

ART AND REVOLUTION

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLw_QwRnWmY



What was the Harlem Renaissance?

- ▶ Period of artistic and cultural activity among African Americans before WWI and the onset of the great depression and lead up to WWII- in the 1930s
- ▶ Considered golden age in African American culture (literature, music, theatre and visual art)
- ▶ Rising awareness of inequality and discrimination- many were experiencing freedom of expression through art for the first time
- ▶ Movement associated with notions of pride in black life and identity

“For the first time since the plantation days, artists began to touch new material, to understand new tools, and to accept eagerly the challenge of Black poetry, Black song and Black scholarship.” -Vernon Winslow

TIMELINE

1914-18

1916

1919

1925

1929-33

1939-45

World War I

The Great
Migration
begins

The Red
Summer

Alain Locke's
*The New
Negro* is
published

The Great
Depression

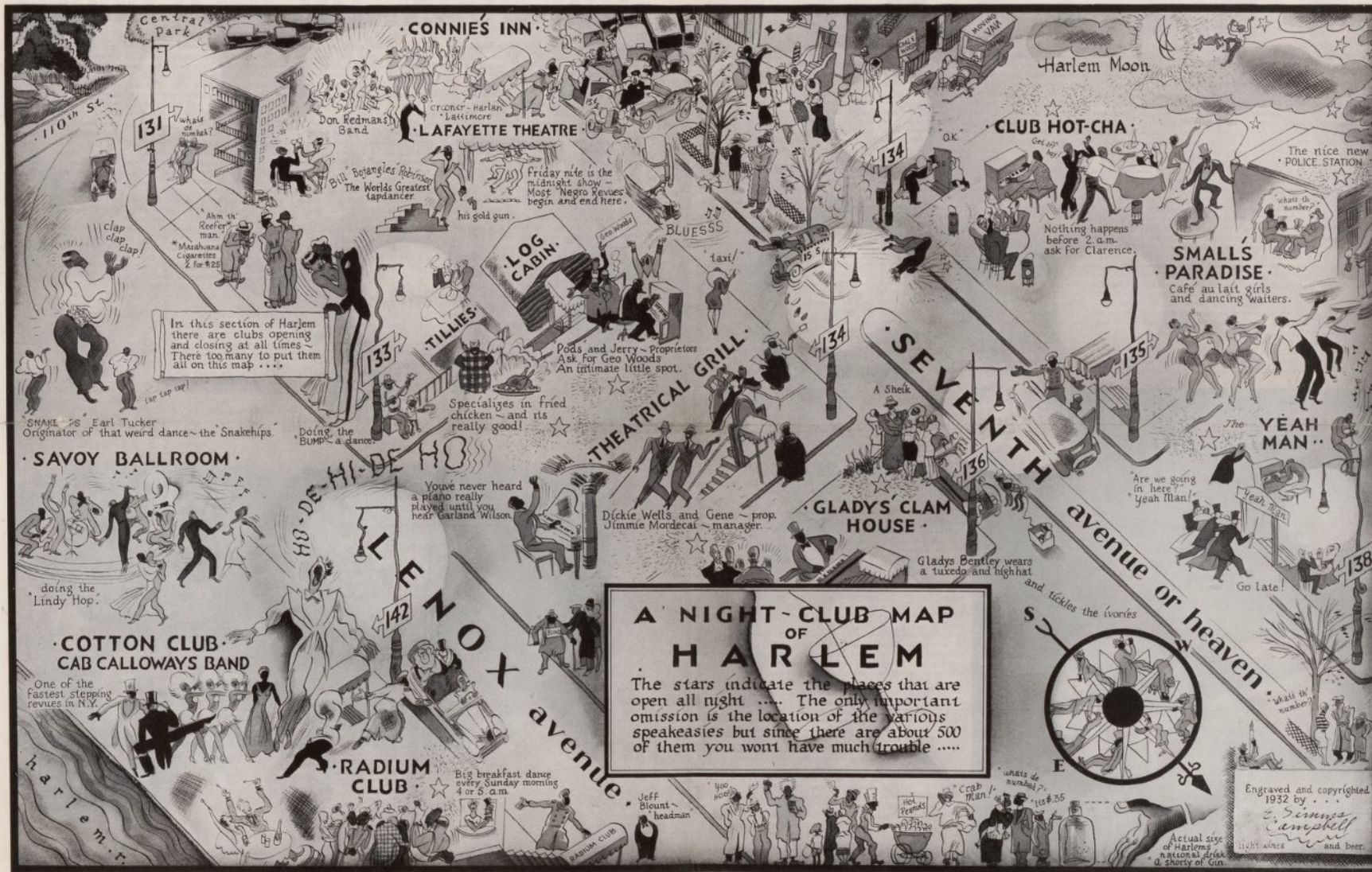
World War II

Harlem as a space

- ▶ Originally established as a Dutch village in the 17th century
- ▶ In 1873, a real estate boom led to the creation of buildings we see in Harlem today: rapid overdevelopment, developers begin to sell or rent to African Americans at discounted prices
- ▶ newcomers from the South moved north and as redevelopment destroyed existing black neighborhoods, pressure for additional and hopefully better housing pushed these communities northward up the west side of Manhattan into Harlem.
- ▶ By 1920, Harlem, with sheer size of its black population, had emerged as the capital of black America.

Harlem as a space

"So here we have Harlem—not merely a colony or a community or a settlement ... It strikes the uninformed observer as a phenomenon, a miracle straight out of the skies." –James Weldon Johnson



Night-Club Map of Harlem 1932

Historical Context: The Red Summer



The "Red Summer" of 1919 marked the culmination of steadily growing tensions surrounding the great migration of African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North that took place during World War I

National Guardsmen question an African-American man in Chicago, after Mayor 'Big Bill' Thompson called in the National Guard on July 30, 1919, after three days of rioting

Historical Context: The Red Summer

- ▶ Culmination of growing racial tensions in the country
- ▶ When the war ended in 1918, thousands of servicemen returned home to find that their jobs had been filled by Black people from the South
- ▶ Financial insecurity, racial and ethnic prejudices continued to grow
- ▶ Meanwhile, African-American veterans who had risked their lives fighting for the causes of freedom and democracy found themselves denied basic rights such as adequate housing and equality under the law
- ▶ During the summer of 1919, these social anxieties became mass violence: increased lynchings, riots, rise of groups like the KKK
- ▶ Amidst this, black communities felt the need to defend but also more calls for equality, solidarity, black pride

The Great Migration



Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*, 1941 (installed at the Phillips Collection)

I tried to show the excitement, the crowds, the tension, through the use of color, through the use of shapes, forms. I tried to get a surge of movement in this particular work.” -Jacob Lawrence



Jacob Lawrence, The Migration Series, Panel no. 1: During World War I there was a great migration north by southern African Americans 1940-1941



Jacob Lawrence

The Migration Series, Panel no. 49: They also found discrimination in the North although it was much different from that which they had known in the South

1940-1941



Jacob Lawrence

The Migration Series, Panel no. 44: Living Conditions were better in the North

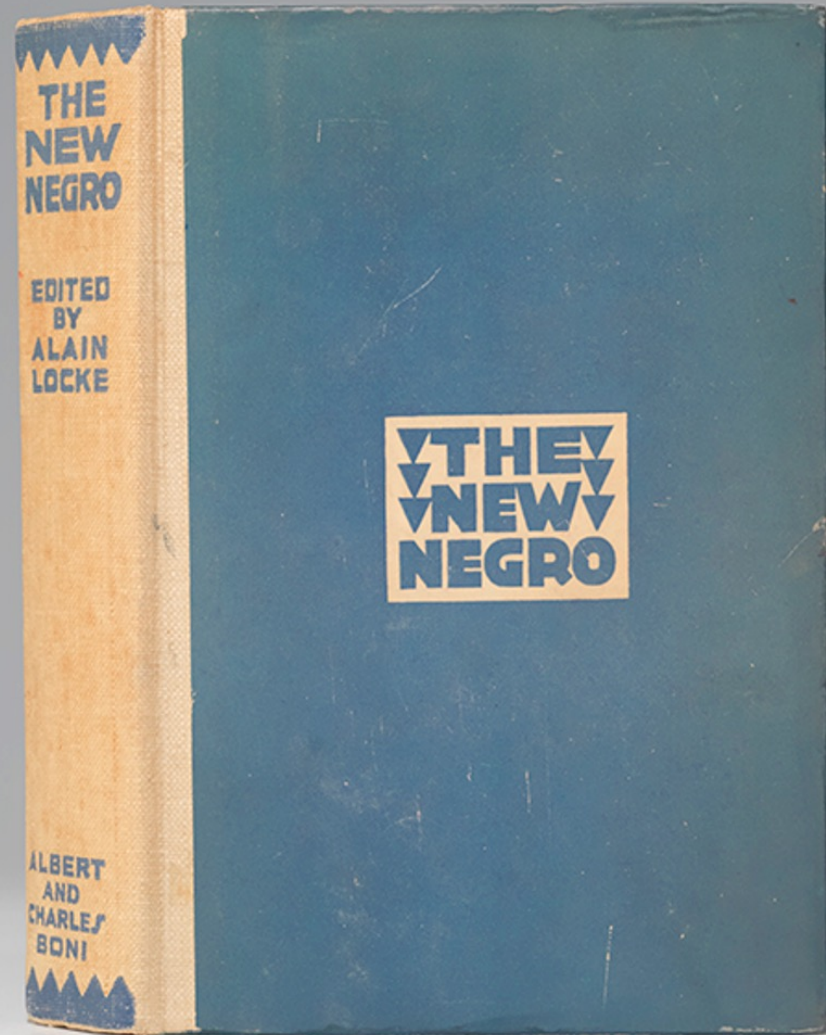
1940-1941

"To me, migration means movement. There was conflict and struggle. But out of the struggle came a kind of power and even beauty. 'And the migrants kept coming' is a refrain of triumph over adversity. if it rings true for you today, then it must still strike a chord in our American experience." -Jacob Lawrence

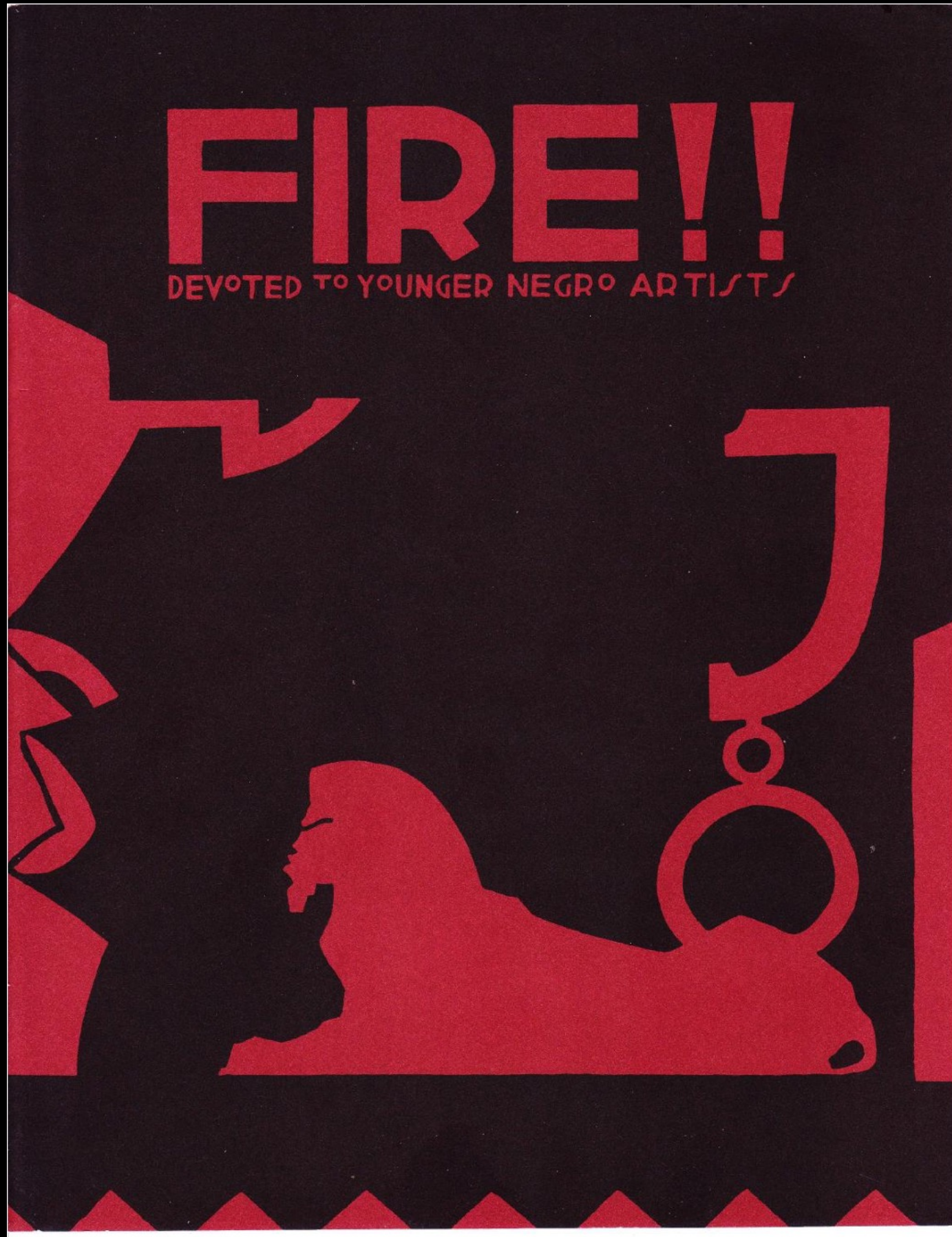


Jacob Lawrence, The Migration Series, Panel no. 60: *And the migrants kept coming*, 1940-1941

The Literature of the Harlem Renaissance

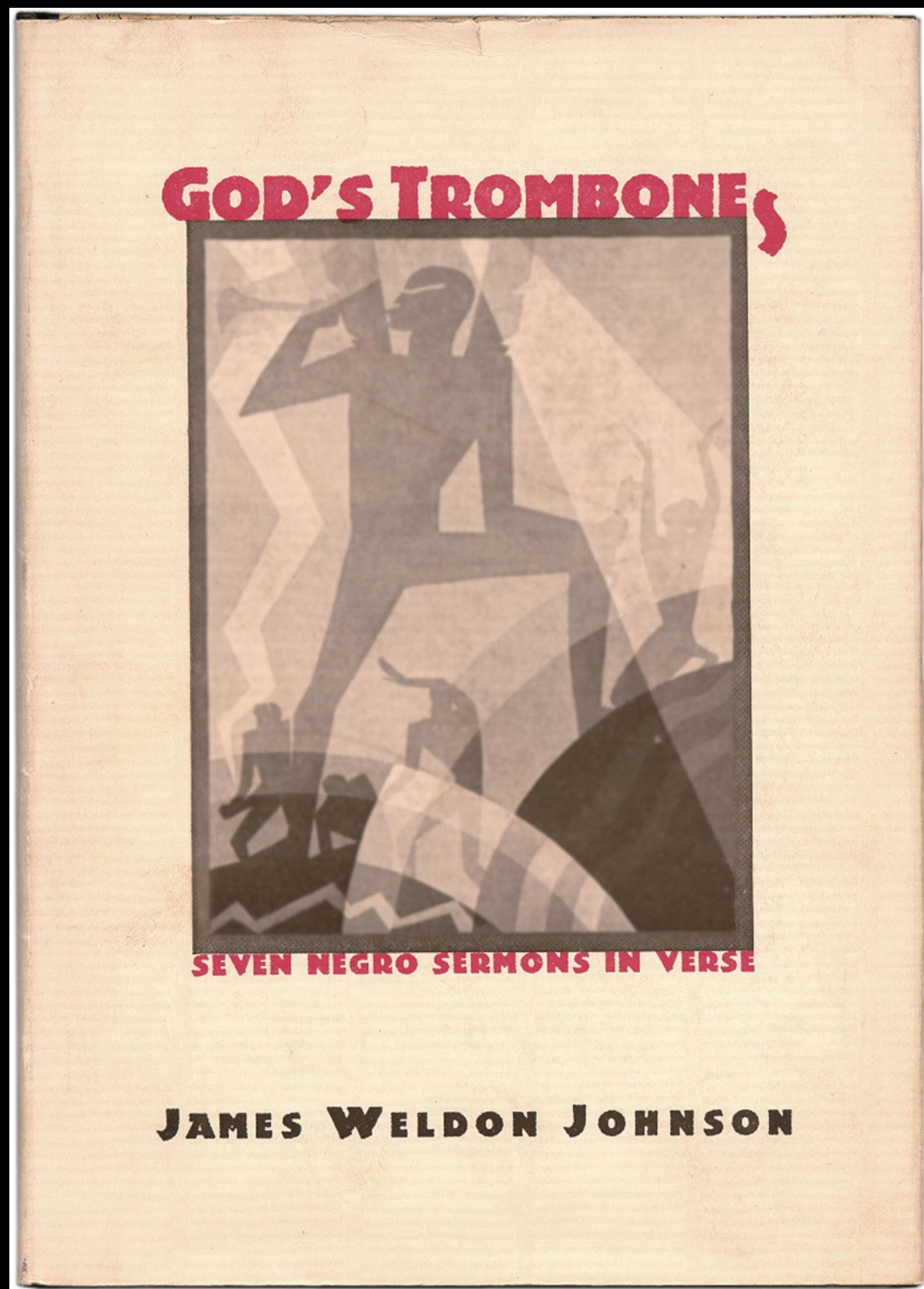


- ▶ Alain LeRoy Locke's *The New Negro* (1925), which called for "a new dynamic phase ... of renewed self-respect and self-dependence" within the community.
- ▶ Locke contrasted the "old Negro," beaten down by legacies of slavery and the Jim Crow era, with the "new Negro," who could start over in northern cities; he saw new possibilities for challenging and changing old stereotypes, as well as opportunities to overcome the internalized effects of oppression.



- ▶ Co-founded by Aaron Douglas, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, and Countee McCullen
- ▶ First literary magazine of the Harlem Renaissance
- ▶ “vehicle for enlightenment” of younger African Americans
- ▶ Financial difficulties caused only one issue to be published, but was widely influential

Cover of the first (and only) issue of FIRE!!, November 1926. Illustrator: Aaron Douglas



Aaron Douglas
 Illustration for *God's Trombones*
 1927



Aaron Douglas
The Judgment Day
 1939



Aaron Douglas
Aspiration
1936

PAINTING



Archibald Motley

Black Belt

1934

[The painting] allows for blackness to breathe, even in the density. From the outside in, the possibilities of what this blackness could be are so constrained. He keeps it messy and indeterminate so that it can be both. Polar opposite possibilities can coexist in the same tight frame, in the same person. -Davarian Baldwin



Archibald John Motley, Jr.

Gettin' Religion

1948

Artists, the Great Depression and the WPA

1932: height of Great Depression, nearly 15 million people unemployed

29 August 1935: Federal Art Project (part of Works Progress Administration) is created – recruited 8 million people to work on public projects (artists to produce graphic posters, documentary photographs, large-scale sculptures, modernist murals, and other works of art)



- ▶ Many Americans experienced original artwork for the first time
- ▶ Community art centers held traveling exhibitions and art classes, she says, which made art part of people's everyday lives
- ▶ Created conditions that led to the development of arts in the Black community

Sculpture workshop in New York sponsored by the Federal Art Project, C. 1940



Aaron Douglas, Aspects of Negro Life, 1934, Schomburg Center for Research, NY

SCULPTURE



Augusta Savage with her sculpture
Realization, 1938.
Photo by Andrew Herman.



Augusta Savage
Gamin
1929

"I hear so many complaints to the effect that Negroes do not take advantage of the educational opportunities offered them. Well, one of the reasons why more of my race do not go in for higher education is that as soon as one of us gets his head above the crowd there are millions of feet ready to crush it back again to that dead level of commonplace thus creating a racial decline of culture in our Republic. For how am I to compete with other American artists if I am not to be given the same opportunity?" -Augusta Savage



Children at a free W.P.A. Federal Art Project art class, 1939

1923 incident- Savage was offered a prestigious scholarship to study in Paris

Upon discovering that she was the only Black woman selected, the committee rescinded her offer

Formative moment for Savage that moved her towards art based activism for the Black community

Spent the later years of her career committed to art education and opened the Savage Studio of Arts and Craft where she offered free art courses to the people of Harlem

PHOTOGRAPHY



James Van Der Zee, *Couple, Harlem, 1932*



VIII 24/75

J. Van Der Zee

- ▶ Residents of Harlem would commission Van Der Zee to mark special occasions
- ▶ Composed, cosmopolitan photographs
- ▶ Conveyed the personalities, aspirations and spirits of his sitters

James Van Der Zee
Garveyite Family, Harlem
1924, printed 1974

The Legacy of the Harlem Renaissance

"Were it not for this movement, other art movements may not even have sprung up. The Harlem Renaissance gave women, gave impoverished people all over this country a hint of just what you can do if you want to put your art on the line, because all they really wanted was to show America that, if you give us a fair chance, we will produce greatness. From that movement they have stitched, the black American, forevermore, into the artistic fabric of this country." -Wil Haygood



Kerry James Marshall
*Better Homes, Better
Gardens*
1994





Kerry James Marshall, School of Beauty, School of Culture (2012)

'I'm always concerned,' he says, 'that the figures in the work seem self-possessed, that they don't exist there as a sign of anything.' So they're not there to fulfil a role, I ask, they don't signify difference or otherness? Part of my project is to escape this kind of imperative that everything you do as a black person is always about lack. That there's never a moment in which you have simple pleasure – where you're just there, where you're just simply being. And your being is not fraught with all these other layers of historical meaning.'



Untitled (Club Couple) (2014), Kerry James Marshall



Kehinde Wiley,
Napoleon Leading
the Army Over the
Alps, 2005



Jacques Louis David, Napoleon
Leading the Army, 1801



Kehinde Wiley, Napoleon Leading the Army Over
the Alps, 2005

Opinion

THE STONE

Who First Showed Us That Black Lives Matter?

By Chris Lebron

Feb. 5, 2018



"Man in Forest Green," 2016 Derrick Adams/Tilton Gallery, New York

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/opinion/black-lives-matter-philosophy.html>

Discussion Questions

Using artwork that we have seen today as an example, develop an argument addressing these research questions.

- ▶ How is the notion of “revolution” promoted through visual art? or What role do artists play in furthering a revolution?
- ▶ How can art further solidarity within a community?
- ▶ How are images embedded into the everyday lives of people?
- ▶ How are art forms tied to the social and historical contexts of their times?