



Cottonfield workers with bags, from Pare Lorentz's film *The River*, 1936–37 (National Archives, Farm Security Administration Collection)

physical slavery, but an economic slavery. If these people, who were so much worse off than the people today could conquer their slavery, we certainly can do the same thing.³²

The Migration of the Negro differs from Lawrence's earlier series by singling out no one hero or heroine; the protagonists are just folks, like his parents. There is not even a skin-color differentiation, which might have connoted class differences; gender differences are also minimized.³³ The people as a whole—acting with a collective will—take on a heroic dimension beyond distinctions of class or gender. Unlike the diaspora of the Middle Passage—when some fifteen to twenty million Africans were forced to cross the Atlantic as slaves for the New World plantations—African Americans leaving the South during and after World War I were acting as free agents.³⁴ Their struggles together—each moving north on his or her own initiative as well as helping each other—ought to revolutionize, Lawrence believed, the

consciousness of all African Americans in the early 1940s.

The visual culture of the 1930s stimulated young Lawrence. He was long familiar with photographic essays such as those published in *Life* and other magazines. Several photographic books of the time also contributed to the visual culture of social concern. Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor's *An American Exodus* (1938), and, later, Walker Evans and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) all focused on the people, both black and white, rooted to the soil of the rural South.

Of all the photographic documentary books, the one that comes closest to Lawrence's project was Edwin Rosskam's *Twelve Million Black Voices* (1941), which included a long text by Richard Wright. Rosskam borrowed almost 150 archival photographs of African Americans by Dorothea Lange, Jack Delano, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, and Marion Post Wolcott that these photographers had made on assignment for the Farm Security Admini-

stration in the 1930s. The project was advancing at the very time that Lawrence was working on his own pictures, and Wright's text could well have applied to Lawrence's series:

This text, while purporting to render a broad picture of the processes of Negro life in the United States, intentionally does not include in its considerations those areas of Negro life which comprise the so-called 'talented tenth' Their exclusion from these pages does not imply any invidious judgment, nor does it stem from any desire to underestimate their progress and contributions; they are omitted in an effort to simplify a depiction of a complex movement of a debased feudal folk toward a twentieth-century urbanization.³⁵

Lawrence's project also aimed to depict the rural working classes of black America rather than elite social groupings. In a statement titled "My Opinion About Painting," published in the mid-1940s, he concluded: "My pictures express my life and experiences. I paint the things I know about and the things I have experienced. The things I have experienced extend into my national, racial and class group. So I paint the American Negro working class."³⁶

Lawrence developed as a *griot* at a time when storytelling

was an aesthetic strategy in the general culture of the visual arts. We have already mentioned photographic books. Documentary filmmakers also turned to storytelling techniques to reach a mass audience. In many respects, the closest analogue to Lawrence's *Migration* series is provided by the documentary films of the 1930s, particularly Pare Lorentz's *The River*, shot during 1936 and 1937 under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration to publicize the government's land reclamation programs.³⁷ With a musical score by Virgil Thomson and a prose-poem script, Lorentz retells the story of the annual spring rising of the great North American rivers that flood the land in the valleys and flow on toward the Gulf of Mexico. The narration turns tragic when it dwells on soil erosion brought on by human ignorance and poverty, but it ends with a burst of enthusiasm for the harnessing of natural power made possible by government agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Both the *Migration* and Lorentz's *The River* deliver messages of hope after explicating historical circumstances. Both communicate through such artistic devices as repetition, movement, synecdoche (the use of the fragment or partial view to represent the whole), and abrupt juxtapositions of images.³⁸ And both weave together



Man sitting on wheelbarrow, from Pare Lorentz's film *The River*, 1936–37 (National Archives, Farm Security Administration Collection)



Man with lantern, from Pare Lorentz's film *The River*, 1936–37 (National Archives, Farm Security Administration Collection)

images and words, which at times enhance one another's messages, but which often develop as independent constructions of meaning.

Lawrence crafted his text in plain, schoolbook English. By the time he wrote the captions for the panels from his research notes in March 1941, he had looked at written sources other than Scott's *Negro Migration During the War*. Carter G. Woodson's *A Century of Negro Migration*, published in 1918, seems to have been another source. Lawrence's language never exactly matches that of the two scholars, since he was writing captions rather than discursive prose. Instead—coming as much from the oral tradition as from scholarship—it sounds like spoken words.³⁹

While Lawrence makes many of the same points as Scott and Woodson, he differs by stressing at the outset that World War I caused the labor shortage, which in turn spurred migration to the northern cities. Not until panel 8 does he mention the other causes that Scott and Woodson had advanced along with the labor shortage theory: the floods of 1915, boll weevil damage to the crops in 1915 and 1916, and the low wages that African Americans had to endure.⁴⁰ And not until panels 14 and 15—a quarter of the way into his story—does he tackle discrimination in the courts and lynchings as motives for migration. In contrast, he had placed those issues at the very beginning of his list of subjects in his Rosenwald Fund "Plan of Work." By 1941, however, the preoccupations of most Americans had shifted. Especially to Lawrence, who had never lived in the South and who most likely was seeing photographs of defense production in the current periodicals, World War I with its increased economic opportunities for African Americans must have loomed as the primary cause for the migration.

Although Lawrence's text conveys facts, he arranges it to evoke a mood. We hear three voices—each coming from a different sociological geography—intoning facts about the momentum of the migration, the promises and the hardships of the North, the poverty and racism of the South. He ends with a poetic coda that affirms both that they will prevail and that the cycle will be renewed: "And the migrants kept coming."

The pictures set up rhythms for interpretative analysis that parallel those of the text. As we walk from panel to panel, our attention continually shifts to absorb new images and

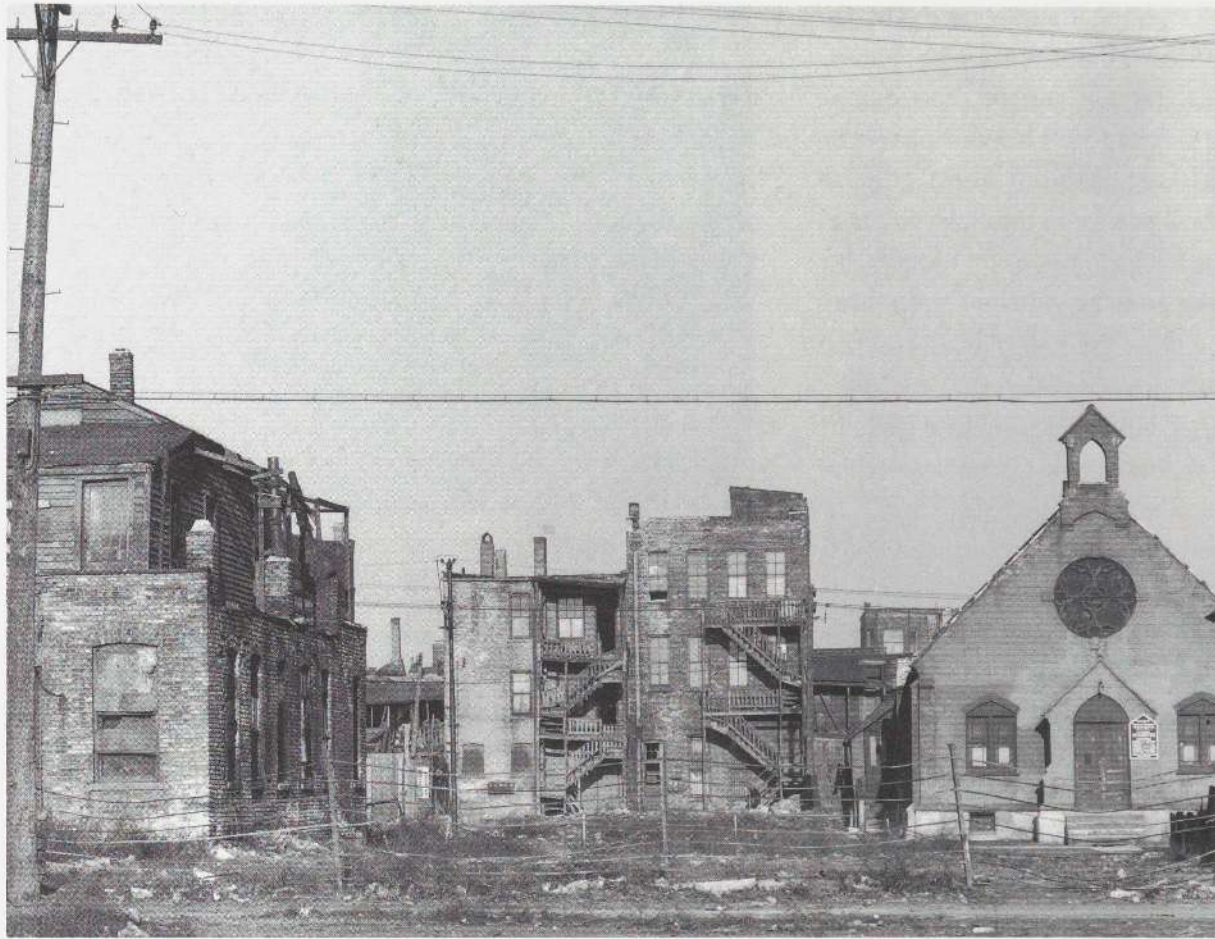
new possible meanings. However, we are always free to return to or glance back at previous images, which we cannot do when experiencing the diachronic progression of film. The encounter with Lawrence's *Migration* is thus both kinesthetic and dialectical, with newer interpretations superseding earlier ones, but never rigidly, as we move through space to view the series.

Lawrence's first panel—"During the World War there was a great migration North by Southern Negroes"—shows a crowd of figures pushing their way through gates marked "Chicago," "New York," and "St. Louis."⁴¹ The flat shapes and latticework of the station architecture control the movement of the figures. The dark turquoise, rose, brown, and black shapes that are the people stream toward the openings that represent the passageways to the cities.

The caption for the second panel highlights the labor shortages in the North: "The World War had caused a great shortage in Northern industry and also citizens of foreign countries were returning home." The picture shows a solitary white workman driving a steamshovel. The sequence of the first three panels leads us to read the captions as images of effects (panel 1), causes (panel 2), and effects (panel 3). This third panel, with its flying wedge of people moving left against a backdrop of migrating birds, quickens the pace of the migrants.⁴²

The fourth panel repeats the single-figure motif, but here Lawrence introduces the African American laborer—a muscular man holding a hammer over his head. The caption reads, "The Negro was the largest source of labor to be found after all others had been exhausted." Lawrence notes the class differences between the African American and his white counterpart. The white man is a skilled worker driving a vehicle; he has a face and features. The black man, on the other hand, is a common laborer whose face is obscured by his muscular arm.⁴³ Hence, a new reading develops based on the pictures as a foursome, independent of the captions: movement, the white worker, movement, the black worker.

And yet this interpretation shifts with the fifth panel—the partial view of the railroad locomotive with its headlights ablaze, black smoke pouring from its stack and its bell ringing. Suddenly, the large spike the black worker is poised to hit suggests a railroad scene, despite the indoor setting, and he is transformed into the folk hero John Henry, "the railroading man."



Russell Lee. Tenements, South Side Chicago. 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)

The sixth and seventh panels (the view of the inside of the train with its sleeping passengers and the view from inside the window to the outside fields whizzing by)⁴⁴ lead us to conclude that Lawrence meant the beginning of the series (panels 1–7) to focus on the railroad as facilitator of the cause and effect process. Because panels 2 and 5 represent vehicles moving to the left, our eyes can trick us into interpreting the white man in the cab as the engineer of a train driving the migrants to the North.

However, we need to return to the words of the captions: panels 7, 8, and 9 indicate that Lawrence is shifting to statements about the southern agricultural economy. We then realize that the seventh panel, instead of being linked to the previous six, belongs visually to the two that follow, which, like it, are vertical and focus on the crops of the countryside. What differs among these three panels is the perspective viewpoint: panel 6 suggests the moving eye looking out over fluttering ribbons of color that are the fields of crops; panel 7, a fixed eye looking at a poor crop

drowned in a flood of water; panel 8, a fixed eye telescoping in to the cotton bolls where the wretched weevils do their mischief. A rhythmic pattern of horizontal and vertical panels emerges for the first nine paintings: a-a-a; b-a-b; b-b-b. Similar rhythms occur throughout the series, but as improvisations rather than as formulaic patterns.

Panels 10 and 11 introduce the impoverishment of southern families; figures sit or stand in interiors bereft of material possessions and at kitchen tables with meager provisions. Poor living conditions, Lawrence tells us, led to increased migration: hence, panel 12 returns to a scene of people crowding the ticket windows of a train station.

The migration, until now considered the effect of economic causes, becomes itself a cause for further economic deterioration in panel 13: "Due to the South's losing so much of its labor, the crops were left to dry and spoil." From here to the end of the series, we clearly understand that the migration and the economic and social conditions mutually and reciprocally affect each other.

Panels 14, 15, and 16 form a unit that addresses the issue of southern justice from an African American's point of view. The pattern is interior, exterior, interior; vertical, horizontal, vertical. Moreover, the placement of forms in each panel enhances the ensemble of the three panels as a unit. In panel 14, the lamp on the judge's desk swings to the right. In panel 15, the noose for the lynching hangs in the exact middle of the threesome. In panel 16, the grieving woman's body turns toward the left and brings to a close the group as a whole.

Next come panels addressing discrimination that are interspersed with more panels of migration. People work, talk among themselves, go to the railroad station, are harassed by the police, desert their homes. The pace quickens. Each scene is self-contained—a quiltwork patch of form and color—and yet essential to the rhythmic pattern of any given sequence. Art historical quotations and references occur here and there. The figures in panel 24 resemble those of workers painted on the walls of a pharaoh's tomb; panel 25 evokes the contemporary abstract compositions of the 1930s. Thus we move from panel to panel, forming visual interpretations, recollections, and reinterpretations that move along in tandem with the rhetorical development of the text.⁴⁵

Midway through the series, at panel 31, Lawrence paints the first scene of the urban North as seen by the arriving migrants: a flat wall of building fronts punctuated by both open and shaded windows, a metaphor for the city where openings of opportunity occur in a facade of seeming isolation and indifference. At this point we realize that Lawrence's weave has become a monumental braid of northern, southern, and migration scenes. Like a cornrow braid, where top hairs disappear as nape hairs come into the plait, the southern scenes become fewer as the northern scenes increase.

The next three panels return to the migrants and the South. Increasingly scenes appear that fill out the landscape of the North: the Chicago stockyards (panel 36), steel manufacturing (panel 37), railroad work (panel 38). More scenes follow of the moving migration (panels 39, 40). Then Lawrence shifts again to the South, where measures to keep the migrants from leaving range from terror to appeasement: the labor agent is jailed (panel 41), the police arrest departing migrants (panel 42), and community leaders initiate some reforms to stay the flight of the migrants (panel 43).⁴⁶ Unlike the more dynamic migration scenes, these last



Edwin Rosskam. Boy in front of apartment house, Chicago, ca. 1941. Published in 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)

three are all bilaterally symmetrical; their stunning colors and iconic images rivet our thoughts to a social structure basically intolerant of change.

Three-quarters through the series, at panel 45, Lawrence presents the first image of a hopeful, extended family looking out the train window at the industrial North. The next three vertical panels represent crowded living conditions for the migrants in the North—conditions discussed at length in Scott's and Woodson's studies. In panel 48 we see only parts of iron beds with valises tucked under them; the effect of this fragmentary view is to suggest an endless row of beds. Lawrence switches to another narrative device for panel 49 when he presents a literal map of segregated seating in northern restaurants.

Violence erupts in three scenes of race riots, but Lawrence carefully explains, in panel 50, that "many of these riots occurred because the Negro was used as a strike breaker in many of the Northern industries." In other words, racial violence was fomented by the antiunion bosses, not the workers. The next three panels represent the different social conditions migrants experienced, including class discrimination within the urban African American community (panel 53).

Near the end of the series Lawrence takes us briefly back to the South with scenes of the last groups of people to

leave—Negro professionals (panel 56) and female workers such as laundresses (panel 57). The two scenes before the final one show children at school (panel 58) and a voting booth (panel 59). To Lawrence, as to W.E.B. Du Bois and others, better educational facilities and the franchise promised African Americans greater self-respect, although the presence of a white policeman with a billy club at the polls and the regimentation of the voters standing rigidly in line suggests that white political control compromises the freedom won with the vote.⁴⁷ The last, panel 60, swings back to the horizontal format with dozens of migrants standing by the railroad track waiting for their train, and once again the refrain, “And the migrants kept coming.”

Jacob Lawrence’s *Migration* series is greater than the sum of its parts. Given his enormous talent and the encouragement he received from major figures in the cultural and artistic worlds, Lawrence was also in the right place at the right time to undertake such an ambitious project. He created a didactic public art, capable of educating and inspiring Americans looking for jobs and a better life in the northern cities and exploring ways to get along with each other. The visual and textual sources were diverse—ranging from documentary photographs to film to New York modernism and from books and pamphlets in the Schomburg Collection to street-corner lectures, poetry readings in Harlem art centers, and political meetings—but the resulting work of art sprang from Lawrence’s understanding and intuition about the course of American history. He has, in fact, always held to the philosophy that the “Negro experience” is “the American experience.”⁴⁸ Through his own art, that belief rings true.

NOTES

I want to thank Elizabeth Hutton Turner and the team of scholars she put together to advise on this exhibition, particularly Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Richard J. Powell, Jeffrey C. Stewart, Diane Tepfer, and Deborah Willis. I am also grateful to the staff at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute where I was visiting scholar during 1991–92; I want to single out for thanks Professor Gates, Randall K. Burkett, and visiting scholars Amritjit Singh and Robert E. Fox, who advised me at crucial moments. The staffs in the various archives of The Museum of Modern Art, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library, and the Syracuse University Library Special Collections Department were particularly helpful. Kevin Whitfield gave the manuscript his usual astute reading. I also want to acknowledge the encouragement of Terry Dintenfass. The many conversations I have had with Gwen and Jake Lawrence in the last decade have helped me understand not only Jake’s work but the cultural milieu of African Americans in Harlem.

1. Definition by Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 37. This West African term has come into street use today.
2. See Jeffrey C. Stewart, “(Un)Locke(ing) Jacob Lawrence’s *Migration* Series,” and Diane Tepfer, “Edith Gregor Halpert: Impresario of Jacob Lawrence’s *Migration* Series,” both in this catalogue. See also Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 60–65, for a discussion of the *Migration* series.
3. The Modern got the even-numbered panels because Mrs. David M. Levy, their donor, liked no. 46. Lawrence wrote to Halpert in October 1941 from New Orleans that he did not want to break up the set “because the complete story was conceived within the sixty paintings therefore to sell any one painting out of the set would make it an incomplete story.” Downtown Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Downtown Gallery Papers). Lawrence agreed to the split when he learned of the two museums involved.
4. According to Wheat, *Lawrence*, 70, the *Coast Guard* series was housed in the Coast Guard Archives and most were subsequently lost. See Wheat, pls. 32 and 33, for reproductions of two of them.
5. Clipping included in Exhibitions Scrapbook, no. 61, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York City. It was typical for critics at the time to use words such as “primitive” when discussing the art of African Americans.
6. *Art Digest* 19 (November 1, 1944), 7.
7. Catlett’s article was titled “Artist with a Message,” clipping dated October 21, 1944, Exhibitions Scrapbook, no. 61, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York City.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Art News* (October 15, 1944), 15. Loucheim wrote under the name Aline Saarinen after she married Eero Saarinen.
10. See statement issued by the Harmon Foundation, Inc., dated November 12, 1940, Downtown Gallery Papers.
11. Lawrence to Charles Alan, December 29, 1972, collection the artist; quoted in Wheat, *Lawrence*, 35.
12. Many of these left radicals belonged to the Communist Party, which in the summer of 1935 entered into its Popular Front period. The new policy urged an end to radical sectarianism and encouraged the making of broad alliances with a spectrum of liberal groups, including New Deal Democrats, in the fight against fascism. Although, in general, pictorial themes of revolutionary class struggle began to wane, radical artists in the Popular Front period still produced pictures of bloody strikes and lynchings along with their antifascist pictures. The party urged a more balanced view of American history and promoted studies of African American groups and individuals. Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 214, states: “During the Popular Front era, the Party won the respect of many Harlem leaders through its effort to improve conditions in Harlem schools, to have black history recognized and taught, and to remove racially biased teachers and textbooks.”
13. Two antilynching exhibitions were held in New York in 1935. The NAACP organized one that opened at the Jacques Seligmann Galleries on February 16 but closed shortly thereafter. A show sponsored by the John Reed Club, the Artists’ Union, and other left activist organizations opened at the A.C.A. Gallery on March 3.
14. Most published chronologies of Lawrence’s life—see Wheat, *Lawrence*, and Milton W. Brown, *Jacob Lawrence* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974)—give his dates of attendance as 1937 to 1939. However, on his 1940 application to the Rosenwald Fund he states the dates as “1936–1938.” He also gives precise dates as to his tenure as “senior artist” on the WPA: “May, 1938, to October, 1939” at the salary of “\$1000 per year.” In 1939 the WPA instituted a rule dropping

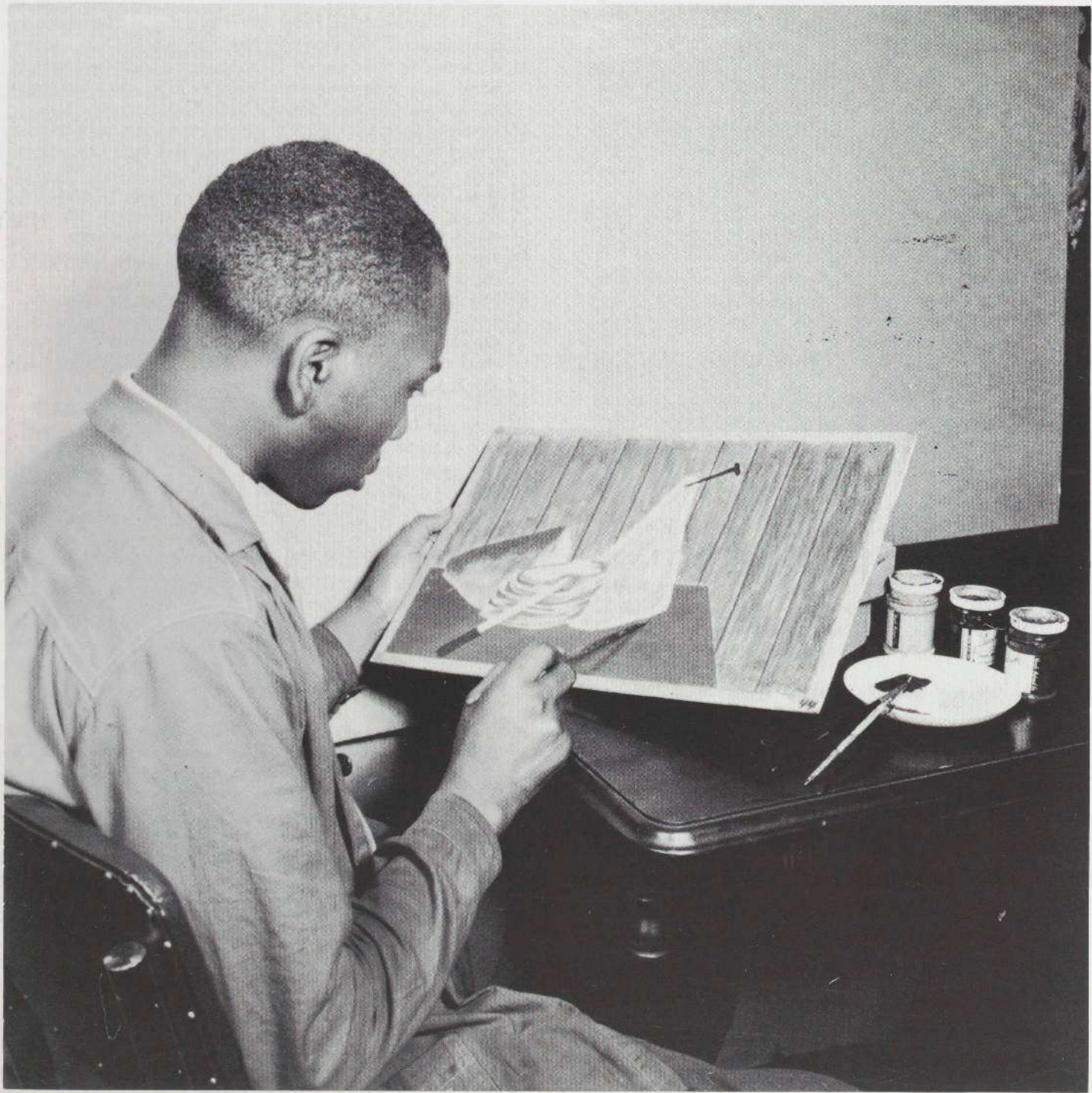
- artists from the rolls after eighteen months. The reapplication process was arduous.
15. The school was the continuation of the art school founded in the early 1930s by the New York Chapter of the John Reed Club, an organization started in 1929 by artist members of the Communist Party and their sympathetic friends. When the party shifted to the Popular Front period in the summer of 1935, the John Reed Clubs and all their projects were disbanded as too politically sectarian for the new policy of alliances with liberal groups. The radical artists then regrouped and formed the American Artists School.
 16. "American Artists School," *Art Front* 3, no. 7 (October 1937): 19. Lawrence's letter from artist-teacher Sol Wilson dated August 26, 1937, awarding him a scholarship, is affixed to a page of a scrapbook that Lawrence kept during these years, now located in the Jacob Lawrence Papers, Syracuse University Library Special Collections Department (hereafter Lawrence Papers). The other faculty offering classes in the fall of 1937 included Alexander Alland, Emilio Amero, Francis Criss, Robert M. Cronbach, Hilda Deutsch, Tully Filmus, Ruth Gikow, Harry Glassgold, Chaim Gross, John Groth, Charles Hanke, Carl R. Holty, Julian E. Levi, Hugh Miller, Eugene Morley, Anton Refregier, Miron Sokole, Moses Soyer, Nahum Tschachbasov, and Lynd Ward (see Lawrence Papers). Other artists connected to the school included Maurice Glickman, Harry Gottlieb, Louis Lozowick, Elizabeth Olds, Walter Quirt, Philip Reisman, and Raphael Soyer (see Stuart Davis Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C.). At one time the board of directors included Stuart Davis, William Gropper, Rockwell Kent, Lewis Mumford, Meyer Schapiro, and Max Weber.

We might consider Gottlieb's response to Lawrence to be typical of the faculty's antiracist social values. In a letter postmarked October 4, 1937, and affixed to the aforementioned scrapbook, Gottlieb wrote: "I consider it an honor to have been of any service to you. Not only was I tremendously impressed by your work as an artist, but also knowing the difficulties that the Negro artist is confronted with, I will do what I can to eliminate that unfairness, so that we may all be treated alike you and me, as artists and as human beings." Lawrence gives Gottlieb credit for arranging the scholarship (Lawrence, taped interview with author, July 25, 1983).
 17. The twenty-six pictures chosen to be reproduced are: nos. 1, 4, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 24, 28, 40, 42, 45, 48, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60. They include the scenes of the lynching noose (panel 16), the race riot (panel 52), the firebombed building (panel 51), and the southern policeman arresting the migrants (panel 42). The editors of *Fortune* abbreviated many of Lawrence's captions but did not essentially censor his words, except for panel 42 where the caption states that the migrants "were held in the railroad station" rather than, in Lawrence's words, "They . . . arrested the Negroes wholesale."
 18. Henry R. Luce, "The American Century," *Life*, February 17, 1941, 63.
 19. *Fortune* carried many such articles on defense at this time, as did *The Crisis*. The latter ran pictures of African American soldiers in the 184th and 349th field artillery regiments in the May 1941 issue; in July 1941 it advertised the NAACP conference that had as its theme "The Negro in National Defense." In August *The Crisis* ran an article, "A Call to Negro Youth," about the need for Negro youth in industry, particularly in the defense industry. The cover of the November 1941 issue pictured a young black man working with sheet metal in a Hampton Institute shop. An analysis of the uses and abuses of racism in the workplace introduces problematical issues that cannot be dealt with here.
 20. When the United States entered World War II, the Office of War Information sent photographers out on assignment to photograph African Americans working for the war effort; the images often show situations of social integration that did not exist in reality. See Barbara Orbach and Nicholas Natanson, "The Mirror Image: Black Washington in World War II," *Washington History* 4 (Spring/Summer 1992): 4–25, 92–93.
 21. "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection, Special Collections, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. (hereafter Rosenwald Fund Collection). I want to thank Elizabeth Turner for providing me with copies of this archival material.
 22. *Ibid.* The issue of "propaganda" engaged writers in the African American community. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in his famous article "Criteria of Negro Art" (*The Crisis*, October 1926, 293): "The apostle of Beauty thus becomes the apostle of Truth and Right not by choice but by inner and outer compulsion. Free he is but his freedom is ever bounded by Truth and Justice; and slavery only dogs him when he is denied the right to tell the Truth or recognize an ideal of Justice."

"Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent."

Locke replied to Du Bois in his essay "Art or Propaganda?" *Harlem* 1 (November 1928): 12. "My chief objection to propaganda, apart from its besetting sin of monotony and disproportion, is that it perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it. For it believes and speaks under the shadow of a dominant majority whom it harangues, cajoles, threatens or supplicates. It is too extroverted for balance or poise or inner dignity and self-respect. Art in the best sense is rooted in self-expression and whether naive or sophisticated is self-contained. In our spiritual growth genius and talent must more and more choose the role of group expression, or even at times the role of free individualistic expression,—in a word must choose art and put aside propaganda."
 23. See Patricia Hills, "Jacob Lawrence as Pictorial Griot: The *Harriet Tubman* Series," *American Art* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 40–59.
 24. Articles for *Art Front*, the magazine for the Artists' Union, throughout its years of publication, had urged artists to cope with the underlying causes of economic and social problems. See, for example, Grace Clements, "New Content—New Form," *Art Front*, March 1936, 8–9.
 25. Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (1920; New York: Arno Press, 1969), 86.
 26. *Ibid.*, 88.
 27. Scott's chapter has its own positive spin in that he hopes that the South will learn from the migration and enact laws and practices to ameliorate the condition of African Americans.
 28. See Wheat, *Lawrence*, 250.
 29. See Deborah Willis, "The Schomburg Collection: A Rich Resource for Jacob Lawrence," in this catalogue.
 30. Lawrence said on his application: "It is important as a part of the evolution of America, since this Migration has affected the whole of America mentally, economically and socially. Since it has had this effect, I feel that my project would lay before the Negroes themselves a little of what part they have played in the History of the United States. In addition, the whole of America might learn some of the history of this particular minority group, of which they know very little" (Lawrence Papers). His proposal included his plan to exhibit the series in schools and public places and to publish it as a book.
 31. Quoted in Bill Moyers, *A World of Ideas: Conversations with Thoughtful Men and Women about American Life Today and The Ideas Shaping Our Future* (New York: Doubleday, 1989). I am grateful to Amritjit Singh for bringing this interview to my attention.
 32. Statement issued by the Harmon Foundation, Inc., dated November 12, 1940, Downtown Gallery Papers.
 33. Other artists of the 1930s made a point to include a variety of skin tones in their pictures of the black community; see the works of

- Archibald Motley and William H. Johnson. White radical artists invariably integrated their figure compositions, for example Diego Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads* (destroyed 1934) for Rockefeller Center.
34. Estimates vary from 15–50 million in the period 1482–1888, according to Molefi K. Asante and Mark T. Mattsool, *Historical and Cultural Atlas of African Americans* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 27.
 35. Wright, in Edwin Rosskam and Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices* (New York: Viking Press, 1941), xix.
 36. Clipping, not dated, affixed to Lawrence scrapbook (early years), Lawrence Papers. "ALA News" is inscribed in ink in the margins. I am grateful to Caroline A. Davis, manuscripts librarian, for sending me a photocopy of the clipping.
 37. See William Alexander, *Film on the Left: American Documentary Film from 1931 to 1942* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).
 38. William Stott, in *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 212, credits the documentary film as a major precedent for the documentary book and quotes Alfred Kazin, "who thought Pare Lorentz had developed this 'new genre' in *The River* [1937], the words and images of which were not only mutually indispensable, a kind of commentary upon each other, but curiously interchangeable." Stott then reminds the reader that earlier books such as the *Pittsburgh Survey* (1909–14) were also sources for the documentary photo-text book.
- Lawrence worked in the CCC for six months in 1936 and may well have seen the film after it premiered in 1937. He knew people in film circles, for in 1940 Jay Leyda, then working in the film department of the Museum of Modern Art, introduced Lawrence to Orozco (Lawrence, conversation with the Phillips team of exhibition consultants, January 15, 1993).
39. Unlike his text for *Harriet Tubman*, which came from two literary sources. See Hills, "Lawrence as Pictorial Griot."
 40. See Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (1918; New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 168: "What then is the cause? There have been *bulldozing*, terrorism, maltreatment and what not of persecution; but the Negroes have not in large numbers wandered away from the land of their birth. What the migrants themselves think about it, goes to the very heart of the trouble. Some say that they left the South on account of injustice in the courts, unrest, lack of privileges, denial of the right to vote, bad treatment, oppression, segregation or lynching. Others say that they left to find employment, to secure better wages, better school facilities, and better opportunities to toil upward." Woodson cites *The Crisis*, July 1917, as a source.
 41. Regarding the three specific cities, Lawrence might have referred to Scott's study, *Negro Migration During the War*, which had chapters on St. Louis and Chicago; Lawrence himself was from New York.
 42. Montaged images of crowds of people moving left, right, back, and toward the front were common in the films of the 1920s; one thinks of Sergei Eisenstein's *Potemkin* (USSR, 1920) and *Strike* (USSR, 1925).
 43. Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, 53, made the point that during the war northern white workers moved to higher-paid jobs in munitions plants, leaving a gap in the ranks of the common laborers.
 44. Lawrence recalled in June 1992 that this scene was intended to represent the view from the window.
 45. Milton W. Brown, in the essay for the first major retrospective exhibition of Lawrence's work, was the first to point out that these captions must only be thought of as texts "for which the picture is a visual equivalent or symbol, rather than a literal illustration." See Wheat and Brown, *Lawrence*, 11.
 46. In the *Migration* series—unlike the *Harriet Tubman* series, where he drew primarily on two written sources—Lawrence drew on many sources for his captions. Du Bois in his various writings for *The Crisis* mentioned aspects of the migration that turn up in Lawrence's imagery.
 47. I had the good fortune to look at these panels with Jeffrey Stewart as they hung at The Phillips Collection in June 1992; I am grateful to him for pointing out the billy club.
 48. Lawrence, conversation with author, February 27, 1993.



Jacob Lawrence with *Migration* series panel 44, ca. 1941. Lawrence mixed his own colors; he did not use the commercially produced paints shown in this photograph (National Archives, Harmon Foundation Collection).

Precision and Spontaneity: Jacob Lawrence's Materials and Techniques

ELIZABETH STEELE AND SUSANA M. HALPINE

Jacob Lawrence's economy of line and color are a particularly striking feature of his *Migration* series. He says about his process, "I am not the kind of person to drag a painting out. I work direct."¹ His success in obtaining such charged depictions of the African American migration north derives from his individualistic use of materials and his unique approach to technique, both of which he manipulates to suit the series format. Undertaking a work of art composed of sixty parts forced Lawrence to proceed methodically, yet the images appear spontaneous, full of movement and action.² His choice of a fast-drying medium, casein tempera, suits his ability to capture the essence of a moment with limited means. The result is a narrative that is both expressive and forceful.

Lawrence executed the series on standard-size, eighteen-by-twelve-inch hardboard panels that he bought from a local supplier. His choice of support was based on both size and cost.³ Dimension and shape were also in Lawrence's mind when he envisioned exhibiting the paintings as an entity; alternating horizontal and vertical formats would give the work of art "a certain interest, a certain rhythm."⁴ With the help of his wife Gwen, he prepared the smooth side of the panels with a gesso of rabbit-skin glue and whiting.⁵ Working on the floor and on a table made of two sawhorses and a board, they brushed three or four coats of the preparation layer across the surface of the panels and then sanded them smooth when dry.⁶ Lawrence humorously recalls preparing all the panels at once, despite the large number involved: "You know, when you're young these things go very fast."⁷

The preparation layer has a profound influence on the appearance of the paintings. Viewed under high magnification, a dense matrix of air bubbles is visible in the gesso, causing this layer to be very porous. As paint is

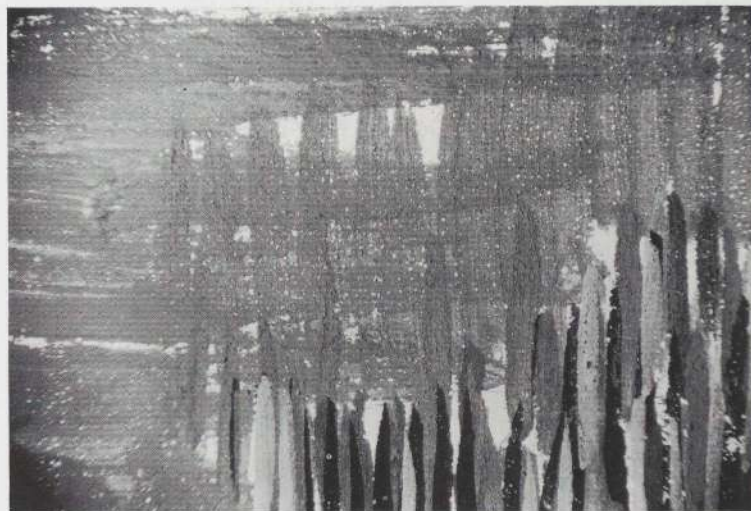


Fig. 1. Photomicrograph of patch of grass (center), middle ground of panel 39. Pinpoint voids in the preparation layer, visible as tiny white dots, give texture to the paint film.



Fig. 2. Photomicrograph of pinhole, upper right corner of panel 51, where preparatory drawing was attached to the prepared surface. Pinpoint voids in the ground layer are also visible as tiny white dots surrounding the pinhole.

brushed across the ground layer, it is drawn into a surface pitted with tiny voids, causing white dots to appear in the paint film; these dots are particularly noticeable in the darker passages (figs. 1, 2). Since gesso grounds are traditionally uniform and smooth in texture, the cause of this extremely porous, pitted surface is of interest. Artists' handbooks warn that air bubbles may develop if the glue solution is too dilute or too concentrated, if it is stirred too vigorously, or if it is prepared in a cold or damp room.⁸ One text advises that the gesso should never "stand over hot water a second longer than is absolutely necessary or you will find your gesso full of air bubbles."⁹ The air bubbles in Lawrence's panels are probably due to a combination of factors: the need to prepare a large number of panels may have led him to dilute his recipe; the time involved may have meant the gesso sat on a hot burner for a long period; or environmental conditions may have played a part (Gwen Lawrence recalls the West 125th Street studio being without heat).¹⁰ Both the *Frederick Douglass* and the *Harriet Tubman* series of 1938–40, which are painted in the same medium, have gesso grounds that exhibit the same surface characteristics.¹¹ When asked if he developed the porous ground to create a certain effect such as a fresco-type surface, Lawrence replied that the effect was not intentional. However, pointing to an area in one panel in which the pinpoint white dots were prevalent, he remarked, "if I see something happening which I like, I let it happen. . . . If I got something going like this and I liked it, I let it stay."¹² This improvisational approach to his materials is a key aspect of his process.

Lawrence made preparatory drawings for his compositions (location unknown). Pinholes in all four corners of the panels attest that he affixed the drawings to the panels and then traced onto the gesso (fig. 2).¹³ He does not recall the exact method he used to transfer them, but the result is a rather faint underdrawing with the deposit of meager amounts of graphite (fig. 3).¹⁴ Lawrence traced only the larger sections of his drawings, then sometimes added the details freehand with a graphite pencil or often let the development of specifics wait until the painting stage. He explained his rationale: "You can get some nice things going that way . . . you can trace a thing almost exactly as it is and it falls dead. It's flat."¹⁵ His underdrawing was to serve only as a framework for the freedom of his exploration in paint. Lawrence's inventiveness in the absence of a completely



Fig. 3. Close-up infrared photograph of underdrawing for the knot in the sack, panel 39. The evenness and lack of hesitation in the line indicate that it resulted from some type of transfer technique rather than from freehand drawing. Below the knot, faint freehand underdrawing is also present, used to loosely suggest the sack.

worked-up underdrawing is vividly experienced in the woman's garment in panel 53 (fig. 4). Although the general shape of the coat is established, there is no underdrawing for the expressive swirls of the brush that capture the essence of the exotic fur and boa.

Lawrence conceived of the series as a single work of art, not as sixty individual paintings. It was of paramount importance to him that the panels retain a unity, for he feared that if he "executed each panel separately . . . I would maybe feel different from the sixtieth panel than I would from the first."¹⁶ Therefore, he systematically worked on the sixty panels simultaneously. Starting with the darkest color, black, he painted in all the blacks on each panel. He went on to complete the series by moving from the darker values



Fig. 4. Close-up of woman's coat, panel 53. Lawrence painted directly on the panel, with no underdrawing, to arrive at the swirling brush strokes that succinctly capture the essence of the exotic garment.

to the lighter, applying each color to all the panels in succession.¹⁷ His pure colors—ivory black, brown umber, yellow ochre, vermilion, ultramarine, viridian, cadmium orange, and cadmium yellow—are all easily identifiable on sight. Lawrence prepared batches of casein, generally using a single pigment for each color with little mixing to obtain different hues.¹⁸ He sometimes mixed white with blues and greens to obtain different shades of these colors, but these colors are the exceptions and not the rule. Lawrence's systematic approach was again at work in his conscious choice of unmixed colors, which enabled him to make the series a unit by keeping his tones consistent from panel to panel without having to prepare large amounts of paint at a time.¹⁹

Lawrence does not use tempera in the traditional technique, modeling shapes by placing individual, small brush strokes side by side in the manner of the fifteenth-century Renaissance artist Carlo Crivelli, whose work he admired.²⁰ Nor does he create volume by building up thin layers of paint as did his contemporaries Romare Bearden and Ben Shahn, who were also using aqueous media at that time. Instead, he generally paints in one layer, and he achieves a sense of movement and space with his strong sense of line and by varying his brushwork and juxtaposing flat, opaque passages next to more transparent ones or areas in which his brushwork is expressive. This great range is evident in panel 11, where Lawrence varies the textural qualities of his paint to contrast forms and elicit a mood. The woman, child, and table are painted in uniformly applied thick paint with no evident brush strokes. In a single line, Lawrence is able to convey the asymmetrical tilt of the sharply shifted shoulders of the woman as she uses all her weight to cut through the thick slab of fatback. The figures are set off in space by the vibrant brushwork on the green wall behind them. This spontaneous, expressive manipulation of the green paint, which has a life of its own, places the mood of the scene as a serious one. The simplicity and severity of the wood floor is effectively rendered using a dry brush technique, a device Lawrence skillfully employs throughout the series to describe certain textures.

Lawrence's command of aqueous media is clear in his capacity to push the limits of the casein tempera. He describes his own working method as a "mechanical process" in which invention and creativity enter into the development of an image.²¹ Reflecting on the second-nature aspect of his technique and his intuitive response to composition, Lawrence rejects the notion of complexity: "You have a feeling for space. You have a feeling for design. I think people do the same things in their homes: If you decorate a room you don't put everything on one side, even if you've never gone to art school: Without even knowing the term design you have a feeling for space, color, texture."²² Lawrence knows remarkably well how to get the most from a medium that does not accommodate changes and cannot be worked on the surface. In panel 5, he succinctly depicts the headlight of the train as it penetrates the night sky by abruptly changing the tone of the sky from a dark to a light blue. Through his manipulation of the paint he



Fig. 5. Close-up of train headlight, panel 5. By varying his brushwork and paint application, Lawrence effectively rendered the appearance of a light piercing the dark sky.

conjures up the misty quality of the light by emphasizing the brush strokes in the conical area lit by the headlight and leaving the surrounding evening opaque and flatly painted (fig. 5). In panel 51, he impulsively achieves a violence in the flames that burst from the windows by using long, single, unbroken brush strokes in black and primary colors. The quick-drying casein tempera obliged Lawrence to get his meaning down quickly in the forceful, individual lines whose bright color sharply contrasts with the gray buildings.

Lawrence was obviously confident of his technique. In his application of paint, spontaneity and chance have equal weight with his systematic working method. The surface textures and shapes are at once intuitive developments and the consequence of working within the limitations of the medium. His paintings reflect a striking absence of changes. He is extraordinarily adept at translating feelings and

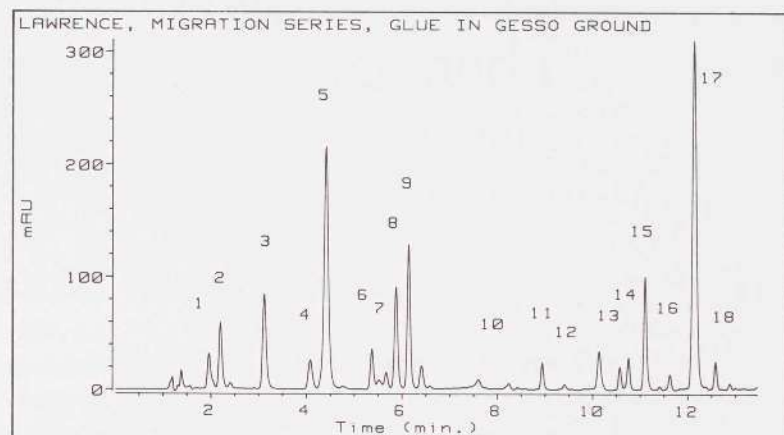
portraying moments with economy of means in a fast-drying aqueous medium, manipulating it to fit his precise yet improvisational reaction to color, line, and texture.

NOTES

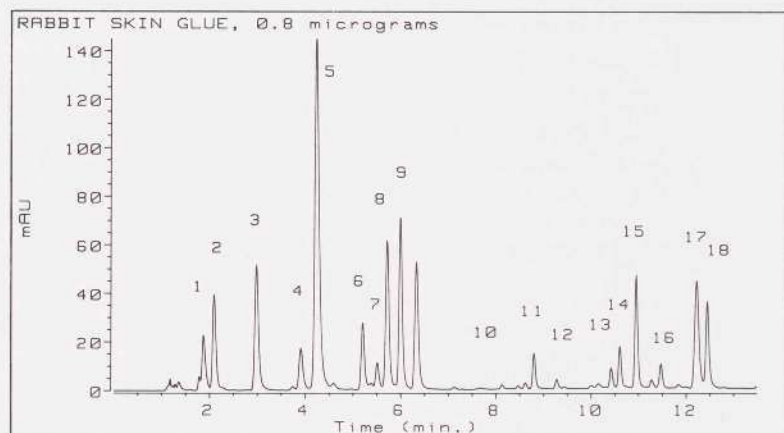
We would like to thank staff members of the Conservation Department, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., for their kind assistance in writing this essay. In particular, we would like to thank E. René de la Rie, Sarah Fisher, and Catherine Metzger for facilitating the technical examination of the paintings. Finally, we are extremely grateful to Elizabeth Hutton Turner for her steadfast encouragement.

1. Lawrence, interview with authors, Elizabeth Chew, and Shelley Wischhusen-Treece, The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., June 4, 1992 (hereafter interview, June 4, 1992).
2. Lawrence, interview with Elizabeth Hutton Turner, Seattle, Washington, October 3, 1992 (hereafter interview, October 3, 1992).
3. Interview, June 4, 1992.
4. Interview, October 3, 1992.
5. Because of the likelihood that a proteinaceous binder was used, medium identification of the preparatory layer using amino acid analysis was undertaken by Susana Halpine, biochemist in the Scientific Research Department at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (figs. 6,7). Small samples (2–4 micrograms) were taken by Elizabeth Steele from the edges of the supports for analysis. Amino acid analysis involves first breaking down the proteins in the binders into their constituent amino acids and then matching the amino acid composition with known materials. All samples underwent a water extraction to separate the water-soluble proteins (supernatant) from the water-insoluble proteins and insoluble pigments (precipitate). The extraction is done before the hydrolysis so that the mixtures or adjoining layers of proteinaceous materials can be more clearly characterized. Hydrochloric acid in vapor phase is used to hydrolyze, or break down, the samples. The free amino acids must then be labeled with a specific reagent in order to distinguish them from other organic materials. Therefore, the samples, now containing free amino acids, are derivatized with phenylisothiocyanate (PITC) according to the Picotag protocol developed by the Waters Division, Millipore Corporation. After the phenylthiocarbonyl-amino acids are formed, they are separated and quantitated using high-pressure liquid chromatography (HPLC). The resulting percent composition of the samples is compared with the composition of known materials, such as animal glue, casein, egg yolk, and egg white. Animal glue is characterized by 10% hydroxyproline, 30% glycine, and approximately a 1:8 ratio of serine-to-glycine. The analytical results of the preparation layer were very clear. The amino acid composition of the ground matched that of animal glue, with 10% hydroxyproline and 30% glycine. For further information, refer to the in-house report by Halpine, Scientific Research Department, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., file date August 11, 1992.
6. Interview, June 4, 1992; interview, October 3, 1992. Ellen Harkins Wheat also described Lawrence's preparation of the panels in *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 60–61.
7. Interview, June 4, 1992.
8. Ralph Mayer, *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques* (New York: Viking Press, 1940), 270. In the June 1992 interview, Lawrence recalled owning both Ralph Mayer's book and Max Doerner's *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934). However, he believed he got his gesso recipe from another artist rather than from an artist's handbook.
9. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr., *The Practice of Tempera Painting, Materials and Methods* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 27.

Fig. 6. Chromatograms showing amino acid analysis results of animal glue in gesso ground sample no. 1 from panel 59 (fig. 6a) and rabbit-skin glue reference sample (0.8 micrograms) (fig. 6b).



6a



6b

Key

1: aspartate; 2: glutamate; 3: hydroxyproline; 4: serine; 5: glycine; 6: arginine; 7: threonine; 8: alanine; 9: proline; 10: tyrosine; 11: valine; 12: methionine; 13: isoleucine; 14: leucine; 15: norleucine, internal standard; 16: phenylalanine; 17: reagent; 18: lysine.

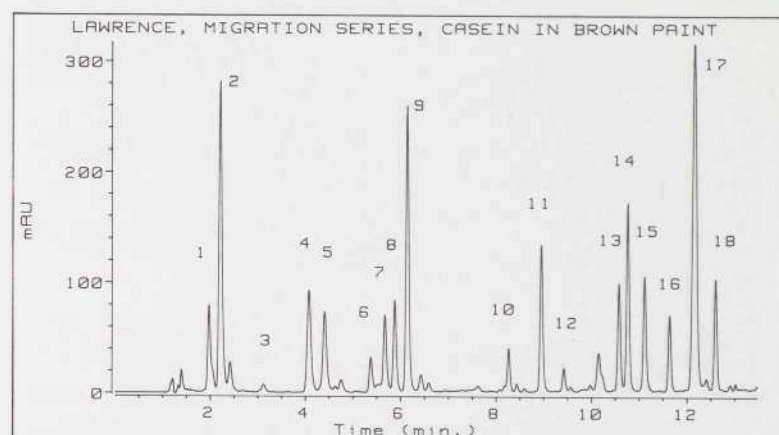
10. Interview, October 3, 1992.

11. Wheat, *Lawrence*, 46.

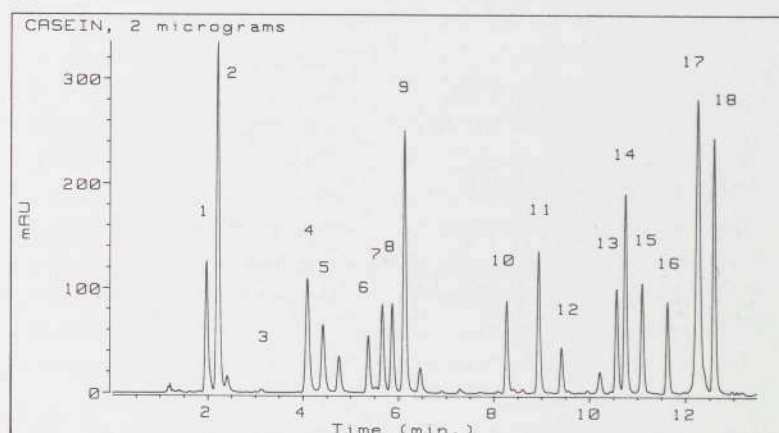
12. Interview, June 4, 1992.

13. Interview, June 4, 1992. On each panel there are nearly identical pinholes in approximately the same locations with accompanying loss of ground and paint. Examination under high magnification reveals that the wood fibers in the hardboard are swollen and protrude forward from the surface and that, in numerous instances, paint used on the borders lies deep inside the pinholes. It appears that when the preparatory drawing was removed from the prepared panel, a hole was made in the gesso; however, there initially was no significant loss. When Lawrence painted the border, water went into the pinholes, causing the wood fibers to swell, which in turn caused the gesso to lift and eventually flake from the surface. This occurred early in the history of the panels, since a 1941 installation photograph from the Downtown Gallery exhibition shows the losses. Lawrence said that he felt the pinholes were part of the history of the panels and that the losses should not be restored but left visible. In the same vein, Lawrence did not feel it was necessary to retouch every minor blemish his pictures had suffered over the years. He felt restoration was

Fig. 7. Chromatograms showing amino acid analysis results of casein paint in dark brown paint sample no. 2 from panel 39 (fig. 7a) and casein reference sample (2.0 micrograms) (fig. 7b).



7a



7b

advisable only if a damage or scratch had become a source of insecurity or if it broke up his form visually.

14. Although his exact transfer technique is not known, it probably involved rubbing the back of the preparatory sheet with graphite and then pressing the main elements from the front of the drawing onto the gessoed surface. His process resulted in no hesitation or unevenness as there would be in a freehand drawing; rather, the lines are smooth and uniform, with a deliberate feel and little overlapping at intersections.

15. Interview, June 4, 1992; Lawrence, telephone conversation with Elizabeth Steele, November 19, 1992.

16. Interview, October 3, 1992.

17. Interview, June 4, 1992; Wheat, *Lawrence*, 40.

18. Interview, June 4, 1992. Medium identification was carried out on the paint by Susana Halpine using the analytical method described in n. 5. The composition of the paint layer matched that of casein, with 20% glutamate and 14% proline.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

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Chronology

Jacob Lawrence and the *Migration* Series

STEPHEN BENNETT PHILLIPS

1917

September 7: Jacob Lawrence is born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, as thousands of African Americans are migrating from the South to the industrial North. This massive shift is brought about by social and economic factors including the fear of violence, the scourge of the boll weevil, the lack of political power, and segregation and discrimination. The migrants hope for high-paying jobs in such cities as New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Detroit, where industry is gearing up for war. Most are young, unmarried, and unskilled.

1918

Carter G. Woodson's *A Century of Negro Migration* is published.

1919

Lawrence's family moves to Easton, Pennsylvania; his sister Geraldine is born.

1920

Emmett J. Scott's *Negro Migration During the War* is published; it is probably a source for Lawrence's *Migration* series of 1940–41.

1924

Lawrence's parents are separated. His mother moves with the children to Philadelphia, and a third child, William, is born.

1925

In "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," published in *Survey Graphic* (March 1), critic and writer Alain Le Roy Locke identifies a profound new pride, independence, and intolerance of bigotry in African Americans who move north. The same issue points to Harlem as the center of the African American world.

1930

Harlem has the largest concentration of African Americans in the country and is home to 72 percent of African Americans in New York City. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, 87,417 African Americans moved into the community between 1920–30, while 118,792 whites left. When annexed as part of the

city in 1873, Harlem was populated by older residents who wanted to escape the noise and new immigrants of lower New York. With the extension of the subway into Harlem in the 1890s, a real estate boom began. But by 1904 the area was overbuilt and overpriced; banks stopped making loans and foreclosed on mortgages. Some landlords started renting to African Americans, who traditionally paid higher prices. Soon Harlem attracted people from established African American sections as well as southerners. Many African American churches moved from Manhattan to Harlem; by becoming the largest African American property owners, the churches helped transform Harlem to an African American neighborhood. By the mid-1920s the headquarters of most New York City African American institutions—fraternal orders, social service agencies, and churches—had moved to Harlem.

1930–31

Lawrence moves to Harlem and lives in the upper 130s and 140s between Lenox and Seventh avenues near Striver's Row. He attends Frederick Douglass Junior High School and the day-care program at Utopia House, where he studies arts and crafts with Charles Alston, who becomes a mentor.

1931

Alain Locke publishes "The American Negro as Artist," in which he states that a unique African American aesthetic sensibility could be translated into art.

1932

Lawrence again studies with Charles Alston, this time at the Harlem Art Workshop at the New York Public Library's 135th Street Branch. He continues there until 1934, when he starts working at Alston's studio, which is home to the WPA Harlem Art Workshop. For a small fee, he is able to remain there until 1940.

1936

Lawrence sees W.E.B. Du Bois's play *Haiti* at the Lafayette Theater. He begins extensive research on the topic at the Schomburg Collection of the 135th Street Branch Library in

preparation for his *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series, the first of his many historical narrative series. The series would be completed in 1938 and consists of forty-one paintings depicting the important episodes in Haiti's fight for independence.

The 135th Street Branch—a resource for many of Lawrence's narratives, including the *Migration* series—opened in 1905 to serve a twenty-block area of Harlem. It played an important role in acculturating southern migrants. In 1925 the Division of Negro History, Literature, and Prints was inaugurated, and the next year the New York Public Library, with the help of the Carnegie Foundation, purchased Arthur Schomburg's collection of books, manuscripts, and artwork for the division, making it the world's largest collection of materials relating to African Americans.

Lawrence is awarded a scholarship to the American Artists School, 131 West 14th Street, New York, where he receives his first academic training outside Harlem. He studies there until 1938 under artists such as Harry Gottlieb, Louis Lozowick, and Anton Refregier.

1937

Lawrence's work is exhibited for the first time when six pencil drawings are on view at a Harlem Artists Guild group show at the 135th Street Branch Library in April. Another group exhibition follows at the American Artists School.

1938

At the insistence of Augusta Savage, an African American artist and teacher at the Harlem Art Workshop, Lawrence is hired by the WPA Federal Art Project. He stays for eighteen months, completing an average of two paintings every six weeks. In February, Lawrence has his first one-person exhibition at the Harlem YMCA.

June 10: Arthur A. Schomburg dies. Since 1932 he had presided over his collection at the 135th Street Branch Library. In October 1939 the Division of Negro History, Literature, and Prints is renamed the Schomburg Collection of Negro History and Literature.

1938–39

As part of the Federal Art Project, Lawrence paints the *Frederick Douglass* series, thirty-three narrative panels depicting the life of the Maryland slave turned abolitionist, speaker, and writer.

1939

Lawrence has his first one-person show outside Harlem when the *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series is exhibited at the De Porres Interracial Council headquarters on Vesey Street.

February: "An Exhibition of Contemporary Negro Art" is presented at the Baltimore Museum of Art in cooperation with the Harmon Foundation, an organization supporting the development of African American art. Lawrence's *Toussaint* series has a room of its own.

1939–40

As part of the Federal Art Project, Lawrence paints the *Harriet Tubman* series, thirty-one narrative panels documenting the life of the great conductor on the Underground Railroad.

1940

Alain Locke's *The Negro in Art: A Pictorial Record of the Negro Artist and of the Negro Theme in Art* is published; it includes the work of Jacob Lawrence.

In the spring Lawrence writes Locke asking for a reference in support of his fellowship application to the Julius Rosenwald Fund: "My proposed plan of work is to interpret in a sufficient number of panels (from 40 to 50—18 × 12 [inches]) the great Negro migration north during the World War. I think this will make a colorful and interesting work, as any group migration is in itself."¹

April 17: Lawrence is awarded a \$1,500 fellowship, which allows him to rent his first studio for \$8 a month in a loft building occupied by other artists at 33 West 125th Street. From 1940–41 he conducts research in the Schomburg Collection and paints the sixty panels of the *Migration* series. In preparing and gessoing the panels Lawrence enlists the help of Gwendolyn Knight, an artist he met at the Harlem Community Art Center.

1941

Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States is published, with text by Richard Wright and photo editing by Edwin Rosskam. It contains nearly 150 photographs from the Farm Security Administration.

June 9: Edith Gregor Halpert, founder of the Downtown Gallery, writes Locke praising his book *The Negro in Art*. She proposes "to introduce Negro art in a large inclusive exhibition . . . following the outline in your book, but limiting it entirely to the work of American Negroes of the Nineteenth and Twentieth century." Locke responds, "Have you seen the work of Jacob Lawrence? I can and will bring along some photographs."²

July 24: Lawrence marries Gwendolyn Knight. They travel to New Orleans, their first trip south. While there Lawrence paints the *John Brown* series, twenty-two panels depicting the story of the man whose raid on Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, helped bring about the Civil War. This project is supported by a \$1,200 renewal of his Rosenwald Fund fellowship.

August 13: Halpert writes Lawrence in New Orleans to report that *Fortune* magazine is interested in publishing part of the *Migration* series; she expresses interest in having her gallery represent him.

October: Lawrence writes to Halpert: "I have finally decided not to break up the [*Migration*] series. I have reached this conclusion because the complete story was conceived within the sixty paintings; therefore to sell any one painting out of the set 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 \$2000 for the complete set."³

November: *Fortune* publishes a color portfolio of twenty-six panels of the *Migration* series, with text. The Downtown Gallery commemorates the event by exhibiting the series in its main gallery.

December 8: The "American Negro Art" exhibition planned by Halpert and Locke, which includes the *Migration* series, opens at the Downtown Gallery. The gala celebration is overshadowed by the attack on Pearl Harbor the previous day.

Locke writes Lawrence to report that the exhibition "was beautifully set up, and was quite an artistic success. . . . Your work was very much admired; . . . and there are several interested sources for the *Migration* series. With patience I believe they will be sold intact. Mrs. Halpert is conscientious about your interest. She wants you as one of her regular artists, and I strongly advise you to sign. I do not think you will ever regret it. Mr. Barr of The Modern Museum was in three or four times, and liked the whole show, but particularly your work."⁴

1942

January 17: Halpert writes Adele Rosenwald Levy thanking her for serving as a sponsor of "American Negro Art" and proposing that she purchase half the *Migration* series for The Museum of Modern Art. Halpert says that "a good many authorities in the art world consider the series one of the most important contributions to contemporary art. While institutions and artist were eager to buy single panels . . . we all agreed that it would be an unfortunate idea to break up this extraordinary series. We are considering dividing it into two groups of 30 each. Various visitors and members of the Museum of Modern Art agree with me that at least thirty of these panels should be in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. Mr. Barr has expressed his enthusiasm for these panels and I have reasons to believe that they will be accepted with great appreciation. We feel that the Museum of Modern Art is the logical institution for this collection and that it would benefit not only the Museum and its public, but the artist and his race."⁵

February–May: The Lawrences visit his family in rural Lenexa, Virginia.

February–March: Adele Rosenwald Levy purchases the odd-numbered works in the *Migration* series for The Museum of Modern Art, and Duncan Phillips purchases the even-numbered panels for the Phillips Memorial Gallery. Each pays \$1,000.

February 14–March 3: The *Migration* series is exhibited at The Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, D.C.

April 18: The Julius Rosenwald Fund renews Lawrence's fellowship again for \$1,200 to paint a Harlem series of thirty genre paintings.

June: The Lawrences return to New York City and reside at 72 Hamilton Terrace, Harlem.

1942–44

The Museum of Modern Art organizes a national tour of the *Migration* series, which travels to: Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York (October 1–22); Kalamazoo Institute, Kalamazoo, Michigan (November 1–22); Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire (December 1–22); Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts (January 1–31, 1943); Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts (March 12–April 2); California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco (April 16–May 7); Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon (May 17–June 7); Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento, California (September 3–24); Mr. William Hill, Los Angeles (December 12–January 1944); The Principia, St. Louis (January 21–February 5); Indiana University, Bloomington (February 14–March 6); West Virginia State College, Institute, West Virginia (March 20–April 10); Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, Connecticut (April 24–May 15); Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (May 29–June 19); and Museum of Modern Art, New York (October 10–November 5).

1943

The Lawrences leave Harlem for 385 Decatur Street, Brooklyn. Lawrence is drafted into the U.S. Coast Guard as a steward's mate. He continues painting while in the service.

1944

October 10–November 5: The *Migration* series is exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art along with eight new works from the *Coast Guard* series.

1945

February 11–16: The *Migration* series is exhibited at the Brooklyn YWCA in connection with Negro History Week.

December 6: Lawrence is discharged from the Coast Guard.

1946

Summer: Lawrence teaches at Black Mountain College, Asheville, North Carolina.

1946–47

Lawrence uses a 1945 Guggenheim Fellowship to produce the *War* series, fourteen panels based on his war experience.

1947

Fortune commissions Lawrence to paint ten works depicting conditions in the South after World War II and publishes them, in the August 1948 issue with text by Walker Evans.

1948

Lawrence receives the Norman Wait Harris Silver Medal and prize for his entry, *Migration*, in the Art Institute of Chicago's Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Society for Contemporary Art. He produces six illustrations on the migration theme for Langston Hughes's book of poetry, *One-Way Ticket*.

1949–50

Lawrence produces the *Hospital* series during his year of psychiatric treatment at Hillside Hospital, Queens, New York.

1951–52

Lawrence produces the *Theater* series, twelve panels inspired by recollections of the Apollo Theater in Harlem.

1953

Lawrence becomes affiliated with the Charles Alan Gallery and is no longer represented by the Downtown Gallery.

1955–56

After conducting research at the Schomburg Collection, Lawrence produces thirty panels of the *Struggle: From the History of the American People* series, which begins in 1775 with Patrick Henry and ends in 1817 with the westward movement. Sixty panels were planned, taking the series through 1908.

1960

The Brooklyn Museum organizes the first major retrospective of Lawrence's work, which travels to sixteen cities.

1962

The Lawrences visit Africa for the first time.

December: Twenty-four panels from the *Migration* series are exhibited at The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

1966

Lawrence is appointed instructor at the New School for Social Research, New York City; he holds this position for three years.

1969

November 14–December 7: The *Migration* series is part of an exhibition on Jacob Lawrence at St. Paul's School, Concord, New Hampshire.

1970

February 14–March 29: The *Migration* series is included in the exhibition "Dimensions of Black" at the La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California.

Lawrence is appointed visiting artist at the University of Washington, Seattle. In 1971 he is appointed full professor, and the Lawrences move permanently to Seattle.

1971

July 1–September 27: The *Migration* series is included in the exhibition "The Artist as Adversary" at The Museum of Modern Art.

1972

September 10–October 23: The *Migration* series is exhibited at The Phillips Collection.

1973

Lawrence returns to the historical narrative with the *George Washington Bush* series. Commissioned by the state of Washington, the series depicts the journey of a black explorer across the Oregon Trail to the West Coast.

1976

Lawrence uses the migration theme in the serigraph *The Migrants Arrive and Cast Their Ballots*, part of a portfolio of silkscreen prints by twelve artists to celebrate the Bicentennial.

1982

Lawrence paints another historical theme in the *Hiroshima* series of eight works to accompany a special edition of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*.

December 8–January 16, 1983: The *Migration* series is included in an exhibition of Lawrence's works at the Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables, Florida.

1993

"Jacob Lawrence: The *Migration* Series" is on view at The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (September 23, 1993–January 9, 1994) and begins a two-year tour.

NOTES

This chronology is based on transcripts of interviews with Jacob Lawrence; the essays in this catalogue; Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and Seattle Art Museum, 1986); Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); Elinor Des Verney Sinnette, *Arthur A. Schomburg* (Detroit: New York Public Library and Wayne State University Press, 1989); Jeffrey Stewart, *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987); and Gary A. Reynolds and Beryl J. Wright, *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation* (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 1989). In addition, this chronology is indebted to the review and contributions of Jeffrey Stewart and Diane Tepfer.

1. Jacob Lawrence to Julius Rosenwald Fund, Rosenwald Fund Collection, Special Collections, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn.
2. Alain Locke to Edith Halpert, June 16, 1941, Downtown Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
3. Lawrence to Halpert, n.d. [October 1941], Downtown Gallery Papers.
4. Locke to Lawrence re success of Downtown Gallery exhibition, ca. December 1941 or early 1942, Alain Locke Papers, Moorland Springarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.
5. Halpert to Mrs. Adele M. Levy, January 17, 1942, Downtown Gallery Papers.

Exhibition Checklist

In 1993 Jacob Lawrence revised his 1940–41 narrative for *The Migration of the Negro*. His original text accompanies the color plates of the series (see pp. 54–127), and his revised text is included in this checklist.

Each painting measures 12 in. × 18 in. and is executed in tempera on masonite. The odd-numbered panels are in The Phillips Collection (TPC); the even-numbered panels are in The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

- | | | | | | |
|----|------|---|----|------|---|
| 1 | TPC | During World War I there was a great migration north by southern African Americans. | 13 | TPC | The crops were left to dry and rot. There was no one to tend them. |
| 2 | MoMA | The war had caused a labor shortage in northern industry. Citizens of foreign countries were returning to their native lands. | 14 | MoMA | For African Americans there was no justice in the southern courts. |
| 3 | TPC | From every southern town migrants left by the hundreds to travel north. | 15 | TPC | There were lynchings. |
| 4 | MoMA | All other sources of labor having been exhausted, the migrants were the last resource. | 16 | MoMA | After a lynching the migration quickened. |
| 5 | TPC | Migrants were advanced passage on the railroads, paid for by northern industry. Northern industry was to be repaid by the migrants out of their future wages. | 17 | TPC | Tenant farmers received harsh treatment at the hands of planters. |
| 6 | MoMA | The trains were crowded with migrants. | 18 | MoMA | The migration gained in momentum. |
| 7 | TPC | The migrant, whose life had been rural and nurtured by the earth, was now moving to urban life dependent on industrial machinery. | 19 | TPC | There had always been discrimination. |
| 8 | MoMA | Some left because of promises of work in the North. Others left because their farms had been devastated by floods. | 20 | MoMA | In many of the communities the Black press was read with great interest. It encouraged the movement. |
| 9 | TPC | They left because the boll weevil had ravaged the cotton crop. | 21 | TPC | Families arrived at the station very early. They did not wish to miss their trains north. |
| 10 | MoMA | They were very poor. | 22 | MoMA | Migrants left. They did not feel safe. It was not wise to be found on the streets late at night. They were arrested on the slightest provocation. |
| 11 | TPC | Food had doubled in price because of the war. | 23 | TPC | The migration spread. |
| 12 | MoMA | The railroad stations were at times so crowded with people leaving that special guards had to be called to keep order. | 24 | MoMA | Their children were forced to work in the fields. They could not go to school. |
| | | | 25 | TPC | They left their homes. Soon some communities were left almost empty. |
| | | | 26 | MoMA | And people all over the South continued to discuss this great movement. |
| | | | 27 | TPC | Many men stayed behind until they could take their families north with them. |
| | | | 28 | MoMA | The labor agent sent south by northern industry was a familiar presence in the Black communities. |
| | | | 29 | TPC | The labor agent recruited unsuspecting laborers as strike breakers for northern industries. |
| | | | 30 | MoMA | In every southern home people met to decide whether or not to go north. |

- 31 TPC The migrants found improved housing when they arrived north.
- 32 MoMA The railroad stations in the South were crowded with northbound travelers.
- 33 TPC Letters from relatives in the North told of the better life there.
- 34 MoMA The Black press urged the people to leave the South.
- 35 TPC They left the South in great numbers. They arrived in the North in great numbers.
- 36 MoMA Migrants arrived in Chicago, the gateway to the West.
- 37 TPC Many migrants found work in the steel industry.
- 38 MoMA They also worked on the railroads.
- 39 TPC Railroad platforms were piled high with luggage.
- 40 MoMA The migrants arrived in great numbers.
- 41 TPC The South was desperate to keep its cheap labor. Northern labor agents were jailed or forced to operate in secrecy.
- 42 MoMA To make it difficult for the migrants to leave, they were arrested en masse. They often missed their trains.
- 43 TPC In a few sections of the South leaders of both Black and White communities met to discuss ways of making the South a good place to live.
- 44 MoMA But living conditions were better in the North.
- 45 TPC The migrants arrived in Pittsburgh, one of the great industrial centers of the North.
- 46 MoMA Industries boarded their workers in unhealthy quarters. Labor camps were numerous.
- 47 TPC As the migrant population grew, good housing became scarce. Workers were forced to live in overcrowded and dilapidated tenement houses.
- 48 MoMA Housing was a serious problem.
- 49 TPC They found discrimination in the North. It was a different kind.
- 50 MoMA Race riots were numerous. White workers were hostile toward the migrants who had been hired to break strikes.
- 51 TPC African Americans seeking to find better housing attempted to move into new areas. This resulted in the bombing of their new homes.
- 52 MoMA One of the most violent race riots occurred in East St. Louis.
- 53 TPC African Americans, long-time residents of northern cities, met the migrants with aloofness and disdain.
- 54 MoMA For the migrants, the church was the center of life.
- 55 TPC The migrants, having moved suddenly into a crowded and unhealthy environment, soon contracted tuberculosis. The death rate rose.
- 56 MoMA The African American professionals were forced to follow their clients in order to make a living.
- 57 TPC The female workers were the last to arrive north.
- 58 MoMA In the North the African American had more educational opportunities.
- 59 TPC In the North they had the freedom to vote.
- 60 MoMA And the migrants kept coming.

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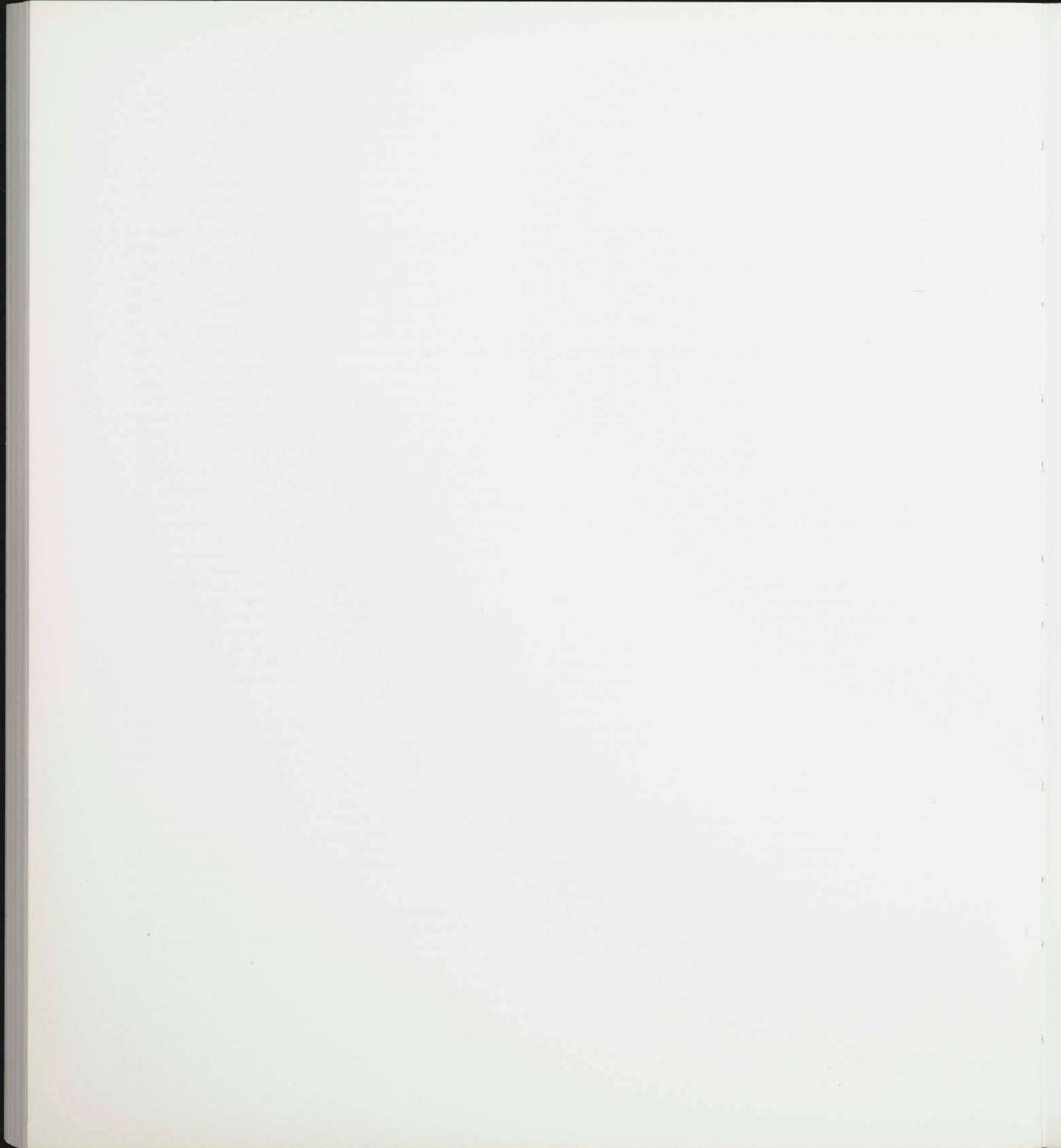
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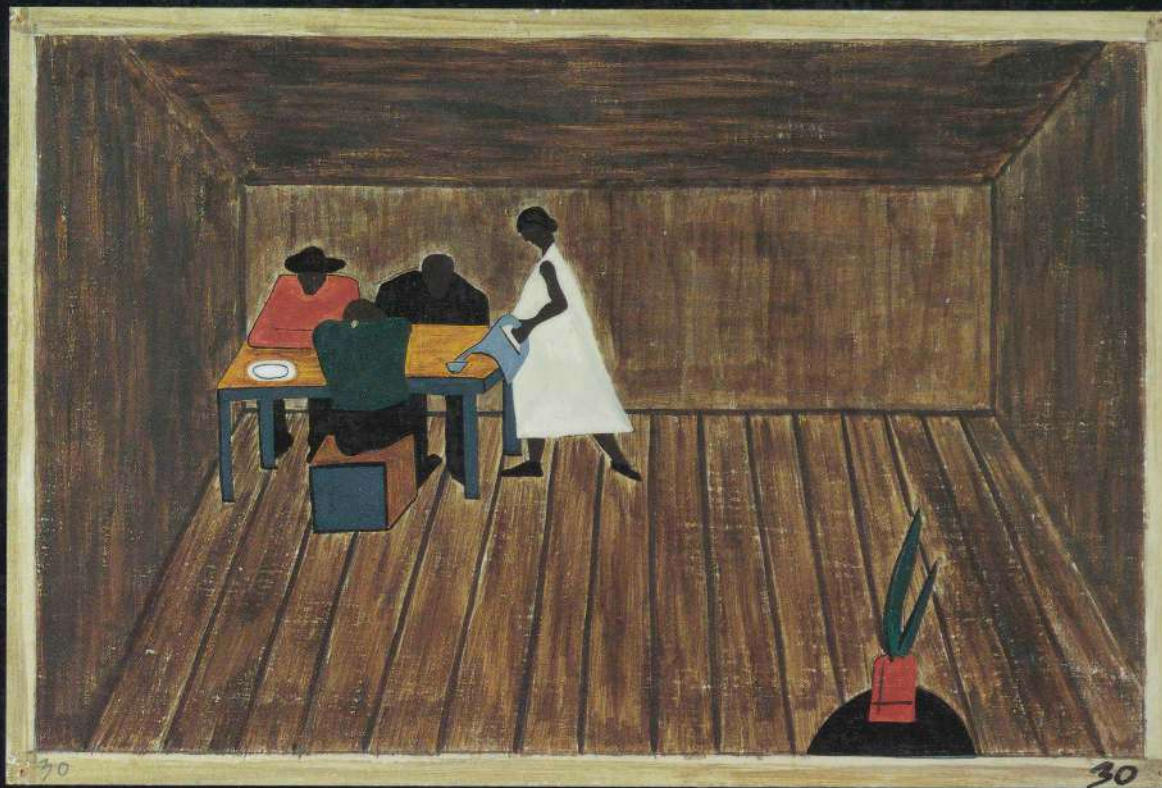
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Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series

A man—known as a *griot*—rises to tell his people's story, and thus to preserve their history and transmute it into art. The role of community storyteller, so vital to African life, was assumed by the American painter Jacob Lawrence in 1941, when he painted the sixty-panel cycle that is the subject of this landmark book. In *The Migration of the Negro* Lawrence recreates in vivid images and compelling words the movement of millions of African Americans, in the 1920s and '30s, from the rural South to the urban North. Rhythmically, powerfully, he shows us the repression and deprivation of southern life...the magnetic pull of the North, with its promise of freedom and opportunity...the culture shock experienced by the migrants' sudden exposure to the ways of the city...their moving attempts to save their traditions while creating a new life for themselves.

Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series is the companion volume to a historic exhibition that reunites the elements of this great work of art (owned half by The Phillips Collection in Washington and half by The Museum of Modern Art in New York) for the first time in decades. The first publication of the series in its entirety, the book is also a major contribution to African American history, with an introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and essays by a roster of distinguished scholars on the migration, on Lawrence's cultural background and milieu, and on the significance of the Migration series for all Americans.

The exhibition will open at The Phillips Collection in September 1993 and will appear during 1994 in Milwaukee, Portland (Oregon), Birmingham (Alabama), and St. Louis, ending at MoMA in 1995.

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