

Twenty-six panels from Jacob Lawrence's The Migration Series were highlighted in the November 1941 issue of Fortune, one of America's most influential business magazines. Though not credited as the author, Alain LeRoy Locke wrote the accompanying article, "...And the Migrants Kept Coming," to introduce readers to Lawrence's work. The feature helped Lawrence gain national recognition, generating widespread interest in The Migration Series a month before it was first exhibited.

...AND THE MIGRANTS KEPT COMING A NEGRO ARTIST PAINTS THE STORY OF THE GREAT AMERICAN MINORITY. BY ALAIN LEROY LOCKE

The twenty-six pictures reproduced on the following pages were selected from a complete series of sixty panels executed by Jacob Lawrence (below), a young Negro artist whose work promises to earn for him the same high recognition accorded to Paul Robeson, Marian Anderson, W. C. Handy, and other talented members of his race. His use of harsh primary colors and his extreme simplicity of artistic statement have extraordinary force. In November, Artist Lawrence's full series will go on exhibition for the first time at the Downtown Gallery in New York. FORTUNE's choice was made partly on the basis of pictorial values, partly to preserve the continuity of the story of the American Negro that Lawrence tells through the medium of his sixty panels. The captions accompanying the pictures are his own.

Here is a strategic front in the Battle for America. Though they constitute a far larger minority group than any on the European continent, and though they represent a social and economic enigma of terrifying proportions, the 13 million U.S. Negroes are citizens of a shadowy subnation that is terra incognita to most whites. While carrying the "four freedoms" to the earth's ends American democracy might well bestow on them its Negroes, who are woefully in need of them. Except when one intrudes on the nation's consciousness as a great singer, musician, pugilist,

or actor, the Negro is not an individual man but a great, dark, moiling mass with unknown aspirations, unknown potentialities. Today that concept is on the verge of imminent change. For the Negro is one-tenth of the U.S. population, and as the nation strives to develop the full measure of its strength it cannot for long ignore that one-tenth—or the problems it both faces and creates.

[The t]heme of the story told by Lawrence's pictures is the great south-to-north migration of Negroes that commenced during the first world war and has continued in lesser degree ever since. In one of the biggest population shifts in U.S. history over a million Negroes quit the crumbling, semifederal cotton economy of their forefathers and trekked to the industrial cities of the North. Behind them were poverty and the flaring prejudices that grew with poverty. An average of fifty-six Negroes were being lynched every year. Then the war-burdened factories of the North sent out a call for cheap labor. Labor agents roamed the South, promising the moon or better. The Negro press exhorted the Negroes to move, and earlier migrants, already settled in the North, wrote to their friends and relatives to tell of good jobs, good pay, and an amiable society wherein a colored man had a chance of living like a human being. Hundreds of thousands of southern Negroes

responded. The first wave of migrants went north between 1916 and 1919 to relieve the acute labor shortage. The second great movement occurred between 1921 and 1923—after the immigration laws choked off the European labor supply. The Negro population of the North jumped almost 100 per cent, and much of the increase was concentrated in six cities—New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, and St. Louis. Today nearly half of all U.S. Negroes are city Negroes.

While the war boom lasted the North seemed to fulfill some of its promises, though, from the start, Negroes were forced to live in overcrowded, segregated areas. Throughout the industrial North there was a series of race riots, often involving white and black laborers. Organized labor was no friend of the Negro, partly because he would work for low wages, partly because of his record as a strikebreaker, beginning in the 1850's when Negroes were brought up from the South to break a longshoremen's strike in New York. Symptomatic of the Negroes' confusion and despair was the rise of Marcus Aurelius Garvey, who promoted a fantastic scheme to take colonists back to Africa and found a Pan-African empire. Thousands contributed to Garvey's cause, and he purchased a steamship, first of his projected Black Star Line, to be used as a transport. But the ship was unseaworthy and sank in Newport News, and no colonist ever went to Garvey's Africa.

The North did give the Negro the right to vote, did send his children to school, and otherwise permitted him a modicum of dignity that he could not have in the South. It was this hope for the chance to live "like a human being" that inspired the continuing migration of the 1930's, for in the six cities of the North about a third of all the Negroes were on relief. Even in Harlem, where half a million Negroes are

crammed into three square miles, white owners controlling 95 per cent of its business had always refused to hire Negroes. During this period, and before and since, Communist organizers were extraordinarily active among Negro communities in large cities. Aside from strengthening race solidarity, they have had surprisingly little effect, despite ideal conditions for agitation. Thus far, at least, the average Negro has been immune to direct ideological leadership.

The great majority of U.S. Negroes still live precariously, from meal to meal, and the Negro's long-range economic future looks no better. And still, in the concluding words of Artist Lawrence "... the migrants kept coming." They will come in ever-growing numbers, and they seem to be about to enact a tragic repetition of the events of the last war. Currently thousands are being drawn to Washington, D.C. by the lure of government jobs. It is common to hear whites predict "trouble" and talk of race riots if the influx continues. But Negroes by and large harbor no animosity against the whites. They plot no overthrow of the white man's domination, though as time goes on they become more articulate and begin to grasp the meaning of the power of masses—chiefly because circumstances force them to. The modern northern Negro has largely discarded the humble counsel of Booker T. Washington, who urged his followers "to know their place" and to crawl into the white man's kingdom through the back door. After many formal protests failed, a few months ago the Negro leader A. Philip Randolph, head of the Pullman porters union, announced plans for a "March on Washington" to protest against discrimination facing Negroes in the army, in industry, in every phase of the defense program. Fifty thousand Negroes pledged themselves ready to march July 1. Then on June 25 President Roosevelt issued an executive order to end discrimination and to implement it[. T]he OPM

established its Committee on Fair Employment Practice with two Negro members. Randolph's 50,000 marchers primarily wanted jobs of course, but they also wanted more—the chance to belong. The reasons for their hunger in both respects are elaborated in the captions accompanying the pictures.

The causes of the great Negro migration, described on the opposite page, Artist Lawrence depicts with such bare symbols as the woman cutting sowbelly while the hungry child watches, the boll weevil destroying the cotton, the floods and storms that drove thousands of farmers off the land—and into unemployment. But in the North industry urgently needed labor. The

Negroes swarmed to the big cities and continued to swarm through the twenties and thirties, even though there were more men than jobs, even though a Negro had a hard time finding a place to eat and sleep. Although there is as yet no such shortage of unskilled labor as there was in the last war, and in skilled labor the bars are up, the tide of migration still flows to the cities. During the last war southern Negroes headed north with high hopes for jobs, security, and dignity. Industrial unionism, WPA, the Wagner and Wages and Hours acts have helped the migrants. But in 1941 there are still few jobs and little welcome.