



Paper Trails

tina post



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Doors (3 Demolition)
1957

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migration
stories

The Migration Stories Chapbook Series, 2019

Drawn from the community at and around the University of Chicago

Edited by Rachel Cohen and Rachel DeWoskin

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“The Prayer of the Exile”

They are so homesick they pray like this: “If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take back to Tennessee.”

—*Memphis Commercial Appeal*
(reprinted in the *Chicago Defender*,
June 10, 1911)

SPRING

It’s a cold, gray morning in May and I am still desperately homesick. It has been eight months since we moved, but I long for our old mustard yellow house. I want its crooked corners and cracking plaster and the doorframe where we measured our babies twice a year as they gained inches and then feet. The dents and wine bottle stains in the butcher-

block counter. Our dogwood and its little mosquito-ridden yard. I want to chat with my next-door neighbor under the cherry trees in blossom, the children swinging in the hammock just out of sight. I want to fear again the skunk who meanders through the evening dusk. The light that comes through the dining room window in such a way, one morning, that you suddenly see the dust thick on everything, even the Christmas cactus, and you’re appalled that you did not see it in the weak winter sun. But you see it today: the sloughed bits of skin and fabric, the exertions of long months ready to be wiped clean. I want to wipe it clean and still be at home. I want our home. But another family lives in our space, which is no longer ours. The space that is ours still feels like another family’s, too.

I'll admit I didn't anticipate this. My diploma was a paper airplane meant to glide us into the future, and the future I landed was elsewhere. I was sad when the contracts were negotiated and signed: now this job is mine, now this house is yours. But I slid the papers across desks and through the internet's ether, and I trusted the current to keep us all aloft.

§

Now I am thinking about the Great Migration, the movement of some six million black people out of the American South during the first half of the twentieth century. This thinking did not begin as a moral corrective, though I am trying to make it one. Who am I to be disconsolate, with my large apartment and hot running water and good job and kind neighbors. Who I am to feel displaced, with my relatively cosmopolitan understanding of day-to-day urban life.

From my new neighborhood on Chicago's south side, I am thinking about the *Chicago Defender*, whose ongoing efforts and 1917 call for "A Great Northern Drive," are widely credited with helping to impel the northern movement of black Americans. More than a hundred thousand new black residents arrived in Chicago between 1916 and 1918 alone. The *Defender* was the most

popular black newspaper of the day, boasting a paid circulation of 120,000, though, given the ways newspapers were read communally and shared hand-to-hand, scholars estimate that the *Defender's* true circulation was five times greater. The majority of these readers were located outside of Chicago. The *Defender* supported its call to migration with both reportage and punditry. The paper reported lynchings and published scathing editorials. It printed job listings and train schedules alongside nail-biting tales of Southern whites attempting to prevent the flow of workers out of their orchards. Article titles were themselves rhetorical maneuvers. "Great Northern Drive to Start," declared the headline to the *Defender's* announcement of their campaign for migration, as though it were in any way a sure thing that millions would uproot themselves and their families, as though this were a self-fulfilling prophesy.

An important part of the *Defender's* efforts were what now seem sentimental poems, lauding the North and the hopes of relocation. Witness the last stanza of "Bound for the Promised Land," by a Mr. Ward, published on November 11th, 1916:

**Now, why should I remain longer
south,
To be kicked and dogged around?
"Crackers" to knock me in the**

mouth
And shoot my brother down.
No, I won't. I'm leaving today,
No longer can I wait.
If the recruiters fail to take me
'way,
I'm bound to catch a freight.

According to an unattributed news item reprinted in *The Negro in Chicago (1922)* – a thorough-going report produced by The Chicago Commission on Race Relations after the riots of 1919 exposed the conditions of black life in Chicago – for some authorities in the South, this poem amounted to contraband:

Five young men were arraigned before Judge E. Schwartz for reading poetry. The police claim they were inciting riot in the city and over Georgia. [...] Tom Amaca was arrested for having “Bound for the Promise Land,” a poem published in the *Defender* several months ago. J. N. Chislom and A. A. Walker were arrested because they were said to be the instigators of the movement of the race to the North, where work is plentiful and better treatment is given.

§

I am thinking of the circular, symbiotic movement of people and paper. Newspapers in, people out. More newspapers in, more people out. I can find curiously little about how this circulation

worked in concrete, material terms. While I am not a historian, I am a fair researcher, and still I can tell you more about *Samizdat*, the illicit distribution of dissident materials in the Eastern Bloc, than I can about the techniques used to smuggle the *Defender* into the South. Here's what I can confirm about *the Defender*.

From *The Negro in Chicago*: “Several cities attempted to prevent its circulation among their Negro population and confiscated the street- and store-sales supplies as fast as they came. Negroes then relied upon subscription copies delivered through the mails. There are reports of the clandestine circulation of copies of the paper in bundles of merchandise.”

Pullman Porters facilitated the newspaper's distribution in the South. One man interviewed by oral historian Timuel Black remembers being paid by the *Defender's* distribution manager to stuff the papers into white envelopes so that white folks would not recognize them. The lede of John R. Hinton's “Sparks from the Rail” column of March 14, 1914 is given over to a note from the editor:

The Chicago Defender is indebted to the vast army of railroad men for their pride in its efforts for the good of the race and their credible work in extending its

circulation. Through them it has reached the remote parts of the world. Only last week a passenger on the Philadelphia & Reading R.R. received his first copy from a porter, while almost at the same time Hon. Booker T. Washington was handed one en route from Tuskegee to Chicago. Space will not permit of an extensive discussion of this matter, but the railroad man's opportunity for good is great. That they have not neglected it is instanced above and many more could be mentioned.

One thinks of Frederick Douglass's declination to share the details that surrounded the "transaction" of his escape: "were I to give a minute statement of all the facts," he said, "it is not only possible, but quite probable, that others would thereby be involved in the most embarrassing difficulties. Secondly, such a statement would most undoubtedly induce greater vigilance on the part of slaveholders than has existed heretofore among them; which would, of course, be the means of guarding a door whereby some dear bondman might escape his galling chains."

§

I try to picture it:
On the second floor of 3159 South State, the distribution manager organizes a scrum of knickerbockered boys. He gives

each a stack of newsprint and a stack of large, plain envelopes. The boys are a touching blend of unruly and diligent. Their arms are all a-jumble, but they make tidy piles for the porters. The porters, in turn, place the envelopes into their picnic hampers, bury them under a shoe-shine kit, a protective bit of cloth, roast chicken. In the brown and orange railcar, basket after basket is tucked away. A whistle sounds. The lockers close. Sleeves are tugged down once more.

The men descend to the platform, standing beside the railway doors, unobtrusive, quiet. Each is now named George, a faithful and discreet uncle regardless of his age. Changeably interchangeable, and all beloved for their proximate invisibility, for their mild and miraculous ability to appear at a gentleman's elbow then disappear right under his nose.

The train descends south. Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas.

And on the other end: Perhaps it's a bright Tuesday morning, the kind that's going to be hot but isn't yet. A young man scans the crowded train platform with no luck, mail bag dangling empty at his side. Let's say it's the barber's nephew; let's say his name is Arthur. He's twenty-three. Teacher at the Negro school. A race man, but quiet-like. Hands thrust deep in his pockets, he starts threading

his way through the trunks and families knotted in their hellos and goodbyes. A Jack Russell lunges at his passing leg from one direction just as a white woman takes a distracted step backwards. Legs jumping back, torso twisting sideways, he just manages to avoid contact with either. As he recovers he sees a hand waving at him. He makes his way toward it.

Arthur knows the porter better now than he ever did when they were young, now that they have this little weekly routine. The war moved Jim away, but eight months ago he returned, the buttons of his Pullman jacket shining in the sun. They exchange their greetings, each touching two fingers and a thumb to the corner of his cap in the formal greeting of business. Behind Jim, another porter is handling the comings and goings of leather cases with a smile and a bit of a bow, as Jim will do for him at the next whistle stop. Arthur pulls an empty mail bag over his head and hands it over. Jim picks up the full bag at his side and helps Arthur sling its weight over his chest. A little louder than necessary—but by a barely perceptible degree—they announce the innocuity of the hand-off.

“Got a parcel or two in here.”

“A friend sent a couple of extra primers for the school. How’s your health? And how’s the weather up

north?”

“Health is good, but it’s terrible cold. I’m sure y’all will hear all about it in those letters.”

“Well, I don’t envy you that weather.”

At the bottom of the mailbag, a bundle of this week’s *Defenders* make their way to the uncle’s barbershop. Then a network of deacons with fresh haircuts will fan out, will visit other shops just to hear the goings-on. They’ll walk in with white envelopes and walk out without them. In the back, the men will pore over the news of lynchings, and the promises of northern jobs. The editorial voice will urge them to leave. Swear they won’t be alone. They’ll copy out poems that promise possibility, pin them to their walls at home. Their families will read them a hundred times a day. Pin them to their prayers.

§

Drive, v.

Signification.

I. To force (living beings) to move on or away.

a. *transitive.* To force (people or animals) to move on before one, or flee away from one, by blows or intimidation; to urge on or impel with violence. Usually with an adverb or preposition phr. defining the direction, etc., *as away, back,*

down, in, off, on, out, up; from, to, toward, through a place, etc. In combination with an adverb often answering in sense to a compound verb from Latin: **drive back** = repel, **drive out** = expel, **drive in** or **on** = impel.

b. Proverb. (needs must when the devil drives)

c. transf. To constrain or oblige to go or flee (by force of circumstances, or by an inward feeling or impulse).

SUMMER

The Great Migration caused entire industries to change color and culture; urban spaces became black and the social sciences took up the ghetto as an object of study; black wealth began its spasmodic development in earnest; African American arts came into categorical strength alongside complex economies of patronage and “social good.” It’s one of the historical moments of communal blackness to which I’ve always been most drawn.

I grew up a little brown girl in a rural place that felt, for various reasons, a little bit dangerous and a lot devoid of opportunity, and which I managed to leave. I went to New York City, which is a good city for the young. My memory of the city is all of summer. I loved the sidewalks and the street

lights, banal but civilizing things that had never before been part of my world. I adored the regular grid of streets and avenues. The pasted adverts and the graffiti that irrevocably altered what those ads hoped to sell. The hot wind that arrived with every subway train. Even the things I hated were enlivening in their hatefulness: How can everyone walk past the man sleeping on tattered scraps of cardboard? How could anything smell as bad as a dumpster circled by pools of hot piss? Above all, I loved being anonymous. Being nobody felt like being free.

I learned – or thought I did – that picking up sticks is hardscrabble but exciting. There’s never quite enough money. There are moments of squalor and shame and precarity and sometimes a phantom pang from the life you left behind. You chase some intangible thing. Love, or community, or joy, or safety. You get exhausted. But there are real, material objects to keep you in thrall: change purses and cranberry vodkas and green neon letters and bronze sculptures and the cologned oxford shirt your bare shoulder is crushed into as you hurtle under a river. There’s danger of a different flavor and always something new to see. It can feel like life. And sometimes in chasing after it all, you get to forget that you were running.

That’s what it felt like when I was

young, anyway.

§

Undoubtedly it felt this way, too, for some who swept themselves north, as is often reflected in the works of the younger Harlem Renaissance artists and writers. They detailed heady cabarets and whirlwind romances; they told tales of wealth and passing; they wore mink or espoused communist politics; they wrote of sexual encounters that flew in the face of corseted and hard-won Negro respectability. They insisted on pleasure. They dared to embrace Africa – or at least an idea of it – and changed black literary history in the course of a single journal issue. In Aaron Douglas's illustrations, migrants become sleek, stark shapes silhouetted in sharp channels of light alongside trombones, skyscrapers, dollar bills. Hard, elegant, modern forms.

In the semester just before we moved, I taught my students about this. We read the Renaissance's celebrated literati: Toomer, Brown, Locke, Hurston, Hughes, Larsen, Wright. Nella Larsen, as it happens, was born and raised in Chicago. She was the daughter of a European immigrant woman who remarried a white man after Nella's black West Indian father left them, making Nella the only black person in a white immigrant family. Larsen wrote stories of

profound misplacement and longing, resonant with that era of migration.

In Larsen's novel *Passing*, Chicago is, too, a summertime city. But it is also a city of middle age. At the novel's opening, Irene Redfield is scouring the city for souvenir gifts for her two sons back home in New York. A drawing pad eludes her. She goes from shop to shop in the sizzling heat until she witnesses a man collapse. She, too, feels faint, and so retreats to a rooftop restaurant.

The Drayton is luxuriously transporting: long windows, fluttering curtains, a tall green glass, a view of the lake's "bright, unstirred blue." She enjoys these elegances under false pretenses, being light enough to pass. In this moment of pleasant ease, she indulges the frustrated thoughts of a tired mother in the afternoon: "Ted and his book. Why was it that almost invariably he wanted something that was difficult or impossible to get? Like his father. Forever wanting something that he couldn't have."

Ted is like his mother, too, as we learn when Irene's retreat is compromised by a friend from her youth. Chicago accommodates worry and luxury, creature comforts and false fronts. Mothers retreat to unsuspecting rooftops. But the past appears of its own

accord, and its desires won't be shaken.

I try not to resent longing for my former life and the doors I closed, as Irene resents her own longing in the novel. It is summer, and I go to the lake. There is sun, and there are waves. I try not to miss the smell of the ocean's salt, the buoyancy it lends a body.

§

"Some 'Don'ts'" from the *Chicago Defender*, May 17, 1919

[...] It is evident that some of the people coming to this city have seriously erred in their conduct in public places, much to the humiliation of all respectable classes of our citizens, and by so doing, on account of their ignorance of the laws and customs necessary for the maintenance of health, sobriety and morality among the people in general, have given our enemies ground for complaint. We consider it absolutely necessary that a united effort should be made on the part of all law-abiding citizens to endeavor to warn and teach those who by their acts bring reproach upon the Colored people of this city to strictly observe the laws, city ordinances and customs and so conduct themselves as to reflect credit upon themselves: by doing so it will disarm those who are endeavoring to discredit our Race.

We Call Attention to Some Things Which Should Be Observed by Our People (selected)

Don't live in insanitary houses, or sleep in rooms without proper ventilation.

Don't allow children to beg on the streets.

Don't take the part of law breakers, be they men, women, or children.

Don't work for less wages than being paid people doing the same kind of work.

Don't be made a tool or strike breaker for any corporation or firm.

Don't get intoxicated and go out on the street insulting women and children and making a beast of yourself—some one may act likewise with your wife and children.

Don't be a beer can rusher or allow children to do such service.

Don't allow children under 15 years of age to run the streets after 9 o'clock pm.

Don't appear on the street with old dust caps, dirty aprons and ragged clothes.

Don't use liberty as a license to do as you please.

§

Reading this list of constriction in the *Defender*, I think of Gwendolyn Brooks, poet of Chicago's south side – another writer I taught my students back home. In her poem “The Lovers of the Poor,” the women of the Ladies’ Betterment League go slumming, ostensibly to choose someone upon whom to bestow their benevolence, though they have some trouble finding a worthy candidate.

They’ve never seen such a
 make-do-ness as
 Newspaper rugs before! In this,
 this “flat,”
 Their hostess is gathering up the
 oozed, the rich
 Rugs of the morning (tattered!
 the bespattered....)
 Readies to spread clean rugs for
 afternoon.
 Here is a scene for you. The
 Ladies look,
 In horror, behind a substantial
 citizeness
 Whose trains clank out across her
 swollen heart.
 Who, arms akimbo, almost fills a
 door.
 All tumbling children, quilts
 dragged to the floor
 And tortured thereover, potato
 peelings, soft-
 Eyed kitten, hunched-up,
 haggard, to-be-hurt.

Perhaps on the floor is that very list
 of “Don’t’s,” read over black coffee

while warming bread for the children, the newspaper spread to catch their falling crumbs. Newsprint rugs to starve the rats that will bite a sleeping child in the night, their teeth cruel ivory picks that can take a baby’s finger clean away. Hence the kitten tumbling with the babies, one more flutter in the soft pile of peelings. Quilts line the battered floor to stave off splinters, to save the mother’s needles for something other than skin. Such a different feel to their feet than grass. But soft. Ragged clothes, she thinks, I ask you. Even the best mender cannot make clothing new again. And why should they be denied a beer after a sweltering summer day. The *Defender* says not to break strikes, not to accept less money for a job than would be offered to another. But how, she would like to ask, is a black man supposed to demand more than the world wants to give him? And what would become of the family without what work he could find, even if it is at the stockyard? Then these taffeta-skirted, hair-pinned women come to the door. “Lady to lady,” they say, their voices honied as they crane their necks to study her home behind her. It is a relief when they go, having delivered nothing but condescension dressed as good will. Her oldest child, a quiet girl in the corner, carefully folds newsprint pages lengthwise, making strips to weave in and out of one another before they go onto

the floor. She is making paper into its more durable miracle. It's good what folding can accomplish, she thinks, what strength can come from something stacked upon itself.

§

7. *Psychology*

(a) Any internal mechanism which sets an organism moving or sustains its activity in a certain direction, or causes it to pursue a certain satisfaction; a motive principle; any tendency to persistent behaviour directed at a goal; *esp.* one of the recognized physiological tensions or conditions of need, such as hunger and thirst.

(b) Any type of persistent behaviour or disposition that would lead to the attainment of a certain goal.

FALL

On the first day of school my children are terrified, though they are trying not to show it. I am terrified for them, though I am also trying not to show it. I wonder if they see through me as easily as I see through them, even though I also worry I am painting them with my own worry. I wonder if they wonder the same.

We're too early and my sons'

classrooms aren't yet open. We sit on a sunny bench. We stare at a row of red lockers. They are already decorated with names ringed with colored pencil illustrations, or photos from last year's picture day. My children have neither. I try to perform enthusiasm. I take out my phone, tell them I want a picture of their first day at this new school. Smile, I say. In the picture my younger son is looking anxiously down the hallway. My older son is giving me side-eye. Their performance rings truer than mine.

The hallways begin filling with noise and bodies. We stare at the red lockers.

§

After I leave my children at school, I unpack books onto the shelves in my office, alphabetical and by genre. As I place them, I pull Angelina Weld Grimké's play *Rachel* and place it on my desk.

Rachel is set in an unnamed Northern city whose geography aligns better with Chicago's black neighborhoods than New York's. A mother, son, and daughter live a modest but comfortable black middle-class existence here. Rachel, the daughter, is beloved by and dotes upon the children of the building, and by the second act she has adopted a little boy whose parents fell ill and died.

Rachel's most fervent desire is to have children of her own. The play's first indication that Rachel's desire will be complicated comes when her mother reveals that Rachel's father and half-brother were lynched; this is what prompted the survivors' migration to the North. This disclosure is not the play's turning point, however. Rather, Rachel's fate is altered by the chance arrival of a Mrs. Lane and her seven-year old daughter Ethel, who have come to look at an apartment in the building and to inquire about the school.

"My husband and I are poor, we're ugly and we're black," Mrs. Lane explains with frankness. The Lane family lives in a cheap neighborhood on 55th street, where they have "a nice little home" despite their poverty. The three of them were happy, Mrs. Lane continues, until they sent Ethel to school, where Ethel was bullied by her teacher and peers for her "naturally sensitive and backward" nature, her fear of being mocked, and, above all, her blackness. She is excluded, touched unkindly, called racial slurs. In two weeks' time, Ethel is reduced to a fragile, quaking mess. Rachel soon learns that her adoptive son faces slurs at school as well, that her home in the North is not the safe haven she once believed it to be. She never recovers from this realization, though whether her reaction amounts to a coming to

or leaving of her senses is a matter of debate.

I pull this particular volume because I'd discovered, when I taught this play last term, that my copy has a printing error. It is missing the first several pages, wherein Grimké delineates the family's domestic abode in painstaking detail, right down to the color of the baseboard and trim, the type of curtain hangings, which window is shut and which is open, the names of the paintings on the walls. I teach my students that this scene-setting is important. I tell them they will find shabbier echoes of this abode in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. But more than that, I say, this home is detailed so exactly for what it reveals of the family and the intimate domestic life they have made. Some of this information reads to the audience; the inexpensive framed image of Millet's "The Reapers," for example, says something of labor and thrift, of agricultural roots and community. But there are details well beyond what an audience might see from any distance from the stage. How are they to know that the sewing machine is already threaded? Such detail, I tell my students, translates to the audience in the exactness with which the scene is set by the director and stage designers. It reiterates across productions, when the room always looks just

so. It informs the actors who will inhabit this space as their own. And it informs you, I say, as you imagine what it is to enter and abide in this home.

I had intended to ask the press to replace my desk copy before the move, though I ran out of time with all the other arrangements that needed to be made. I resolve to do it now.

§

“How to Keep Well: Doing the Unexpected Thing,” By Dr. A. Wilberforce Williams. *Chicago Defender*, September 11, 1920

It is time for you to do the unexpected thing by having your children or child all ready for entrance in school. Begin now and have your children’s teeth, eyes, and ears carefully examined by a first-class physician and dentist. If there is any trouble with adenoids and tonsils have them removed. Get busy, wash and repair their school clothes. Get their shoes repaired. Please, do not send your child to school with toes out and heels all run down or off, as it lessens the child’s pride, diminishes its ambition and self-respect. Teach your children to love cleanliness and to bathe frequently. Give special attention to the child’s head—see to it that there are no lice about the head and body of your child. See to

it that there are no bedbugs about the premises to disturb the child’s rest at night. These things will give you plenty to do and leave no time to gossip with your neighbors about the clothes line. Instead of spending your evenings in cabarets, stay home and care for your children—get up early and send your child off to school with a warm meal in its stomach—do not tell your child to just eat that banana there and be off to school, nor give it a little cold cheese for its breakfast. Your child’s health is in your keeping. It is up to you, parents, to keep your children clean, healthy, and strong.

§

VII. *intransitive*. To drive oneself, or be driven; to move with vehemence or energy.

25.

a. To move along or advance quickly; to run or come with violence; to dash, rush, hasten.

b. *fig.* To work hard, ‘go at’ strenuously. *colloq.*

26.

a. To move along, impelled by wind, current, or other natural agency; to float along, drift.

27. *fig.*

a. To proceed in a course; to tend.

WINTER

Question: What difficulties do you think a person from the South meets in coming to Chicago?

Answers:

1. Getting used to climate and houses.

2. Getting accustomed to cold weather and flats.

4. Adjusting myself to the weather and flat life: rooming and 'closeness' of the houses.

7. Getting used to the ways of the people not speaking or being friendly; colder weather, hard on people from the south.

12. Adjustment to working conditions and climate.

13. Climatic changes.

14. Changes in climate, crowded living conditions, lack of space for gardens, etc.

15. Changes in climate, crowded housing conditions.

17. Becoming adjusted to climate.

– *The Negro in Chicago*, The Chicago Commission on Race Relations

§

The ice and its myriad aggressions.

The dirks threatening from eaves.
The black ice lying in wait.

The cold that lays claim to your fingertips, your toes.

Mornings that are neither rose and gold nor black and starry, but brown with the streetlights' grim sentry. And after, when the day is not bright but grey.

The wind, which, honest to God, you have walked into at a forty-five-degree angle only to march in place. It is cartoonish and funny except when it isn't. You find each step blown behind you and all your intentions with it. You blink into the onslaught, unsure how to move against the gale of the future, into its numbness.

The lonesome, which you can't fully explain except to say that it is the sparseness of all that has blown away.

The once-a-day your son says that he misses home. Me too, baby, you reply.

§

"Second Blizzard Hits Chicago; Everybody Digs, Fire Perils City; Business Houses Are Closed by Lack of Coal; Zero Weather Stays," *Chicago Defender*, January 19, 1918.

The worst blizzard that has visited

these parts of the country put in its appearance late last Friday afternoon and raged all night, the wind blowing a forty-five mile an hour gale and the snow falling until all traffic was brought to a standstill and Chicago found itself buried Saturday morning, with the thermometer hovering around 20 degrees below zero.

Street cars were stalled, trains were unable to move. All day Saturday the people dug, dug, and dug. Sunday it was the same. In many cases women and children wended their way with shovels to the street and cleared the road wide enough to allow the fire department to pass in case of a blaze. [...] Many newcomers who heretofore had never seen snow were out doing their bit. The front and cold did not daunt them, as they were wrapped up warmly.

Those reported dead:
[...]

An unidentified woman about 36 years of age entered a westbound Lake street car Saturday night, apparently cold, and succumbed a few minutes later.

An unidentified woman was found frozen at the corner of 37th street and Indiana avenue.

§

Moving in middle age feels so

different from moving in my youth. In fact, its feeling is rendered in the hues of Jacob Lawrence's *Migration* series. Lawrence paints not bright, searing optimism, but the dinge of effort and worry. That is not to say he doesn't also picture hope. Hope can be quite a muddy thing.

In his works, loss and opportunity comingle. Housing is improved and a problem. Jobs are available and then stolen. Race riots come, and also the vote. Men arrive without families, or with them. A different discrimination exists, but schooling does too. Floors tip and angles unsettle. And the migrants keep coming, like water running to meet its level. The story changes, and perhaps there is a greater sense of symmetry, but the palette doesn't change from South to North. The overwhelming sense for me is not victory, but persistence.

I love the series better than I have in times past because for the first time I feel that the first year in a new place is just this side of bearable—even with family, and even with new friends. I don't know what it is. It's like the eyes can't quite relax into the new colors and the new angles of light, the ears cannot rest in familiar daily cadences, the nose lacks the odors of its baseline knowing. As a consequence: the body never rests, the mind never settles, there's

always this sense of casting out for something – of casting farther and farther afield, but nothing comes back. And I guess gradually you forget what you’re casting for, or your lines just tangle and break, and you find something new to feed on. Gradually.

§

“If YOU CAN FREEZE TO DEATH in the north and be free, why FREEZE to death in the south and be a slave, where your mother, sister, and daughter are raped and burned at the stake, where your father, brother, and son are treated with contempt and hung to a pole, riddled with bullets at the least mention that he does not like the way he has been treated. [...] The Defender says come.”

– From “Freezing to Death in the South,” February 24, 1917

§

V. To go through, endure, pass, prolong.

†**20** *transitive*. To go through (something painful or unpleasant); to endure, suffer, undergo. (Apparently confused to some extent with *dree* n.) *Obsolete*.

†**21**.

a. To pass, spend (time); to cause (the time) to pass: often with *away*, *forth*, *over*. *Obsolete*.

b. *intransitive*. Of time: To pass away, elapse. *Obsolete*.

22. *transitive*. To protract, prolong (time or occupation): also with *off*, *out*, *on*. Hence, to put off, defer. Also *absol*.

MARKING TIME

It’s a hot day in July – the hottest since I’ve arrived in Chicago. This is normally the kind of weather I love, though I am ignoring it in favor of work. I am back on my computer, reckoning again with the Migration. I am trying to feel myself in the slipstream of history, one more among all the black folk who’ve come to Chicago who’ve endured homesickness and worry and worse and still made themselves a life. Once an hour I give up and wander the internet for five minutes. Then it flashes across a tickertape of confessionals and news stories: the *Chicago Defender* prints its last today. I re-read the post. I google the story on the *New York Times*. I visit the *Defender*’s website.

What can it mean to come across this as I am in the midst of trying to write about the Migration and the *Defender* – paper in, people out? One wishes for a narrative of rebirth. One wants a narrative of spring. The *Defender*’s spokespeople are hopeful that being able to focus on their digital

edition will strengthen what they do. All fifteen employees will remain. People in, paper out. They leave other voices to carry the longer lament: what the *Defender* meant once; the sadness of its decline; the irony that the success of integration brought down the pillars of black culture. Inevitably the sense of loss and nostalgia is most pervasive. I wander my apartment. Paint cans and drop cloths litter the floors, the detritus of my campaign to finally make this apartment our own.

§

At his old school, my younger son made seed bombs. He soaked and pulped newspaper, mixed in wildflower seeds, shaped the mess into balls, then dried it into transportable ballistics of springtime. We placed them in our old yard before we left, a blessing for the beloved home and a hope for the people we left it to. Besides, there was no yard to speak of in our future life. But I am trying to make us a new mess of newspaper and seeds, capsules durable enough to weather a winter, precarious enough to come apart and set down roots.

§

27. *fig.*

a. To proceed in a course; to tend.

b. with at (formerly also †to): To

proceed towards with definite intention, aim at, have for one's drift or aim; to mean, intend, purpose.

About the Author

Tina Post is a Provost's Postdoctoral Fellow in English at the University of Chicago. Her literary nonfiction has appeared in *ImaginedTheatres.com*, *The Appendix*, and in *Stone Canoe*, where it won the S.I. Newhouse School Prize for Nonfiction.

Afterword

We are proud, pleased, and grateful to present this series of five chapbooks as part of the ongoing Migration Stories Project at the University of Chicago. We decided to introduce a chapbook series because it feels important for writers in our community to have a place for longer reflections about histories and experiences of migration. In these pages, Tanya Desai writes on animals shipped across oceans and among royalty in the early modern period; Tina Post traces movements of paper and people through the *Chicago Defender* and the Great Migration; Felipe Bomeny pieces together one man's experience of leaving Xelajú during the Guatemalan Civil War; Liana Fu uses poetry, prose, found texts, photography and two languages to think about coming of age in the Hong Kong diaspora; and Susan Augustine chronicles the work of the Hyde Park Refugee Project to support two Syrian refugee families arriving on the south side of Chicago. Each piece illuminates another moving line in the vast map of the history of migration, and helps us to see more clearly how these lines shine through the life of our shared neighborhoods.

The Migration Stories Project began in November of 2016 as a project of the Creative Writing Department in the hopes of making more spaces to tell and listen to migration stories, and to help elucidate the collective history of migration in the community at and around the University of Chicago. Over the last three years, the Migration Stories Project has created or co-hosted nine public readings, and has collaborated with the Smart Museum, Student Support Services, and the Regenstein Library. In 2017, we published an anthology of migration stories, written by people from all around our community, now accessible at <https://knowledge.uchicago.edu/record/1236>. We are glad to be a part of the new Migration Studies Cluster hosted jointly by the English Department and Creative Writing, which creates research opportunities for our students and fosters new collaborative relationships among our faculty. More information on Migration Stories Projects can be found at <https://creativewriting.uchicago.edu/>.

We hope these chapbooks inspire new readers as they have inspired us, to keep reading, writing, and imagining stories of migration.

Rachel Cohen & Rachel DeWoskin

Creative Writing
University of Chicago

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Migration Stories Chapbook Series

Susan Augustine, *Jumping In*

Felipe Bomeny, *Leaving Xelajú*

Tanya Desai, *Dürer and the Rhinoceros*

Liana Fu, *Origins*

Tina Post, *Paper Trails*