Whether consciously or unconsciously, in her support of African American artists Halpert sought to join this larger network created by Rosenwald and other prominent members of the Jewish community.⁹

Recognizing the timeliness of Lawrence's series, Halpert quickly brought it to the attention of Deborah Calkins, *Fortune* magazine's visionary and efficient assistant art director. Halpert knew that *Fortune* had the interest and resources to package and present the series to a prestigious and influential audience. The previous December the magazine had published *Power*, an impressive portfolio of six portraits of energy-generating machines commissioned from Charles Sheeler, a senior Downtown Gallery artist.¹⁰ Halpert, Locke, and Calkins probably viewed the *Migration* panels together at the Harlem Community Art Center on June 25, 1941. Soon thereafter, Calkins and the editors of *Fortune* advised Lawrence that they would publish the series "in the fall or winter—unless the war situation makes publication obsolete."¹¹ Halpert adamantly negotiated with the magazine to ensure that Lawrence received a \$150 option

and eventually a total of \$500; *Fortune* also contributed \$100 to the Negro Art Fund, which Halpert planned to create at the Downtown Gallery.

Calkins reported to Locke in late August 1941 that Lawrence's work was scheduled for the November issue and requested reading material for the magazine's customary "well-documented background." Locke lent her a copy of his book, *The Negro in America*, directing her to the section on "the present-day problem," which he felt concisely presented his view "on the significance of migration, and its possibilities as a new front of race contacts with American life."¹² These ideas are echoed in the text written collectively by staff to accompany the twenty-six panels reproduced in the November 1941 issue. The elegant, full-color portfolio was entitled "'... And the Migrants Kept Coming': A Negro artist paints the story of the great American minority."

Lawrence and Halpert did not actually meet until he returned from his first stay in the South. But from August 1941 to May 1942, while he lived in New Orleans and in Lenexa, Virginia, with his new wife, the painter Gwendolyn Clarine Knight, he and Halpert corresponded regularly. Their surviving letters and those between Lawrence and Locke have given scholars a rich written record that probably would not be available had Lawrence remained in New York. From their first dealings Halpert solicited and respected Lawrence's decisions about the price and disposition of his work. She did not follow her usual practice and lower Lawrence's prices to induce sales. When she asked how he felt about selling the panels of the *Migration* series singly or together, he replied:

I have finally decided not to break up the series. I have reached this conclusion because the complete story was conceived within the sixty paintings, therefore to sell any one painting would make it an incomplete story. I also know the difficulty of selling the entire set as a whole. I have fixed a price of \$2,000 for the complete set.¹³

However, when Lawrence saw the *Fortune* piece, he realized that a careful selection could make a meaningful ensemble. He wrote Halpert, "I was very pleased with the job they did on the whole lay out. I thought that the story of the migration was complete and that the accompanying article and notes were very good."¹⁴

Halpert's elaborate preparations for the December 1941



"In spite of everything, living conditions were better in the North. The Negro professional followed his clientele to from the South."



"Gradually female workers also began to come to the North."



"In the North the migrants found out of their main sources of recreation and of social activity."

THOUGH numerically poorer, the northern Negro is not so wide-eyed and helpless as his southern counterpart. Consequently, he is much more of a man than his southern brother. But while he is bound up in a struggle with white the white world complains of prejudice him from coming to living, he is in no sense a detached man living in a ghetto. He knows also, and so the white, better country in the world. He has used the American Negro as prime propaganda to convince people that U.S. democracy is a mockery. But even in the migration and discrimination he endures the Negro is finding strength. If he cannot achieve dignity in the eyes of the whites, he can create a vast circle from sympathy, compassion—and he does. If he cannot make any individual headway in a white world, he can make subjective headway if he learns to make the weight of his numbers felt in the economy. He has the billion-dollar of backbone and in recent years he has swung more than a few times and perhaps a few times. He needs to really rise to fully around a better or credit understand-a Negro Huey Longward if he gets kicked around much longer he will probably feel one.



"In the North the Negro had freedom to vote . . . In the North the Negro had better educational facilities."



" . . . and the migrants kept coming."



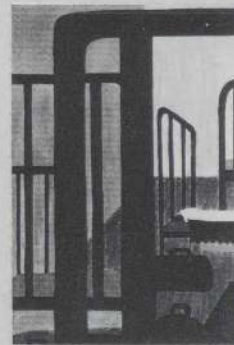
"Sometimes to force migrants from leaving they were held in the railroad station and made to wait the train."



"The Negroes, who had been part of the soil for many years, arrived in great numbers in the urban centers of the North."



"Cramped into urban life, they contracted a great deal of tuberculosis. The death rate was very high."



"The vast numbers of migrants made housing difficult. They were overcrowded in dilapidated tenement houses."



"The Negroes who were already in the North met their fellow men with disgust and aloofness."



"There were race riots. They happened because the Negroes tried to move into new neighborhoods, or because of antagonism between the Negro and the white workers. Often the Negro was used as a strike breaker in northern plants. The worst riot occurred in East St. Louis."

"In some cities, when they attempted to spend out, Negro houses were bombed."



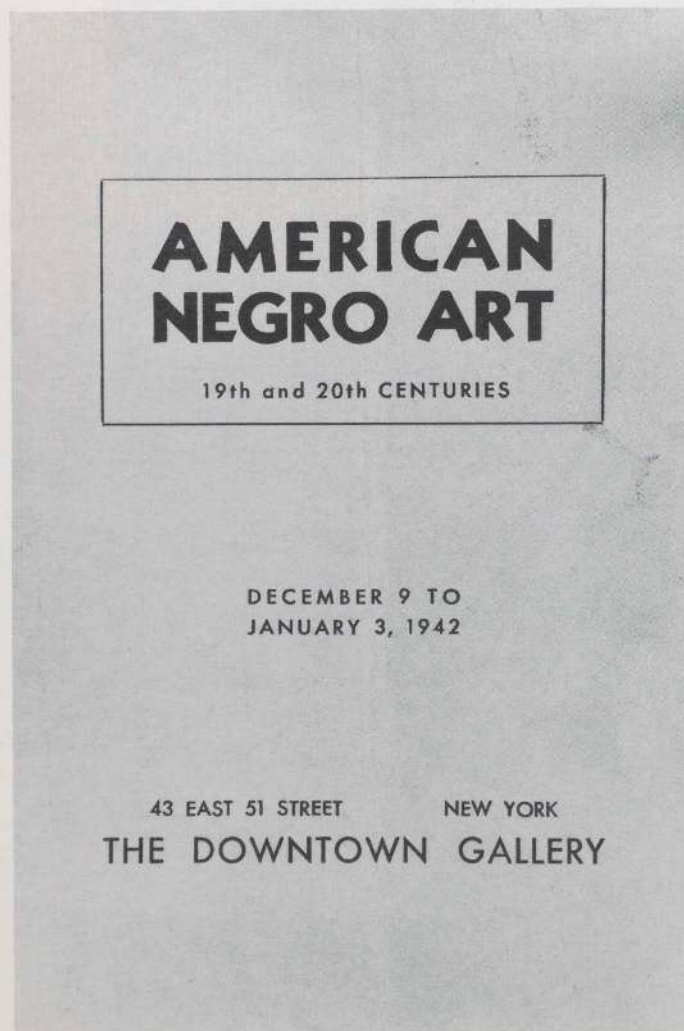
"American Negro Art" exhibition at the Downtown Gallery were jeopardized by what she feared would be a somewhat imitative, and possibly rival, exhibition at the Mc Millen Interior Decoration and Art Gallery. This exhibition, Halpert convinced Locke, threatened to steal their thunder and pervert their cause. Halpert had intended "to introduce a representative cross section of the work of Negro artists, both to the art critics in New York and to several important museum directors." But they learned from Peter Pollack, head of the South Side Art Center in Chicago, that the urbane Frank Crowninshield—editor of *Vanity Fair*, founding trustee of The Museum of Modern Art, and owner of a substantial collection of African sculpture assembled by the artist John Graham—was "broke and is trying to sell his African collection [within an] exhibition of contemporary

Negro art . . . to publicize the African stuff." When Mc Millen curator Kathleen Carroll went to Chicago to select paintings, an unfortunate argument developed between artists who believed they would receive a better price by contributing to Mc Millen, the first exhibition, and those who would go with the Downtown Gallery's credentials.¹⁵

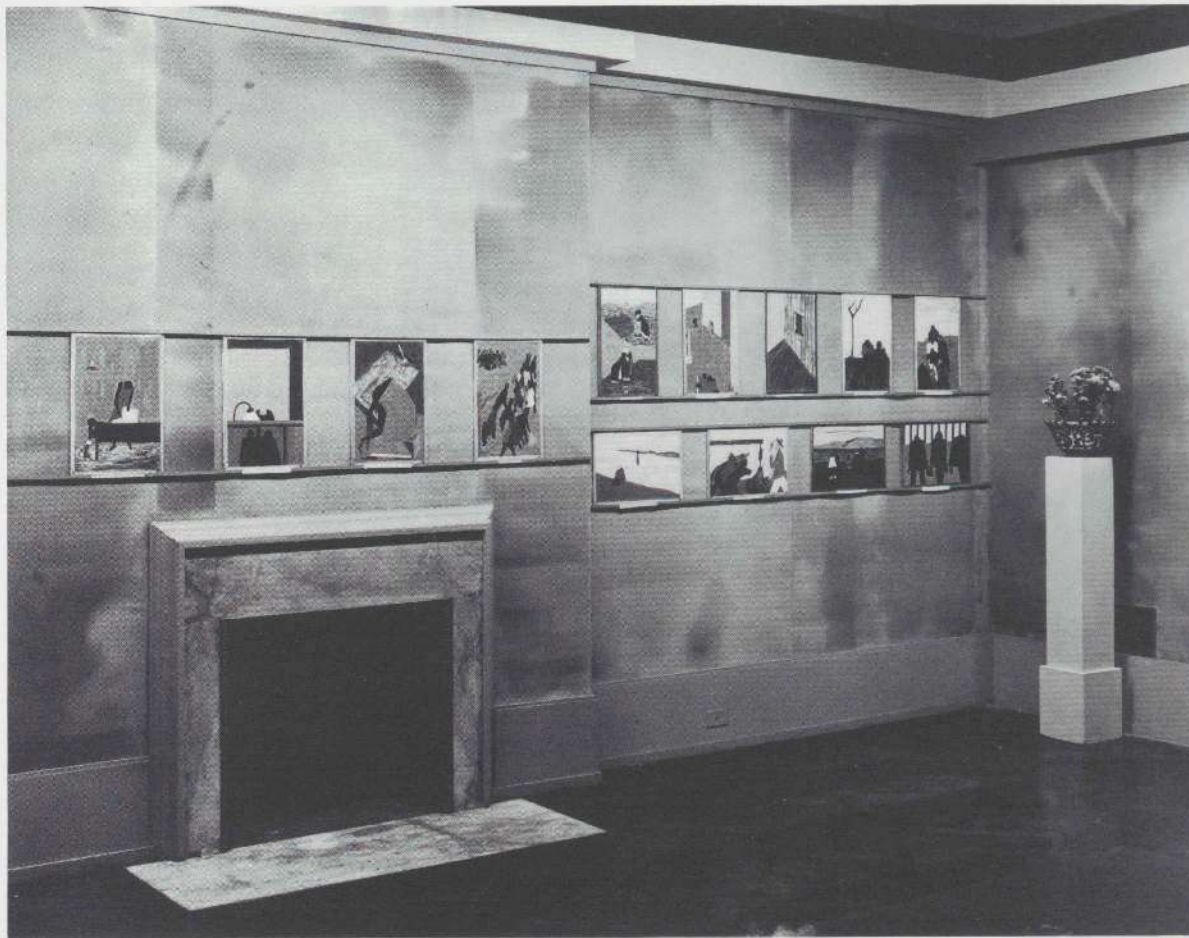
Despite the disdain of Halpert and her allies, Mc Millen mounted "Negro Art, Contemporary," October 16–November 7, 1941. An *Art Digest* article on the Mc Millen show noted "a sudden emphasis on the art of the U.S. Negro." Unlike the forthcoming Downtown Gallery exhibition, the show included "the pure African background of 'Negro' art."¹⁶ Halpert also objected to the association Mc Millen and others made between contemporary Negro art and what she termed "Savage art." Following the teachings of Locke, she preferred instead a grouping with American folk art. Indeed, in a photograph of the Downtown Gallery installation, the bottom of a weather vane is visible above Robert Duncanson's *Blue Hole, Little Miami River* (oil, 1851). Despite Halpert's anxiety, the Mc Millen show has been overshadowed in the history of American art by the Downtown Gallery's exhibition.

Because the *Migration* series generated such extraordinary appeal and enthusiasm, Halpert modified her original plan and showed it first in November, at the time of its publication in *Fortune*. In a departure from her usual practice, she deliberately did not seek reviews but rather directed the press release to the forthcoming "American Negro Art" exhibition. She told Lawrence, "We have not made too great an issue of these as we want to save the excitement for the large show At that time we have some special plans in connection with the group. What with the Mc Millen show, we decided to hold off the real fire works until December."¹⁷ Her plan was to have the Downtown Gallery and other New York galleries add one contemporary Negro artist to each of their rosters; she would also establish a Negro Art Fund to purchase art for public collections.

The special character of "American Negro Art" brought added cachet through a prestigious and glamorous sponsorship committee that Halpert and Locke assembled. The list in the brochure began with Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Honorable Fiorello H. La Guardia. Other luminaries included Katherine Dunham, pioneer of modern



Cover of the catalogue for the "American Negro Art" exhibition at Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery, December 1941 (National Archives, Harmon Foundation Collection)



The *Migration* series on view at the Downtown Gallery, 1941 (National Archives, Harmon Foundation Collection)

African American dance; Edsel Ford, president of Ford Motor Company, and Eleanor Clay Ford, art patron; Dr. David Levy, noted child psychologist, and Adele Rosenwald Levy; A. Philip Randolph, founding president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; William (Bill "Bojangles") Robinson, king of tap dancers; John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller; and Carl Van Vechten, author, portrait photographer, and music critic. Alain Locke headed the Coordination Committee roster, which included Lawrence Allen, the Downtown Gallery's longtime African American secretary.¹⁸

On the first page of the brochure, Halpert explained the Negro Art Fund:

The Downtown Gallery has two objectives in presenting this exhibition. One is to continue its educational program by demonstrating to the public the valuable contribution made by American Negro artists. The second objective—a vital one—is to inaugurate a special NEGRO ART FUND for the purchase of paintings, sculpture, and graphics by

contemporary American Negro artists, such works to be presented to museums and other public institutions. You can help by either making a direct donation, or by purchasing works of art on exhibition. The Gallery is contributing the entire sales commissions, as well as all its facilities.¹⁹

Several photographs commissioned and preserved by the Harmon Foundation document the gracious installation of the *Migration* panels. In one view, ten panels are mounted in two rows in Halpert's coffered wood-paneled office. They are flanked by Eldzier Corter's *Southern Landscape* (tempera, 1940) and by John H. Smith's *Self-Portrait* (cast stone, 1934) on the adjacent mantel. Curiously, the installation does not follow the sequence of the series; one row is all horizontal panels, the other all vertical, rather than the more rhythmic sequence the artist specified. Several other photographs show more panels in a spare, yet elegant, modernized room; another documents Romare Bearden's *After Church* (tempera, 1941), Sargent Johnson's *Chester*



Edith Halpert with a group of Downtown Gallery artists and their work, photographed for *Life* magazine, March 17, 1952. Behind Halpert are (from left): Charles Oscar, Robert Knipschild, Jonah Kingsten, Wallace Reiss, Carroll Cloar, and Herbert Katzman (photo by Louis Faurer).

(terra cotta, 1929), and other twentieth-century painting and sculpture from the exhibition. Visible below are *Fortune* magazine open to the *Migration* series, Locke's *The Negro in Art*, discreet placards reading, "All exhibits are for sale," and other supplementary material.

The Harmon Foundation's photographs are rare documents because Halpert usually did not take installation photographs of exhibitions in her gallery. The foundation's pioneering art exhibitions and other activities helped encourage and support many African American artists. Mary Beattie Brady, the foundation's devoted director, was a dedicated supporter of Jacob Lawrence. In 1939 she purchased his *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series and made it available for loan exhibitions. The practical services she faithfully provided helped Lawrence and other artists focus on making art.²⁰

The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the immediate entry of the United States into World War II eclipsed the carefully planned December 8 opening and the exhibition itself. But, although Halpert's educational aim was never fully realized, "American Negro Art" was important to Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, and the forty-five other contemporary painters, printmakers, and sculptors who had an opportunity to show their works at the Downtown Gallery.²¹ Halpert also

included two works that Jacob Lawrence had created recently in the South: *The Green Table* and *Catholic New Orleans*. While most of the earlier works were loaned from public collections and not for sale, no other exhibition at that time had shown as many museum-quality works and included both nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples.

Halpert did not have to work hard to promote the *Migration* series; Lawrence's art seemed almost to sell itself. Rather, she devoted her skill and ingenuity to placing the series in two major collections. By the close of the exhibition, she had persuaded Adele Rosenwald Levy—the daughter of Julius Rosenwald and a philanthropist, community and social service leader, and member of The Museum of Modern Art Board of Trustees—to purchase thirty panels and donate them as her first gift to the museum. Halpert wrote Levy:

Apart from the documentary importance of this group, the aesthetic quality is such that a good many authorities in the art world consider the series one of the most important contributions to contemporary art. Jacob Lawrence was enabled to produce these paintings through the fellowship of the Rosenwald Foundation. Both the artist and I . . . feel

that it would benefit not only the Museum and its public, but the artist and his race.²²

Alfred Barr later wrote to Levy that he had selected the even-numbered panels because they include "the staircase picture you liked so much [no. 46]."²³

Duncan Phillips bought the odd-numbered panels for The Phillips Memorial Gallery. Halpert knew of Phillips's early appreciation of Horace Pippin, a contemporary African American folk artist who would soon show at the Downtown Gallery. Both Phillips and Levy paid, according to Halpert, "a ridiculously low price . . . one thousand dollars, or at an average of \$33. per panel," and Lawrence received his price of \$2,000, less a 33 percent commission to the Negro Art Fund. Halpert provided the "captions" Lawrence wrote and suggested they be placed on the wooden framing strips. She expressed her hope that "the entire series will be preserved for the future and will be useful for educational work both in the field of art and in the field of racial history."²⁴ The Phillips and The Museum of Modern Art agreed that each institution would lend its half to the other to facilitate the exhibition of the entire series.

The *Migration* series first went on exhibition at the Phillips in March 1942 and then was circulated by MoMA to fourteen small museums around the United States between October 1942 and June 1944. The press release suggests the expanded meanings Lawrence's series would bear during World War II and the resulting influx of refugees throughout Europe and the Americas:

Today nearly half of all American Negroes (one-tenth of our population) are city dwellers.

Though they constitute a far larger minority group than any on the European continent, and though they represent a social and economic enigma of tremendous proportions, the 13 million Negroes in this country are citizens of a shadowy sub-nation that is unknown to, or overlooked by, most of the rest of our population.

The Museum of Modern Art showed the entire series in its Auditorium Gallery from October 10 through November 5, 1944, together with eight new paintings Lawrence had made during his Coast Guard service. The museum invested the series with the sinister overtones of events that had not yet occurred when it was created. A draft for the wall panel reads:



Life called this group of Downtown Gallery artists "oldtimers." Some had been with the gallery since its opening in 1926. Seated, from left, are Jack Levine (on floor), Stuart Davis (behind Levine), William Zorach, and Bernard Karfiol. Behind them are Jacob Lawrence, David Fredenthal, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Charles Sheeler, and Ben Shahn (photo by Louis Faure).

In every country in the world, Hitler has used the American Negro as prime propaganda to convince people that U.S. democracy is a mockery. To bring these facts to the attention of those within our own borders at the same time [as] they are being carried to the ends of the earth in our battle against the tyranny of a Nazi world was the aim of the department of circulating exhibitions in making this show available to institutions throughout the United States. . . . [W]e hope these eloquent statements by Jacob Lawrence have caused many Americans to examine their democratic beliefs.²⁵

By helping to place the *Migration* series in these two important museums, Edith Halpert furthered her goal of broad exposure for American Negro art and prestige for the Downtown Gallery. Lawrence, who had created four major series before he came to Halpert's attention, would have continued to make his art whether or not the Downtown Gallery had discovered him. Some time earlier, when the government of Haiti expressed an interest in acquiring the *Toussaint* series, Lawrence had written to Locke:

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.²⁶

Through the auspices of the Downtown Gallery and the two museums, Lawrence realized his hope for wide public access to his work. He always acknowledged the importance of his early association with the Downtown Gallery:

Edith Halpert was greatly responsible for me and my early success and I would think my latest success, because if it hadn't been for the early success. . . . And this is how it all started and how I became more a part of the art world.²⁷

NOTES

I want to acknowledge the critical leadership of Elizabeth Hutton Turner in the development of this project. It has been a treat to collaborate with the extremely helpful team of scholars she assembled, Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence, the staff of The Phillips Collection, and the staffs of the various manuscript collections cited in these notes, especially Esme Bahn and Helen Rutt, Alain L. Locke Papers; Elaine Felsher, Time, Inc., Archives; Victoria Garvin, Museum of Modern Art, Department of Painting and Sculpture; Beth M. Howse and Ann Allen Shockley, Rosenwald Fund Collection; and Rona Roob, Museum of Modern Art Archives.

1. I have written more about Halpert, her gallery, and related topics in my dissertation, "Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery Downtown (1926-1940): A Study in American Art Patronage," University of Michigan, 1989. I am refining and expanding this work into a book, *Inside the Downtown Gallery: A Biography of Edith Gregor Halpert*.
2. Alain Locke, *The Negro in Art: A Pictorial Record of the Negro Artist and of the Negro Theme in Art* (Washington, D.C.: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1940). It seems likely that the final eight illustrations in part 1, "The Negro as Artist," from Lawrence's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series (127-29), escaped Halpert's eye. A summary biography of Lawrence appears on p. 133.
3. Halpert to Locke, June 9, 1941, Alain L. Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Locke Papers). For more about Locke and his writings about art, see Jeffrey C. Stewart's essay, "(Un)Locke(ing) Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series," in this catalogue and Stewart, ed., *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982). Conversations with Stewart have brought me closer to an understanding of Locke's complex aesthetic ideas.
The six-month period (June to December) in which Halpert planned this large and historical exhibition was the longest interval the gallery had taken to prepare an exhibition.
4. Press release, Downtown Gallery, December 2, 1941.
5. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller purchased one of Woodruff's watercolors from Halpert and sent money through Halpert to aid Woodruff. For the interracial cultural climate, see David Levering Lewis, "The New Negro: 1920-1935," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 3 (1971): 250-70. For Woodruff, see Mary Schmidt Campbell, *Hale Woodruff: 50 Years of His Art* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1979). Information about Halpert, Rockefeller, Woodruff, and

Locke was gleaned from twenty letters in the Downtown Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Downtown Gallery Papers) and from a questionnaire I sent to Woodruff and a telephone interview I had with him in January 1978.

6. I have seen nothing in the extant Downtown Gallery Papers or the Locke Papers to indicate that Locke was compensated for his services or expenses when working on the exhibition. However, the financial records of the Downtown Gallery remain closed. Locke never had a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund or the Harmon Foundation. In an era before grants from public agencies, he would have had to rely on informal private grants. He was no longer in contact with Charlotte Moser, his previous private patron.
7. See Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 202-5, 221-23. Additional exhibitions are listed in Locke, *Negro in Art*, 133. The Columbia University exhibition was noted in "Life of Toussaint," *Art Digest*, December 15, 1940, 12.
8. Madelyn Matz of the Division of Motion Pictures, Library of Congress, and a colleague and devoted admirer of Leyda assembled many of Leyda's obituaries for me. They attest to the breadth of his accomplishments in film and American cultural history but do not hint at his role as a mentor to young African American artists. Lawrence recalled Leyda's early support of his work at the planning sessions for this exhibition on June 3, 1992, and January 15, 1993. Although Lawrence remembers seeing the work of von Stroheim, he did not recall the powerful and suggestive narratives of Sergei Eisenstein, with whom Leyda had worked.
Wendy Jeffers, working on a biography of Dorothy Miller and Holger Cahill, brought to my attention that when Leyda was eking out a precarious existence as an independent filmmaker during the early 1930s, he occasionally sold folk art to Halpert's American Folk Art Gallery. Leyda's March 26, 1940, request to Holger Cahill on Museum of Modern Art Film Library Memo stock and a carbon copy of Dorothy Miller's March 27, 1940, recommendation to the Rosenwald Fund are in the Department of Painting and Sculpture Object Files, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Jeffers explained to me that Miller's restrained letter in support of Lawrence was characteristic, especially when Miller wrote about artists who did figurative work rather than abstraction.
9. Lawrence's Rosenwald fellowship materials are held in the Rosenwald Fund Collection, Special Collections, Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tenn. (hereafter Rosenwald Fund Collection). His application includes statements by Lincoln Kirstein; Carl Zigrosser, director of the Weyhe Gallery; Helen Grayson, designer and advisor to the federal theater costume workshop; Charles R. Rogers, director of the Baltimore Museum of Art; Locke; and Dorothy Miller.
Rosenwald (1862-1932) was a first-generation German Jewish merchant from Springfield, Illinois, who rose from local clothier to president and chairman of the board of Sears, Roebuck, & Company. After meeting Booker T. Washington in 1911, he had crusaded for the betterment of Negro education. The Rosenwald Fund established more than 5,000 schools for African Americans in the South using matching funds from the community; supported African American higher education; and acted on its founder's belief that progress depends largely on individual leadership. Rosenwald was one of a small but influential group of Jewish philanthropists who rigorously supported the welfare and rights of African Americans.
I learned about Rosenwald and the fund he established from: Julius Rosenwald, "Principles of Public Giving," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1929, 599-606; "Rosenwald Dead; Nation Mourns Him," *New York Times*, January 7, 1932, 1, 18; Edwin R. Embree and Julia Waxman, *Investment in People: The Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1949), 5-27, 31-33, 143-55, 238-61 (list of fellows); and Hasia Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American*

- Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), 166–76, 192 ff. Discussions with Diner about the activities of German-American Jewish philanthropists have helped me better formulate my ideas about Halpert. I believe that Halpert, by mounting a major public exhibition corrective to racism, was consciously or unconsciously declaring how American she had become.
10. Elaine Felsher of the Time, Inc., Archives provided information about Calkins and Francis E. Brennan, *Fortune's* art director in 1941, as well as about *Fortune's* editorial process. Correspondence between Halpert and Calkins is in the Downtown Gallery Papers. A July 1, 1941, letter from Calkins to Lawrence is in the Jacob Lawrence Papers, Syracuse University Library Special Collections Department, Syracuse, N.Y. (microfilm in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). Correspondence between Locke and Calkins about Locke's advice for the text is in the Locke Papers. For Sheeler, see Carol Troyen and Erica Hirschler, *Charles Sheeler: Paintings and Drawings* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), 162–77.
Halpert and Calkins continued their collaboration, with other Downtown Gallery artists later making art for *Fortune*. *Fortune* commissioned Lawrence to paint *African Gold Rush* for the October 1946 cover (original in the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution) and sent him to the South the following June and July to make ten paintings for the unpublished series "In the heart of the black belt."
 11. A telegram from Halpert to Locke in the Locke Papers reads: "PLEASE PHONE MRS CALKINS FORTUNE AT ONCE CAN YOU JOIN ME WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON AT ART CENTER." Halpert and Calkins would have been familiar with the thriving WPA center at the corner of 125th Street and Lenox Avenue near Lawrence's studio. Halpert and Locke both understood that the *Migration* series should be seen before its message might be obscured by the new war (Halpert to Locke, July 1, 1941, Locke Papers).
 12. Calkins to Locke, August 28, 1941, Locke Papers; Locke to Calkins, September 4, 1941, Locke Papers. Locke, *The Negro in America* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1933).
 13. Lawrence to Halpert, n.d. [October 1941], Downtown Gallery Papers. Lawrence later authorized Halpert to set his prices.
 14. Lawrence to Halpert, n.d. [annotated in Halpert's hand, "Nov/1941"], Downtown Gallery Papers.
 15. Peter Pollack to Locke, July 25, 1941, Locke Papers. A series of spirited letters between Pollack and Locke (in Pollack's file in the Locke Papers) detail the saga of the Mc Millen and Downtown Gallery exhibitions and comment on Halpert's activities. Pollack tells Locke about the Mc Millen representatives' visits to Chicago to see local artists.
 16. "Art by Negroes," *Art Digest*, October 15, 1941, 11, 23.
 17. Halpert to Lawrence, November 8, 1941, Downtown Gallery Papers. In the *New York Times*, Howard Devree praised the paintings for their directness, simplicity, imagination, and obvious conviction (November 9, 1941, 1, 10).
 18. The other members of the sponsorship committee were Mrs. Ernest R. (Lillian Anderson) Alexander, social worker and member of the NAACP board of directors; Mrs. Francis (Katherine Chapin) Biddle, poet; Mrs. W. Murray (Josephine Boardman) Crane, member of the founding committee of The Museum of Modern Art; Countee Cullen, poet of the Harlem Renaissance; Raymond B. Fosdick, former undersecretary of the League of Nations and president of the Rockefeller Foundation; William C. Handy, jazz trumpeter and composer; Mrs. William E. (Katherine Griffiths) Harmon, widow of the founder and member of the board of the Harmon Foundation; Roland Hayes, concert tenor; Mrs. James Weldon (Grace Nail) Johnson, widow of the poet, teacher, and diplomat; Dr. Malcolm S. Maclean; Archibald MacLeish, poet and Librarian of Congress; Dorothy Maynor, soprano and founder of Harlem School of the Arts; Mrs. Henry (Elinor Fatman) Morgenthau, Jr., activist wife of the secretary of the treasury; Paul Robeson, singer, actor, and activist; and Ethel Waters, blues singer and stage and film actress. In addition to Locke and Allen, members of the Coordination Committee were Robert Carlen, Carlen Galleries, Horace Pippin's Philadelphia dealer; the Harmon Foundation; Richard Foster Howard, director, Dallas Art Museum; Peter Pollack, South Side Art Center; and Daniel Catton Rich, director, Art Institute of Chicago.
 19. Exhibition brochure, "American Negro Art," December 1941, Downtown Gallery Papers.
 20. The Newark Museum recently recognized the Harmon Foundation with an exhibition; see Gary Reynolds and Beryl J. Wright, *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation* (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 1989), especially David Driskell, "Mary Beattie Brady and the Administration of the Harmon Foundation," 59–69.
Brady placed Lawrence's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series at Fisk University; it is now in the Amistad Research Center's Aaron Douglas Collection, New Orleans. She stored the *Frederick Douglass* and *Harriet Tubman* series, supplied the portrait photograph of Lawrence that appeared in *Fortune*, ordered and circulated offprints of the *Fortune* portfolio, and sent copies to Lawrence in New Orleans together with four Downtown Gallery installation photographs. Lawrence to Locke, n.d. [probably January 1942], Locke Papers.
The Downtown Gallery installation photographs are with the Harmon Foundation Photographs, Still Picture Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
 21. See Catlett's cogent discussion of the *Migration* series, "Artist with a Message," *People's Voice*, October 21, 1944, clipping in Museum of Modern Art Archives, Public Information Scrapbook, New York. For further discussion of Catlett's criticism, see Patricia Hills, "Jacob Lawrence's *Migration* Series: Weavings of Pictures and Texts," in this catalogue.
 22. Halpert to Mrs. Adele M. Levy, January 17, 1941, Downtown Gallery Papers. For more about Levy, see "Mrs. David M. Levy Dead at 67," *New York Times*, March 13, 1960, 86, and *The Mrs. Adele R. Levy Collection: A Memorial Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961).
 23. Barr to Levy, March 7, 1942, Barr Papers. It is not surprising that Barr and Levy focused on this stark, very abstract panel. At that time The Museum of Modern Art considered abstraction the embodiment of modernism.
 24. Halpert to Duncan Phillips, February 5, 1942, and to Mrs. Duncan Phillips, February 21, 1942, Downtown Gallery Papers.
 25. Both statements are found in Museum of Modern Art Archives, Department of Circulating Exhibitions, New York.
 26. Lawrence to Locke, n.d. [1938 or 1939], Locke Papers.
 27. Lawrence, interview with Carroll Greene, October 26, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 24, 64.
Lawrence would repeatedly experience the results of Halpert's extraordinary efforts on behalf of her artists. During the war she used her connections and her persistence to secure special assignments for Lawrence and other Downtown Gallery artists in uniform. When he suffered a mental breakdown in 1949, Halpert enlisted her long-time friend Dr. Nathaniel Uhr, then at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, in her search for the best treatment plan and facility. She then willingly contributed to his medical expenses and found a job for his wife.
In 1953, without being consulted, Lawrence and the other artists who had come to the Downtown Gallery after 1936 were abruptly transferred to the newly opened Charles Alan Gallery as part of a settlement between Halpert and Alan, her long-time associate. Halpert maintained her loyalty to Lawrence and her devotion to his work and retained at least three major paintings in her personal collection: *At the Piano, Drama—Halloween Party*, and *Fantasy* (*The Edith G. Halpert Collection of American Paintings* [New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1973], nos. 174, 184, 199).



Jacob Lawrence in his Coast Guard uniform with two children at the Museum of Modern Art exhibition of the *Migration* series, 1944 (International News)

Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series*: Weavings of Pictures and Texts

PATRICIA HILLS

When Jacob Lawrence finished his *Migration* series in 1941, he had created a new theme for the twentieth century—an imaginative, yet didactic, pictorial narrative representing the great migration of African Americans from the South to the industrial cities of the North beginning during World War I. Within his grand, ambitious story, Lawrence incorporated scenes of labor, of the regional landscape, and of families interacting in their daily routines and embarking on a journey that would irrevocably change the country and themselves. What he accomplished was a weaving of sixty pictures and sixty text captions that draws the viewer through time and geography, struggle and hope. Like a West African *griot* (a “professional . . . praise singer and teller of accounts”) Lawrence spun a tale of the past that had relevance for the present and the future.¹

The completed series won acceptance from the start. It was obvious that the twenty-three-year-old artist had a special gift for communicating a great epic of American history in dynamic modernist terms. The influential cultural writer Alain Locke brought Lawrence to the attention of art dealer Edith Halpert. She, in turn, arranged for *Fortune* magazine to reproduce a substantial number of the panels (twenty-six in all) in color in the November 1941 issue, and she showed the series at her Downtown Gallery in December 1941.² Halpert did not need to persuade Duncan Phillips and Alfred H. Barr, Jr., director of The Museum of Modern Art, of the worth of the series; they already were vying for them and ended by each acquiring half.³ All sixty panels then toured the country for two years and returned to New York in October 1944 for a homecoming exhibition at the Modern, which also displayed Lawrence's genre scenes of Coast Guard life.⁴

The 1944 exhibition elicited the most extensive press coverage of Lawrence's work to date, with critics praising

both his unique modernist style and his choice of subject. Emily Genauer wrote in the *New York World-Telegram and Sun* that she liked Lawrence's modern style, his “splendid gift for color and design, integrating both into compositions distinguished by their highly sophisticated treatment of blocky, almost primitive forms.”⁵ The reviewer for the *Art Digest*, on the other hand, focused on his theme of the relocation of African Americans “in large quantities into the war plants of the urban industrial North at a time of national crisis”—a time similar to his own—and observed that “no professional sociologist could have stated the case with more clarity—or dignity.”⁶

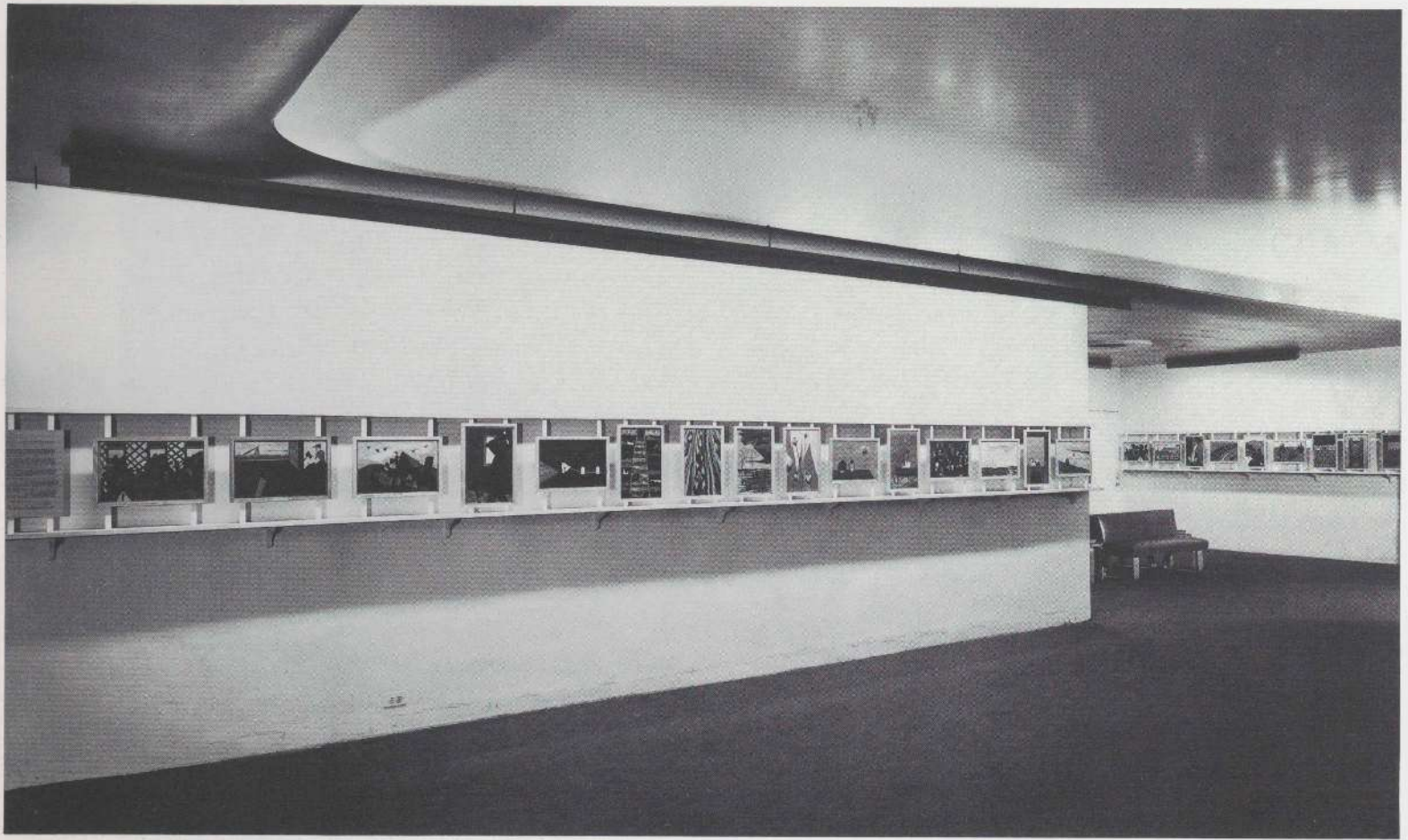
Artist Elizabeth Catlett spoke for the African American community when she wrote in the *People's Voice*:

One cannot look at these seemingly simple portrayals of the startling lack of the bare necessities of life, the frustrations and complexities of daily struggle, and the determined mass movement towards democratic equality of these Negroes without a decided self examination.⁷

To Catlett, however, the artistic achievement rested on his successful alloy of subject and style. The young artist was already “one of America's truly great painters,” because “his style of painting with almost elemental color and design is a perfect means for the expression of the fundamental needs of the Negro. . . . He strips his material to the bone.”⁸

In *Art News*, Aline Loucheim agreed that Lawrence's modernist style went beyond notions of pure painting:

The way Lawrence sees is in terms of pattern in bright primary color, unmodulated . . . and in simplification of form. Form is simplified in order to articulate the essentials. Detail is suppressed except where it functions both as part of design and basic part of fact. His steep perspective generates immediacy.⁹



Installation view of the *Migration* series, exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 10–November 5, 1944. The exhibition included all sixty panels (photograph courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art, New York).

These critics recognized that Lawrence had forged a modernism—clarity of form, reductive color range, absence of tonal variations, and simplified spatial relations—that expressed deeply felt social concerns.

That these voices should blend into a rousing chorus of admiration for the *Migration* series is not difficult to understand. Whether consciously or not, Lawrence had his hand on the pulse of America in early 1940 when he first proposed the series to the Julius Rosenwald Fund as a project worthy of a fellowship. For different, but often overlapping, reasons a wide audience was in place to respond—African American cultural nationalists, left-radical artists, capitalist business executives, and white liberals.

From the people of his own community Lawrence acquired the mantle of storyteller to spin out the saga of the descendants of Africa in the American continent. During his Harlem youth, he attended after-school classes at Utopia

House and learned about African American history; he remembered particularly a Mr. Allen telling about Toussaint L'Ouverture.¹⁰ He also recalled going to meetings when he was older, at which a "Professor" Seyfert lectured on black history. Lawrence recalls that Seyfert wanted "to get black artists and young people such as myself who were interested in art . . . to select as our content black history. . . . For me, and for a few others, Seyfert was a most inspiring and exciting man, in that he helped to give us something that we needed at the time."¹¹ When Lawrence embarked on his series of the lives of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman, he was taking on the role of community *griot*, and he received encouragement for his efforts from such cultural figures as Alain Locke.

Left-radical artists also urged the telling of African American history and encouraged the artistic expression of the conflicts, struggles, and victories of the socially and

economically oppressed.¹² These radicals were in the forefront of protests against the trial of the Scottsboro Boys and agitated for antilynching legislation debated in Congress in the mid-1930s.¹³ Many of them taught at the American Artists School, which Lawrence attended from 1936 to 1938,¹⁴ and they included such activists and artist-theorists as Harry Gottlieb, Louis Lozowick, and Anton Refregier.

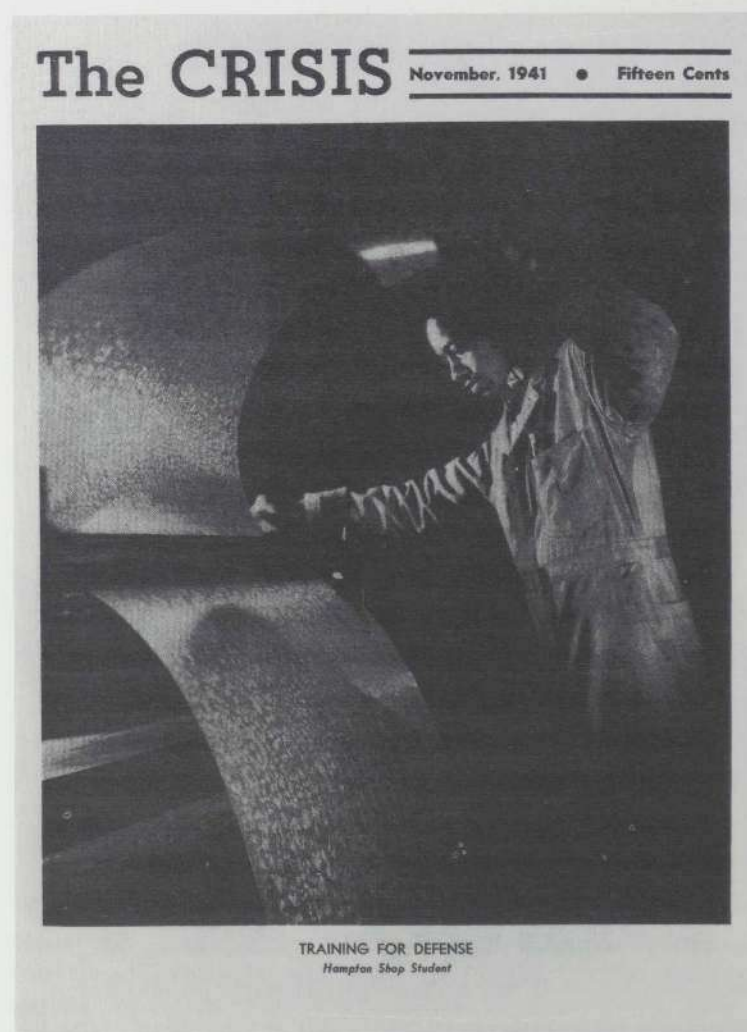
The ideas of the radicals must be incorporated into any assessment of the influences operating on young Lawrence at this time.¹⁵ The school advertised an innovative curriculum that included "weekly lectures by recognized authorities" that would "provide the student with an historical approach to his creative problems." The purpose was to give the student "an understanding of modern society itself, its forces, tendencies, and conflicts which can only serve to deepen his aesthetic outlook and capacities."¹⁶ To these artists, art had a social purpose.

At the other end of the political spectrum, within the business world a receptive audience was being developed for imagery of African Americans coming north to work in industry. Publisher Henry Luce presented to the readers of his *Fortune* magazine a full-color spread of almost half of the *Migration* series in the November 1941 issue, when the nation was gearing up for war production.¹⁷ Luce's often-quoted "American Century" essay, published in the February 17, 1941, issue of *Life*, projected an ideal of the United States as an international economic leader and humanitarian provider for the entire world. But, warned Luce, this "will not happen unless our vision of America as a world power includes a passionate devotion to great American ideals . . . a love of freedom, a feeling for the equality of opportunity, a tradition of self-reliance and independence and also of co-operation."¹⁸

To Luce and others, the image of the racially integrated factory would be a necessary step toward that vision of equality of opportunity. The image was needed immediately; the reality could come later. The picture magazines of 1941 were filled with positive, almost propagandistic, images of American industry, running efficiently and conflict-free, and the August and November issues of *The Crisis*, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, ran stories on training programs for blacks in the defense industry.¹⁹ Thus, to the Luce editors, Lawrence's pictures could be seen as a first step—images heralding the

inevitability of African Americans in the work force and cautioning against the continuation of racism.

Progressive liberals, many connected with New Deal programs and involved with organizations like the Rosenwald Fund, would not disagree with the *Fortune* crowd, nor even with the left radicals' political outlook in the early 1940s. They would, however, be especially drawn to themes of social uplift, of advancement through hard work and education. Thus the directors of the Rosenwald Fund may have been predisposed toward Lawrence's 1940 grant proposal. He had the credentials, and he already had a successful track record of painting historical series of African American life, such as the *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series (1937–38) of forty-one panels, *Frederick Douglass* (1938–39) of thirty-two panels, and *Harriet Tubman* (1939–40) of thirty-one panels. As he completed each series his reputation



Training for Defense, cover of *The Crisis*, November 1941

grew, so that he felt confident enough to list as his references Lincoln Kirstein, Alain Locke, and the director of the Baltimore Museum of Art, Charles Rogers.

Their recommendations glow with admiration and provide proof that Lawrence had already developed a following among the cognoscenti. Kirstein, for example, recommended Lawrence as

the most capable negro artist whose work I have ever had the opportunity to look at. His series of paintings seem to me strikingly original, and possessed of great inherent beauty. Unlike so many others, he is not imitative, but has a genuine emotion, and is extraordinarily successful in conveying it. I feel absolutely certain that with the necessary encouragement and slight security, he could be the most important negro artist this country has yet produced.²⁰

Rogers, who had mounted a major exhibition of contemporary African American art for the Baltimore Museum that included Lawrence's *Toussaint* series, praised the artist as "undoubtedly the most talented, sincere and creative" of African American artists.²¹

Locke, who knew Lawrence's art most intimately, called the *Toussaint* series "the sensation" of the Baltimore Museum's exhibition:

What impresses me about Lawrence is his ability to combine social interest and interpretation . . . with a straight art approach. . . . There is little or no hint of social propaganda in his pictures, and no slighting of the artistic problems involved, such as one finds in many of the contemporary social-theme painters. Yet his work has a stirring social and racial appeal.

Locke's recommendation also speaks of Lawrence's artistic development and praises the "considerable growth in maturity and power" of his compositions.²²

Indeed, by the *Tubman* series, done a year after *Douglass* and probably not yet seen by Locke, Lawrence had reached his full powers as a pictorial *griot*. His link to his community's storytelling traditions comes through not just in the subject matter of the *Tubman* series—the story of a heroic woman's journey from slavery to freedom and her subsequent rescue of other slaves—but in the telling of the story through the twin means of extended captions and

colorful pictures. Lawrence learned from *Tubman* to work with the rhythms of both words and images.

The captions for *Harriet Tubman*, when read as a continuous narrative, recall the conventions of slave narratives: the need to frame the story with testimonials by white writers, the significance of the journey as a metaphorical and Biblical testing of faith, and the importance of the slave's metamorphosis into a man or woman with an identity and a voice. In this series, the collective yearnings and hopes of the people coalesce in the story and voice of one individual.

But Lawrence's development into a master artist is most apparent in his pictorial construction of the *Tubman* series. The thirty-one panels form groups of four to six panels, within which are rhythms, contrasts, and closures. Vertical panels create a syncopation with horizontal ones; scenes of crowded all-over forms zoom to single, iconic images; bright day scenes are preceded or followed by night scenes; indoor scenes contrast with outdoor ones; and angular, diagonal movements shift to rounded and calm forms.²³

In 1940 Lawrence was ready to begin a more ambitious series. His conceptual powers had matured, and he had full control over his techniques. He knew his *Migration* series would involve a more complicated orchestration in order to represent by pictures not just the phenomenon of people on the move but also the underlying economic and social forces.²⁴

In his application to the Rosenwald Fund, Lawrence outlined the plan of the narrative into eight sections: "Causes of the Migration"; "Stimulation of the Migration"; "The Spread of the Migration"; "The Efforts to Check the Migration"; "Public Opinion Regarding the Migration"; "The Effects of the Migration on the South"; "The Effects of the Migration on Various Parts of the North"; and "The Effects of the Migration on the Negro."

Although Lawrence wrote in his application that he had not yet begun the *Migration* project, he had at least studied Emmett J. Scott's *Negro Migration During the War*, first published in 1920. Six of his sections are exact quotations from Scott's chapter headings. Moreover, in his listing of subheadings, Lawrence follows the development of Scott's analysis, except that the artist tends to give a positive spin to his topics. For example, Lawrence lists "the prevalence of mob violence" as a cause of the migration, but he does not

mention lynching, which Scott discusses. Lawrence no doubt wished to prevent his liberal supporters from worrying that he might launch into the propaganda that Locke had so carefully assured them he would avoid. Other examples of Lawrence's positive outlook come in the section devoted to "The Effects of the Migration on the South." He mentions that wages for Negroes increased by 150 percent, but Scott states a more conservative 100 percent at the most.²⁵ While Lawrence says that "labor unions opened their doors to Negroes," Scott had declared, "the trade unions have been compelled to yield, although complete economic freedom of the negro in the South is still a matter of prospect."²⁶ Lawrence makes another point—"Business decreases to such an extent as to cause the closing of shops"—that Scott did not discuss.²⁷ These variations indicate that Lawrence felt free to appropriate facts from other sources, but he felt no compunction to follow these sources doggedly.

Lawrence's last section, "The Effects of the Migration on the Negro," is not based on Scott's chapter headings, but is drawn instead from the collective experience of the artist's own community. The theme had a personal dimension as well: his own parents had come from the South looking for better working and living conditions. His mother, a domestic worker from Virginia, met his father, a cook from South Carolina, in Atlantic City, and Lawrence was born there. When his parents separated some time later, his mother took Lawrence and his sister and brother to Philadelphia. Later, when Lawrence was about thirteen, she moved the children to Harlem,²⁸ where they met others who recounted their own stories of the migration. Thus, even though he looked at Scott's book and later went to the New York Public Library's Schomburg Collection, the planning and execution of the *Migration* series came as much from his own emotional and social experience as from books.²⁹ To Lawrence, the telling of the story needed to incorporate that experience.

To elaborate that point, Lawrence ended his "Plan of Work" with a statement that the significance of the project rested "on its educational value." He argued that since the Great Migration had an impact on the entire nation, African Americans should realize their contribution to history, and others should know it as well.³⁰ Collective pride in past achievements would help stimulate individual feelings of self-worth in the present. Lawrence well understood the psychological reasoning of August Wilson, who said much

later: "The real struggle, since the African first set foot on the continent, is the affirmation of the value of oneself."³¹

But besides the individual, psychological benefits, Lawrence believed that reminders of historical gains would spur collective action toward securing better social and economic conditions for the whole community. He felt that artists could make a difference by visualizing inspiring themes, just as the *griot* can verbalize hopes in the most ordinary of us. In a statement for the Harmon Foundation in 1940, Lawrence declared the agenda behind the *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series:

I didn't do it as a historical thing, but because I believe these things tie up the Negro today. We don't have a



Russell Lee. Church service, Illinois, ca. 1941. Published in Edwin Rosskam and Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices*, 1941, and selected by The Museum of Modern Art for the wall text for its installation of the *Migration* series in 1944 (Library of Congress, Farm Security Administration Collection)