

A black and white portrait of a man with a mustache, wearing a suit and tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

In 1935 Lawrence met "Professor" Charles Seifert, a lecturer and historian who spoke about important black historical figures including Toussaint L'Ouverture, a slave who emancipated Haiti from European rule and helped establish the first black republic in the Western Hemisphere. Seifert offered Lawrence use of his library of African and African American literature and encouraged him to continue studying black history and attend trips to museum exhibitions, including *African Negro Art* at the Museum of Modern Art.

Life was difficult for Lawrence as a young man, and his mother told him he would never make money as an artist. Fortunately, he had the support of his mentors and other artists in Harlem, who encouraged him to apply for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Arts Project, a government program that paid artists to document life in the United States. Rejected the first time he applied because of age requirement, Lawrence re-submitted his application after he turned 21 and was employed for 18 months.

es Lawrence, a lecturer and historian who spoke about important
in L'Ouverture, a slave who emancipated Haiti from European rule
public in the Western Hemisphere. Seifert offered Lawrence use of his
literature and encouraged him to continue studying black history
including African Negro Art at the Museum of Modern Art.
as a young man, and his mother told him he would never make
the support of his mentors and other artists in Harlem, who
Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Arts Project, a government
in the United States. Rejected the first time he applied because of the
his application after he turned 21 and was employed for 18 months.

A man with a beard, wearing an orange polo shirt, is standing behind a large wooden table in a studio. He is working on a large, horizontal painting that features a landscape with a body of water and a small boat. The table is covered with various art supplies, including several tubes of paint, a palette, and a few brushes. A large, adjustable desk lamp is positioned over the table, providing bright light. In the background, there are shelves with more art supplies and a framed piece of art on the wall.

The Black - The Negroes lives and real Black culture.

John James - 1979

The 1920's...The Migrants Cast Their Ballots
1974
serigraph print on paper, 34 3/8 x 26 in.
Gift of Lorillard, A Division of Loews Theatres, Inc., 1975.97

When he returned to the subject in 1974 Lawrence eliminated the guard, which removed a feeling of anxiety and unease that voters must have felt. He included a mixture of people waiting in line to show that the right to vote extended to everyone, including women with babies, elderly figures leaning on canes, businessmen wearing suits, and construction workers wearing overalls. Instead of waiting rigidly in single file, voters in the print read the newspaper or talk to one another while they wait. Two lines of people converge at a table in the center of the print, where a man in a black suit and hat signs a voter registration booklet. Behind him, a man in a voting booth pulls the curtain behind him so that no one will see which lever he pulls indicating his vote.

Lawrence began experimenting with printmaking in the 1970s, although he was primarily known as a painter. The technique he chose – screen-printing – is where mesh is used to transfer ink onto another surface, except in areas where a stencil has blocked the tiny holes. A squeegee or blade is moved across the screen to push ink through the mesh to reach the paper. Because only one color can be printed at a time, several screens are needed to produce a multi-colored image. Lawrence used seven different screens to produce this print.

The bright red and blue pops of color make the scene dynamic. Although in many of his works Lawrence documented the injustices of the world, he also wanted to promote a positive dialogue to celebrate the accomplishments of African Americans and continue to champion equality.

Teachers: go to www.joslyn.org/education for this poster's academic standards and related lesson plans.

For many African Americans living in the South after the Civil War life proved just as difficult as it had been before they were freed from slavery. Racial violence and lack of economic opportunity left people destitute and desperate. Fortunately, an opportunity for change presented itself with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The war stemmed the constant flow of European immigrants, which resulted in a shortage of labor for industrialized urban areas in the northern United States. Recruiters for these companies targeted African Americans in the South, promising economic opportunities in cities like New York and Chicago.

Eager to escape the dismal living conditions in the South, blacks relocated to New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia in huge waves. By 1919, one million African Americans had left the South, and they were followed by five million more over the next decade. This mass movement, today known as the Great Migration, went nearly undocumented even though it had a significant impact on our nation's history and on the lives of millions, including Jacob Lawrence. His parents were among the migrants that fled from southern states, and later he witnessed the struggles of many families moving to his New York neighborhood, Harlem, with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

Lawrence explained, "I didn't know the term 'migrant,' but I would remember people used to tell us when a new family would arrive. People in the neighborhood would collect clothes for these newcomers and pick out coats that hadn't completely burned in the furnace to get them started."

Even though stories similar to this one were common, they were rarely discussed in schools. Lawrence wanted his art to educate others, and he used the Great Migration as the subject for his most famous series- *The Migration of the Negro*. Each of the 60 panels focused on a different aspect of the mass-migration and told the stories of the millions of African Americans who made the brave journey in search of freedom.

occasionally forced them to recite and explain obscure parts of the Constitution. Some states implemented a "grandfather clause," stating that no male citizen could exercise his right to vote if his grandfather had been denied the same right. Groups, like the Ku Klux Klan, enforced these restrictions through lynchings and other public acts of brutality intended to discourage and warn African Americans against voting. These constraints proved so effective that in 1940 only three percent of black southerners were registered to vote.

During the 1950s and 1960s, people fought for racial equality with the Civil Rights Movement. In 1965 the struggle for equality and voter rights reached a peak in Selma, Alabama. Martin Luther King, Jr. launched a voter registration drive there in January, where voting rolls were 99 percent white even though African Americans outnumbered them in the city. Over seven weeks hundreds of Selma's black residents attempted to register to vote. Fewer than 100 were admitted to the registration roll while 3,000 people were arrested for their attempts, including Dr. King.

Frustrated by the results of the registration drive, citizens of Selma called for a march to bring national attention to their struggles. On March 7, 1965, over 500 civil rights marchers began the 50 mile

Slavery was officially abolished with the end of the Civil War in 1865, and the Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, stated that all male citizens were guaranteed the right to vote regardless of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." However, white supremacy was reborn and Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation and prevented African Americans from voting in the states of the former Confederate States of America. Blacks were restricted from voting through poll taxes, literacy tests, and residency and record-keeping requirements.

Illiteracy rates were high amongst the African American population due to centuries of slavery and oppression, so many potential voters failed these tests. Officials told blacks that they had shown up to the wrong location, or at the incorrect time, and arts of the Constitution. Some states implemented exercise his right to vote if his grandfather had been forced these restrictions through lynchings and other African Americans against voting. These constraints ck southerners were registered to vote.

racial equality with the Civil Rights Movement.

A peak in Selma, Alabama. Martin Luther King, Jr. re voting rolls were 99 percent white even though seven weeks hundreds of Selma's black residents tested to the registration roll while 3,000 people were

journey from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital. Soon after the peaceful protesters began their journey they came upon a group of state troopers blocking a bridge. Law enforcement officers attacked the marchers with tear gas, nightsticks, whips, and dogs, leaving almost 70 injured. Americans and international audiences saw the event broadcast on television and on the front page of newspapers, and they were shocked by the brutality. People around the world wanted to give their support to the people of Selma. President Lyndon B. Johnson backed the marchers and sent U.S. Army and Alabama National Guard troops to protect them. This security allowed 2,000 people to depart Selma on March 21 to continue the march and reach Montgomery on March 25, where they were greeted by nearly 50,000 supporters.

Five months later, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law. The act banned literacy tests, authorized the investigation of the use of poll taxes and local elections, and provided for federal oversight of voter registration in regions where less than half of the nonwhite population had registered to vote.

The Voting Rights Act significantly improved voter turnout among African Americans, but the fight for equal rights, including the right for all citizens to vote, did not end. Unfortunately, racial violence is still common today, and some laws still prohibit a proportionate number of minorities from voting. For example, in some states, a person convicted of a felony will never be allowed to vote. Barring felons from voting is problematic because in the United States there is a vastly disproportionate number of African Americans and other minorities who have been found guilty of crime, partly as a result of systematic oppression, unfair criminal punishment based on race, and unequal opportunity. Centuries of racial injustices and widespread poverty have disenfranchised thousands of people.

Jacob Lawrence, *Confrontation on the Bridge*, 1975, silk screen printed in color on paper, 24 7/8 x 31 7/8 in., Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA, Gift of Andrew Dintenfass and Ann Dintenfass, SC 2006-54-4

This project is part of Joslyn's Schools, Teachers, and Technology programming and is supported by the following: Dr. C.C. And Mabel L. Criss Memorial Foundation, Dixon Family Foundation, Equitable Bank, Gilbert C Swanson Foundation, H. Lee and Carol Gendler Charitable Fund, Humanities Nebraska and Nebraska Cultural Endowment, Mammel Family Foundation, The James C. Mangimeli Grant for Art Education, Pacific Life Foundation, Peter Kiewit Foundation, Wells Fargo Foundation, and Whitmore Charitable Trust



5/125

The 1920's... The Migrants arrive and cast their Ballots

Jacob Lawrence - 1974

JACOB LAWRENCE
American, 1917–2000

THE 1920'S...THE MIGRANTS CAST THEIR BALLOTS
1974, serigraph print on paper, 38 3/8 x 26 in.

JOSLYN ART MUSEUM® OMAHA, NEBRASKA
Gift of Lorillard, A Division of Loews
Theatres, Inc., 1975.97