



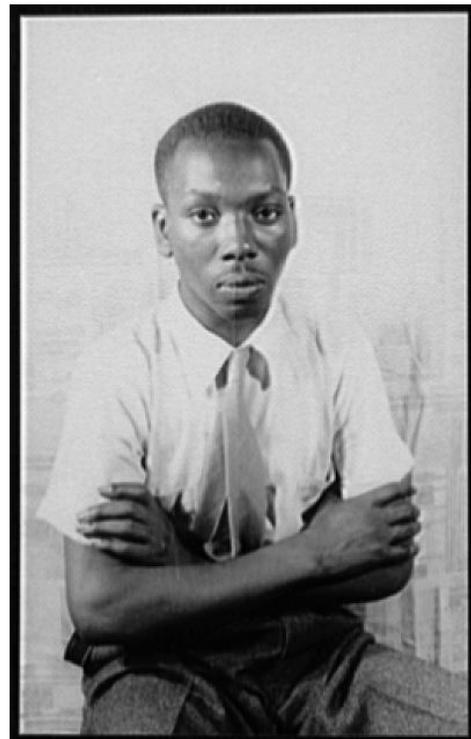
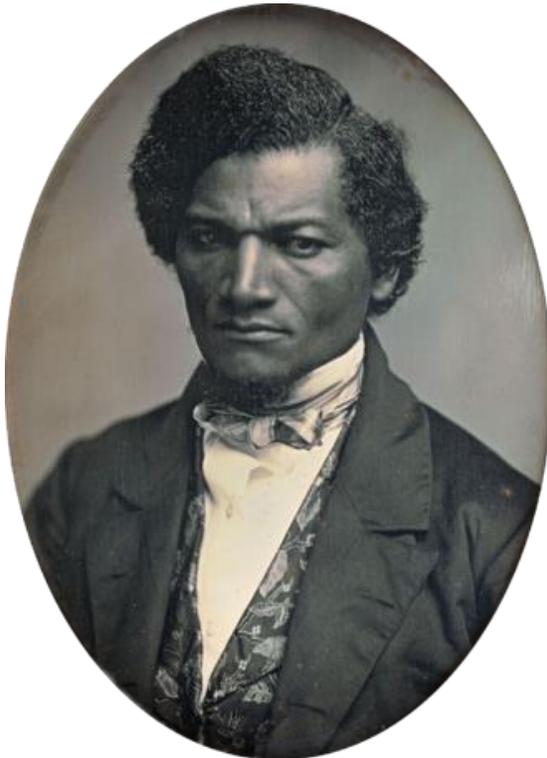
Suggested for Grade 6 and up, with Families

African-Americans’ Long Struggle for Justice

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

[From the Declaration of Independence, 1776]

Every generation of African-Americans has faced the struggle for an equal share in the promise of the American dream. From abolitionist Frederick Douglass’s 1852 speech to artist Jacob Lawrence’s 1940–41 *Migration Series* prints, to the 2020 Black Lives Matter demonstrations, African-Americans have expressed their frustration at the failure of the United States of America to live up to the promises of its founders.



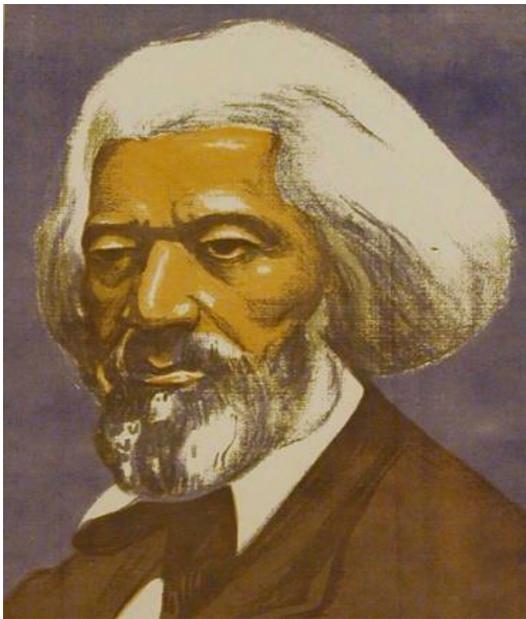
Left: Frederick Douglass, 1847–1885. Photo by Samuel J. Miller.

Right: Jacob Lawrence, 1941. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Carl Van Vechten Collection.

Let's explore the work of visionaries Douglass and Lawrence with these questions in mind:

- What specific conditions and issues do they each cite?
- Who is the intended audience for each man's work?
- What gives each man hope for positive change?
- What has changed since Frederick Douglass' speech and Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series*? What has stayed the same?
- Do you think Douglass' words and Lawrence's images have the same meaning today?

Frederick Douglass (ca. 1818–1895)



Frederick Douglass moved to Rochester in 1847 and in the same year he founded *The North Star*, antislavery newspaper (later called *Frederick Douglass' Paper*).

[See more resources on MAG's website.](#)

Elizabeth M. Olds, *Frederick Douglass*, 1942.
Color serigraph. Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 2001.16

Born into slavery, Frederick Douglass became a key leader of the movement to abolish slavery. On July 5, 1852 the fiery orator was invited to speak in Rochester, New York, his home from 1847 to 1872, to a group of 500 abolitionists. His topic: *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*

Continue to read excerpts of the speech . . .

“Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?”

. . . What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour.

. . . Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented, of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. ‘The arm of the Lord is not shortened,’ and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope.”

[Read the entire speech](#), or [listen to actor James Earl Jones’s oration](#).

- How do the words of this speech make you feel?
- What words does Douglass use to describe the life of the American slave?
- Do you think Douglass’s words have the same impact and meaning today as they did in 1852?
- What has changed since then? What do you think has stayed the same?

Continue to read about Jacob Lawrence’s Migration Series . . .

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)



Jacob Lawrence
Left: *The 1920's... The Migrants Arrive and Cast Their Ballots*, 1974
Color serigraph
Gift of Lorillard, New York, 1975.120.8

In 1940–41 Jacob Lawrence created *Migration Series*, 60 prints that depict the conditions of African-American life in the southern United States in the early 20th-century, and their Great Migration to seek more opportunities and freedom in the northern cities and states. *The 1920's...The Migrants Arrive and Cast their Ballots* is number 59 in the series.

Lawrence noted, “During the post-World War I period millions of black people left southern communities in the United States and migrated to northern cities. This migration reached its peak during the 1920's. Among the many advantages the migrants found in the north was the freedom to vote. In my print, migrants are represented expressing that freedom.”

See [MoMA's 2015 exhibition *One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series*](#) and compare these images with the conditions described by Frederick Douglass two generations earlier.