



DIGITAL RESOURCE GUIDE

STEP **AFRIKA!**

# THE MIGRATION

## REFLECTIONS ON JACOB LAWRENCE

NOW PLAYING THROUGH JULY 14 ON THE KREEGER THEATER STAGE



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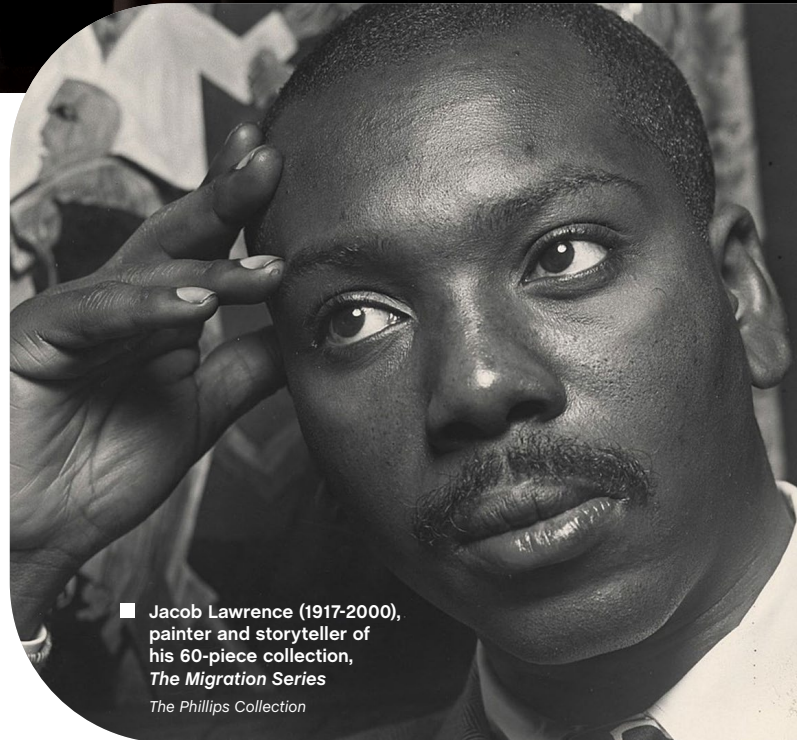
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***"To me, migration means movement. There was conflict and struggle. But out of the struggle came a kind of power and even beauty."***

— Jacob Lawrence, Artist-Storyteller of *The Migration Series*

# THE SHOW

Inspired by the iconic 60-panel painting series, Step Afrika!'s *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence* tells the story of one of the largest movements of people in United States history—when millions of African American migrants moved from the rural South to the industrial North in the early 1900s to escape racial oppression. The award-winning company's signature work combines its hallmark style of percussive dance-theater with the paintings' images, colors, and motifs to bring history to life through pulsating rhythms and stunning movement!



■ Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), painter and storyteller of his 60-piece collection, *The Migration Series*  
*The Phillips Collection*

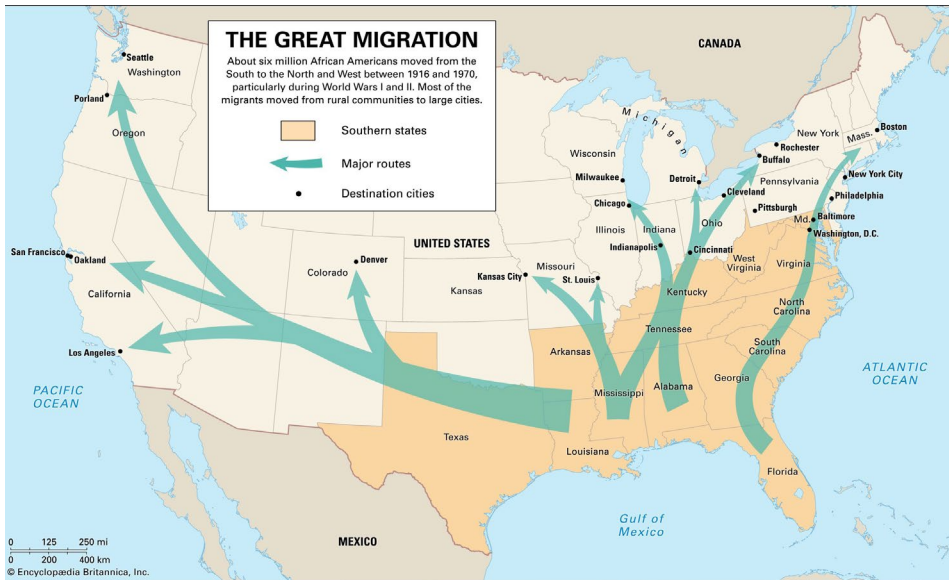
## MEET JACOB LAWRENCE

Jacob Lawrence captures his own family's journey during America's Great Migration in his 60-piece paintings, *The Migration Series*. In this video, Jacob Lawrence reflects, "I think the motivation for painting *The Migration Series* is that I grew up in a period where we all knew about it. We were a part of it. My family was a part of that migration... I grew up very conscious of people moving from one section of the country to the other."



CLICK HERE TO WATCH  
**JACOB LAWRENCE'S INSPIRATION  
FOR THE MIGRATION SERIES**

# WHAT WAS THE GREAT MIGRATION?



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

Known as one of the greatest advancements in African American history and one of the most significant of American history, the Great Migration was a mass movement of over six million African Americans from the South to Northern, Midwestern, and Western cities from 1910 through 1970, which changed the demographic landscape of the entire United States.

The Great Migration, however, did more for the U.S. than merely change its demographics. The courageous journey of the Great Migration allowed African Americans to seize their destiny with both hands and to take ownership of their own path as citizens. Despite its dark foundations, the significance of this American milestone stems from its lasting social and economic impacts, as well as the creation and establishment of Black urban culture in American society.

## DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS FROM THE GREAT MIGRATION (1910-1970)

History.com, "The Great Migration"

**in 1900** **9/10**  
Black Americans lived in the South

**3/4**  
Black Americans lived on farms

**in 1970** **5/10**  
Black Americans lived in the South

**2/10**  
Black Americans lived in rural areas

## JIM CROW OPPRESSION SPARKS THE FIRST GREAT MIGRATION (1910-1940)

*"From every southern town, migrants left by the hundreds to travel north."*

In the Southern Jim Crow era (1865-1968), the segregation of Black Americans and White Americans was law and racially prejudiced practices against Black people were permitted. One effect of these laws was limited employment options for African Americans, who, outside of their own communities, were typically confined to domestic, labor, and serving roles<sup>1</sup>. These roles generally supplied lower wages for Black citizens and limited their financial prosperity.

In addition to economic suppression, African Americans suffered intimidation, murders, and lynchings (which involved torture, beatings, removal of body parts, and hangings). These were unleashed upon Black citizens by White supremacists, such as the Ku Klux Klan (a racist domestic terrorist group). Such acts shaped African Americans' everyday reality and stifled Black prosperity.



■ The Migration Series, Panel 3, Jacob Lawrence,

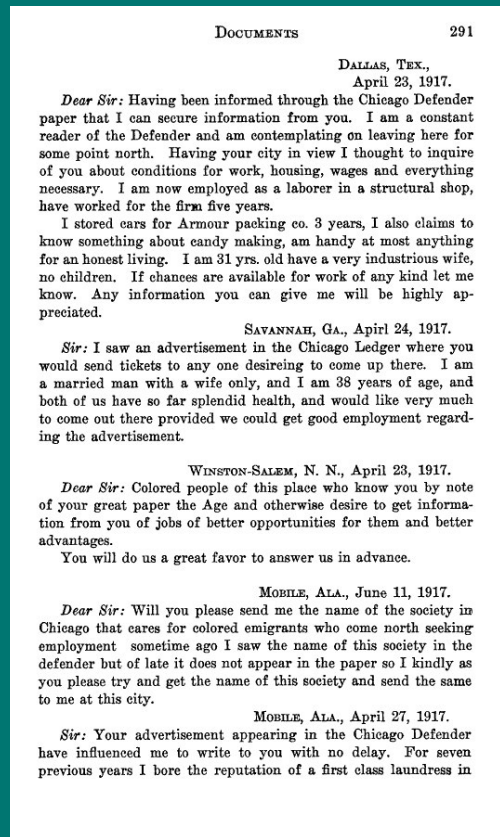
1. Willette Wright Hines, interview by Genean Hines Grobe, Washington, DC, April 30, 2024.

# JIM CROW OPPRESSION SPARKS THE FIRST GREAT MIGRATION (1910-1940)

*“The migrant, whose life had been rural and nurtured by the earth, was now moving to urban life dependent on industrial machinery.”*

World War I (1914-1918) caused an increased demand for factory labor in the Northern and Midwestern cities. Immigrants and White males left their factory jobs to enlist and join the war in Europe, leaving job vacancies in cities like Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York, Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee. Such openings created employment options for Southern Black citizens seeking a more prosperous livelihood and also provided hope of escape from Jim Crow’s vicious oppression. With the aid of railroad travel, nearly two million African Americans migrated to, what they believed was, their promised land.

Migration letters from Southern African Americans, 1917  
University of Chicago collections



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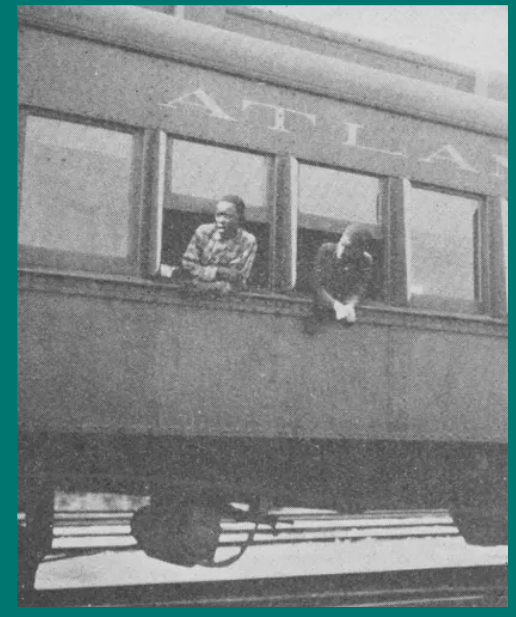
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Social services organizations handed out advertising cards to aid the new Black factory workers in the North.  
Smithsonian Magazine via University of Illinois-Chicago

A segregated rail car in Fayetteville, NC, 1929  
New York Public Library



“They left as though they were fleeing some curse. They were willing to make almost any sacrifice to obtain a railroad ticket, and they left with the intention of staying.” —Scholar and journalist, Emmett J. Scott, in his 1920 book, *Negro Migration during the War*.

As intimidating Southern ordinances prohibited migrant train travel in some cities, migrants forged ahead by boarding trains in faraway cities where they would be unrecognized by the citizens there or their police.

# “They found discrimination in the North.

It was a different kind.”

As the migrants settled, they suffered violent racial prejudice yet again, now from Northern and Midwestern White Americans, who were resistant to the influx of Black Americans settling within their communities. A surge of violent, bloody attacks from White citizens against Black citizens swept across the country. For example, during the Red Summer of 1919, White citizens attacked hundreds of returning Black WWI veterans and Black migrants in over 26 cities. The bloodiest event occurred in Elaine, Arkansas where over 100 Black citizens were killed.

Only three years later, in 1921, the Tulsa Race Massacre occurred when a mob of White individuals attacked the thriving Greenwood District, known as Oklahoma’s Black Wall Street. Within 24 hours, an estimated 300 Black residents were murdered, and 35 city blocks, home to many prosperous Black-owned businesses, were burned to the ground. According to the National Archives, the use of small planes to attack from above has led to this event being deemed the first aerial bombing of a U.S. city.



■ *The Migration Series, Panel 49, Jacob Lawrence*

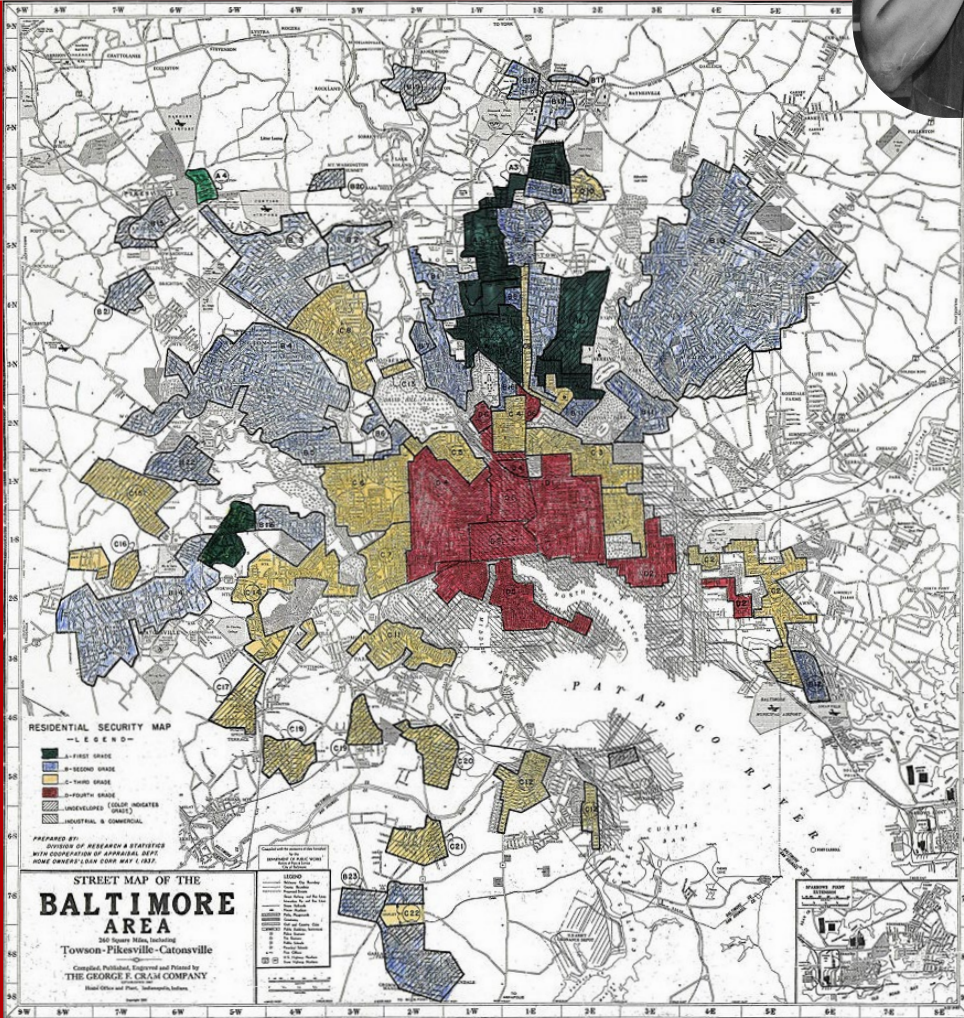


■ **Bomb-vandalized Black apartment in Chicago, 1922**  
The Phillips Collection via The New York Public Library

# THE SECOND WAVE OF MIGRATION: NORTH AND FURTHER WEST ← (1940-1970)



■ Two African American women working at an aircraft factory in El Segundo, California in 1940  
Britannica Kids via Library of Congress



■ A 1937 redlining map of Baltimore  
Former Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC)

## What are restrictive covenants?

These are legal policies that govern how properties are to be used in communities. During the Great Migration, such rules were enforced by local White communities to prohibit White property owners from selling properties to Black citizens.

In addition to housing discrimination, White mobs attacked newly settled Black families by firebombing their homes and pelting them with bricks and concrete.

From *Smithsonian Magazine*, the celebrated playwright of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry, recalls “being spat at, cursed and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school” in Chicago. These terrors, reminiscent of Southern Jim Crow brutality, may have threatened Black Americans’ well-being, but they didn’t break their resolve. Undeterred, three million African Americans continued settling in the North and West.

World War II created another surge of employment opportunities for African Americans due to the establishment of the national defense industry, according to the National Archives. As a result, Black people migrated further West to cities such as Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland. During the second wave of the Great Migration, White Americans enforced housing discrimination practices upon the migrating Black community. Akin to Jim Crow’s racially restrictive policies in the South, redlining and restrictive covenants suffocated Black housing advancement by preventing Black citizens’ home and property ownership.

## REDLINING?

what was

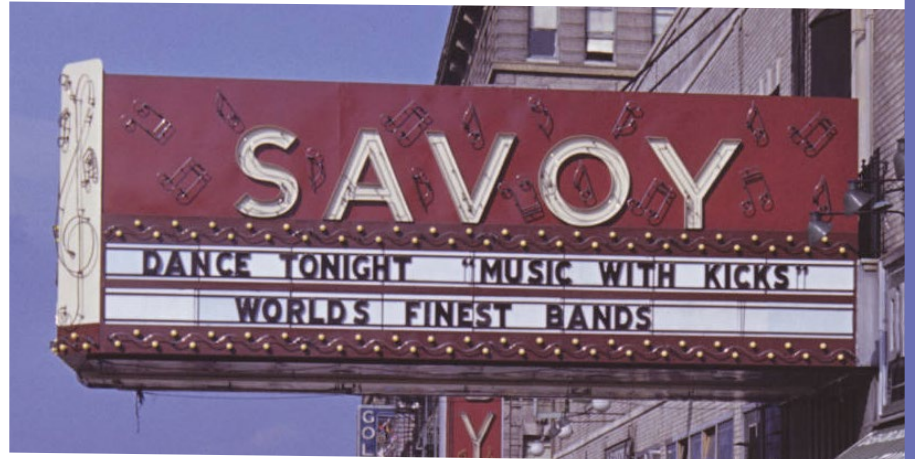
In 1930, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) implemented a now-illegal and discriminatory practice known as redlining. This tactic involved drawing boundaries around Black neighborhoods to mark them as “hazardous,” enabling government-sponsored loan organizations to deny mortgages and lending services to Black communities.

Like *beauty for ashes*, African Americans' suffering during the Great Migration provided fertile inspiration for artistic and cultural expression.

■ Harlem's The Savoy in 1941  
The Savoy Ballroom Gallery

## A NEW URBAN CULTURE EMERGES IN AMERICA

As a result of the Great Migration, Harlem, once a predominantly White area in New York, became a major epicenter for the creative pulse of the Black community. Between 1919 and 1935, numerous famous artists, thinkers, and philosophers fueled the Black artistic rebirth known as the Harlem Renaissance.



Greats such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston birthed prolific poetry and prose. Performers like entertainer Josephine Baker and actor Paul Robeson thrived on the professional stage, a platform previously denied to African Americans. The Harlem Renaissance

produced a new genre, jazz, which permeated a growing Black nightclub scene at stops like The Savoy. Jazz legends Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington migrated to Harlem and produced evolutions of jazz with their big band sounds at the famous Cotton Club for White audiences.

The Harlem Renaissance flourished! It founded a new Black urban culture in America and influenced Black empowerment philosophies, which laid the seeds for the eventual Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, the Harlem Renaissance established a purely American cultural legacy.

### What is meant by *“beauty for ashes”*?

The adage “beauty for ashes,” from the Biblical scripture Isaiah 61:3, describes the good things that come despite one’s suffering.



Photo via Hampton University

## IMPACTS OF THE GREAT MIGRATION

As the fight for equality continued, the 1960s saw the end of Jim Crow laws with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which solidified Black voting rights. These monumental events significantly improved the lives of African Americans by increasing educational opportunities, facilitating political participation, and enabling relocation to new areas.

Triumphantly, the Great Migration stimulated African American prosperity, empowering the Black community by opening doors and creating new opportunities.



Photo by Gergely Jánosy

**“The desire to be free is, of course, human and universal.”**

— Isabel Wilkerson, “The Long-Lasting Legacy of the Great Migration,” *Smithsonian Magazine*

# WHAT’S YOUR MIGRATION STORY?

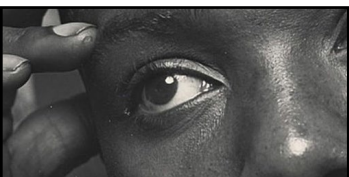
The desire for freedom is a mighty force of human nature that drives young and old to persist through life’s obstacles to live freely. Many people across the globe pay the price in blood, sweat, and tears to migrate to their promised land and build a life of choice and prosperity. Whether for higher education, for a childhood dream, or simply to live at peace, no matter your background, we all have a migration story to tell.

As you reflect on the Great Migration, think of your own family’s path, or ponder your own life’s journeys where you courageously faced an unfamiliar horizon. What were the challenges? What were the struggles? What motivated your family to press on toward their promised land? What is your promised land and what kept you moving to get there in the face of your challenges?

## VIEW THE COLLECTION, SHARE YOUR STORY

View Jacob Lawrence’s *The Migration Series* panels, as well as videos and more, on The Phillips Collections’ website at:

[lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/the-migration-series](http://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/the-migration-series)



**SHARE YOUR VISUAL MIGRATION STORY ONLINE (#PANEL61)  
ON THE PHILLIP COLLECTIONS’ WEBSITE AT:**

[lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/immerse-yourself/your-panel61](http://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/immerse-yourself/your-panel61)



# FOR MORE INFORMATION



## EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE BY CLICKING THE LINKS BELOW:

“Black Codes - Definition, Dates & Jim Crow Laws,” History.com, May 1, 2024. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-codes>

“Great Migration: Definition, Causes & Impact,” History.com, April 30, 2024. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration>

“Harlem Renaissance – Definition, Artists & How It Started,” History.com, May 2, 2024. <https://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/harlem-renaissance>

“How a New Deal Housing Program Enforced Segregation,” History.com, May 3, 2024. <https://www.history.com/news/housing-segregation-new-deal-program>

“How Southern Landowners Tried to Restrict the Great Migration,” History.com, May 30, 2024. <https://www.history.com/news/great-migration-southern-landowners>

“Jacob Lawrence,” The Phillips Collection, April 30, 2024. <https://www.phillipscollection.org/jacob-lawrence>

“Jim Crow Laws: Definition, Facts & Timeline,” History.com, May 1, 2024. <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws>

“Racial Violence and the Red Summer,” National Archives and Records Administration, May 1, 2024. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/wwi/red-summer>

Scott, Emmett J., Negro Migration During the War, Oxford: New York, 1920. <https://archive.org/details/negromigrationdu00scot/page/30/mode/2up>

“Savoy Ballroom Gallery,” Welcome to the Savoy, May 3, 2024. <https://www.welcometothsavoy.com/gallery/>

“Sound Smart: The Great Migration: History,” YouTube, April 30, 2024. <https://youtu.be/7TfgJnXlaxo?feature=shared>

“The Digital Library: Social Studies : The Great Migration,” Education and Outreach Collections from the University of Chicago, May 2, 2024. [https://ecuip.lib.uchicago.edu/diglib/social/greatmigration/letters/page\\_01.html](https://ecuip.lib.uchicago.edu/diglib/social/greatmigration/letters/page_01.html)

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“The Great Migration (1910-1970),” National Archives and Records Administration, April 30, 2024. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration>

“The Migration Series,” Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series, The Phillips Collection, April 29, 2024. <https://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/the-migration-series>

“Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921,” Encyclopedia Britannica, Last modified April 23, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Tulsa-race-massacre-of-1921>

Wilkerson, Isabel. “The Long-Lasting Legacy of the Great Migration,” Smithsonian.com, Last modified September 01, 2016. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/long-lasting-legacy-great-migration-180960118/>


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