

Langston Hughes, *I Look at the World*

I look at the world
From awakening eyes in a black face—
And this is what I see:
This fenced-off narrow space
Assigned to me.

I look then at the silly walls
Through dark eyes in a dark face—
And this is what I know:
That all these walls oppression builds
Will have to go!

I look at my own body
With eyes no longer blind—
And I see that my own hands can make
The world that's in my mind.
Then let us hurry, comrades,
The road to find.



Jacob Lawrence, *The 1920s: The Migrants Arrive and Cast Their Ballots*
(1974) Lithograph at Currier Museum of Art

***The Open Door:
A Biweekly Tidbit
on the
Monthly Theme***

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Essential Questions:

What does it take to awaken a sense of self that is not defined before birth or limited in life?

Where do the roads meet for people with different perceptions of a possible path forward? Can we imagine together a world without fences or walls?

Langston Hughes (1901 - 1967) was a major figure of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. He is best known as a poet, but also wrote novels, short stories and plays. His work has been called “jazz poetry.” He sought to portray the joys and hardships of working-class black lives, avoiding both sentimental idealization and negative stereotypes. A critic commented: “By molding his verse always on the sounds of Negro talk, the rhythms of Negro music, by retaining his own keen honesty and directness, his poetic sense and ironic intelligence, he maintained through four decades a readable newness distinctly his own.” Hughes was authentic and honest. While he is best known as the voice of the Harlem Renaissance, he was a great poet period. Writers like Alice Walker, whom he discovered, consider him an inspiration and mentor.

Jacob Lawrence (1917 – 2000) was an American painter whose work chronicled the migration of Afro-Americans from the south with its Jim Crow laws to cities of the north such as Chicago, St. Louis and New York. He studied with Charles Alston and Augusta Savage in Harlem and became a part of the second wave of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1930s and 40s. His style is a form of dynamic cubism and his palette used brown and blacks with blocks of intense bright colors. The Currier Museum of Art in Manchester has a collection of his work that is well worth seeing for its narrative power. Some of this work was on view with the *For Freedoms* exhibit at the museum this past year.