

Jacob Lawrence

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For more than half a century, Jacob Lawrence has been widely regarded as America's most important African American artist. The son of Southern migrants, Lawrence grew up in Harlem during the Depression and the Harlem Renaissance. In the studio of his mentor, Charles Alston, Lawrence painted while a host of Harlem Renaissance figures- artists and writers such as Augusta Savage, Langston Hughes and Alain Locke- gathered to discuss ideas that would eventually influence Lawrence's art.

His artistic style evolved out his subject matter: the lives of working people, usually African Americans, engaged in a spectrum of human endeavor. Lawrence's art depicts the African American experience from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond, creating a uniquely American vision about the dreams of equality of ordinary people.

"If at times my [artworks] do not express the conventionally beautiful, there is always an effort to express the universal beauty of man's continuous struggle to lift his social position and to add dimension to his spiritual being," Lawrence said.

His distinguished career has earned his a National Medal of Arts, election to the



National Academy of Design, and dozens of honorary degrees and awards.

"I paint the things I know about and the things I have experienced," Lawrence said. "The things I have experienced extend into my national, racial, and class group. So I paint the American scene." Lawrence died in 2000 at the age of 83.