A Road Three Hundred Years Long: Cinema and the Great Migration
June 1—12, 2015
The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

The Department of Film’s companion series to the exhibition One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence’s Great Migration Series and Other Visions of the Great Movement North features the world premiere of a new MoMA commission: Thom Andersen’s Juke: Passages from the Films of Spencer Williams (2015). In Juke, Andersen reconsiders the work of Williams, the pioneering African American writer-director whose central dramatic theme in such films as The Blood of Jesus (1941) and Go Down, Death! (1944) was the battle between the sacred and the profane, the church and the juke joint.

Accompanying the premiere of Juke is a concise selection of fiction films by independent African American writer-directors, including Eloyce and James Gist, Oscar Micheaux, and Spencer Williams; and nonfiction films of the 1920s-1940s, including newsreels, amateur films, ethnographic studies, home movies, and New Deal social documentaries by William D. Alexander, Zora Neale Hurston, Pare Lorentz, Edgar Ulmer and others. For black audiences during the Great Migration, these moving images stood in stark contrast to their lives in the South, offering the promise of deliverance from impoverishment, injustice, and violence—the promise, though perhaps not the fulfillment—as well as visions of a new black urban modernity.

The legacy of the Migration is reflected in more contemporary films like Charles Burnett’s To Sleep with Anger (1990), Julie Dash’s Daughters of the Dust (1991), and Kevin Jerome Everson’s Company Line (2009). Guest presenters include Hilton Als, Thom Andersen, Lynne Sachs, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart.

Organized by Joshua Siegel, Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art; and Thomas Beard, independent curator; with Candace Ming, research assistant. Special thanks to Martin L. Johnson and Dan Streible.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press.
Monday, June 1

4:30 Laughter in Hell. 1933. USA. Directed by Edward L. Cahn. Screenplay by Tom Reed. With Pat O’Brien, Clarence Muse, Tommy Conlon, Merna Kennedy. Responding in the African American weekly newspaper The New York Age to the controversy surrounding Laughter in Hell, a pre-Code chain gang melodrama from Universal Pictures, the Jamaican-born columnist Vere E. Johns wrote, “I journeyed all the way to the little Morningside Theatre at 116th street and Eighth avenue [sic] to see it. The complaint was that nine colored convicts were hanged in the picture…. The whole thing in my opinion…is intended to be an exposé of the appalling cruelty of Southern chain gangs, and with the known attitude to the Negro in the southern states, if such a picture did not show the colored convicts getting a rawer deal than the whites, then it would be faulty. Any picture that will tend to lessen the brutality in the South should be encouraged. I haven’t heard of any white people complaining about the brutality meted out to Paul Muni in I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang or to Richard Dix and Tom Brown in Hell’s Highway, and I can see no reason for objection in this case.” Courtesy NBC Universal. 70 min.

Introduced by filmmaker Thom Andersen.

6:45 Juke: Passages from the Films of Spencer Williams. 2015. Directed by Thom Andersen. MoMA presents the world premiere of a newly commissioned moving-image work, Juke, in which Thom Andersen (Los Angeles Plays Itself, Red Hollywood) reconsiders the films of Spencer Williams, the pioneering African American screenwriter, director, and actor whose 1940s melodramas centered on sinners and saints—Beale Street mamas and storefront preachers, crime bosses and upwardly striving lawyers and soldiers—who are tempted by jazz and sex and then set back on the glory road to salvation. “I began to notice a remarkable documentary record of black life in the 1940s in these films,” Andersen observes. “There are the nightclub scenes, of course, but there is also a precious recording of residential spaces, from the shack in The Blood of Jesus to the comfortable middle-class rooming house in Juke Joint. [My] film brings out these documentary qualities by looping shots of empty interiors and showing actions freed from the plot. I am not trying to make some new meaning from these films; I am striving to bring out the meanings that are there but obscured by the plot lines: the dignity of black life and the creation of dynamic culture in the segregated society in small-town north Texas. I regard my movie as akin to Walker Evans’ photographs of sharecroppers’ home in 1930s and George Orwell’s essays on English working class interiors.” 30 min.

Movies of Local People (Chapel Hill). 1939. USA. Directed by H. Lee Waters. Between 1936 and 1942, the itinerant photographer and filmmaker H. Lee Waters travelled throughout North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and South Carolina to produce his Movies of Local People: 252 extraordinary film portraits of ordinary small-town America during the Great Depression. The entrepreneurial Waters encouraged local audiences to “See Yourself in the Movies,” convincing local theaters to screen his “home” movies as an added attraction before the Hollywood feature (and, naturally, taking a cut of the profits). The selection presented here was made for the Hollywood Theater, a segregated cinema in Chapel Hill reserved for African American moviegoers. Courtesy H. Lee Waters Film Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. 29 min.

Introduced by filmmaker Thom Andersen.

Wednesday, June 3

4:30 The Symbol of the Unconquered. 1920. USA. Directed by Oscar Micheaux. With Iris Hall, Walker Thompson, Lawrence Chenault. The critic J. Hoberman has described Micheaux as the "Black Pioneer of American film—not just because he was a black man, or because in his youth he pioneered the West, or because he was the greatest figure in 'race' movies and an unjustly ignored force in early American cinema. Micheaux is America's Black Pioneer in the way that André Breton was Srealism's
Black Pope. His movies throw our history and movies into an alien and startling disarray." One of Micheaux's earliest surviving films, *The Symbol of the Unconquered* is a stirring melodrama about the westward migration of a young African American woman from her native Selma, Alabama, to the Pacific Northwest town of Orison. Micheaux provided a dramatic rebuttal to the racism of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*: as one advertisement for the film read, "See the Ku Klux Clan in action—and their annihilation." Silent, with Max Roach score courtesy Turner Classic Movies. Approx. 54 min.

**Introduced by scholar Jacqueline Najuma Stewart.**

6:45

**Broken Earth.** 1936. USA. Directed by Roman Freulich. With Clarence Muse. Freulich, a Hollywood still photographer, belonged to an early generation of American experimental filmmakers. This exceptional one-reeler—a sequence from which Spencer Williams incorporated into his feature *The Blood of Jesus*—stars Clarence Muse as a sharecropper whose prayerful devotion brings his ailing son back to health. Freulich's poignant images of backbreaking farm work and his use of local African American Southerners as extras redeem the film's maudlin pieties. Courtesy G. William Jones Film and Video Collection, Hamon Arts Library, Southern Methodist University. 11 min.

**Hellbound Train.** 1930. USA. Written and directed by James Gist, Eloyce King Patrick Gist. The long-forgotten husband-and-wife amateur filmmaking team of Eloyce and James Gist were black evangelists (she a convert to the Bahá’í faith and he a Baptist) whose *Hellbound Train* was a jeremiad against intemperance, jazz music, and abortion, set on a train filled with unrepentant sinners hurtling toward damnation. The Gists presented their movie on a Bible-thumping program of sermons and hymns to African American church congregations and civic groups in Washington, D.C. Courtesy S. Torriano Berry. 20 min.

**The Blood of Jesus.** 1941. USA. Written and directed by Spencer Williams. With Williams, Cathryn Caviness, Juanita Riley, Reather Hardeman. Film scholar Jacqueline Najuma Stewart has described the films of Spencer Williams as being "vastly underappreciated despite his unique ability to capture Black religious and cultural practices while experimenting with film style." Williams made this debut feature film in Texas on a miniscule budget, and it became, according to Stewart, "probably the most popular movie made for African American audiences before World War II." A morality tale about a woman who is accidentally shot by her husband and forced, in limbo, to choose between heaven or hell, the film is indeed formally daring. Its animating tensions between the urban and the pastoral also provide a counterpoint to Jacob Lawrence's own juxtaposition of Jim Crow agrarian experience and northern city life in his Migration Series. Courtesy G. William Jones Film and Video Collection, Hamon Arts Library, Southern Methodist University. 57 min.

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Friday, June 5

4:30

**A New Deal for African Americans, 1937-1944**

**We Work Again.** 1937. USA. Produced by the Works Progress Administration. This Depression-era WPA film promoted New Deal employment opportunities for African Americans, and features the only known footage of Orson Welles's legendary "voodoo" *Macbeth*, which transposed Shakespeare's play to 19th-century Haiti and was staged in 1936 at the Lafayette Theater, the home base for the New York Negro Unit of the Federal Theater Project. Courtesy National Archives. 33 min.

**A Study of Educational Inequalities in South Carolina.** 1938. USA. Directed by Charles Hamilton Houston. A call to action produced by the NAACP and filmed by the influential civil rights attorney Charles Hamilton Houston, this sociological study sought to bring attention to the unjust distribution of resources within segregated school systems, arguing that "separate but equal" was anything but just. The film is also a richly evocative documentary record of African American life in the Deep South during the 1930s. Courtesy National Archives. 33 min.

**Let My People Live.** 1938. USA. Directed by Edgar Ulmer. Though known for visionary Poverty Row films like *Detour*, Ulmer also produced sponsored short subjects like this educational film, shot at Tuskegee University in Alabama and intended for young African American audiences, about the prevention and treatment of
tuberculosis. The widespread outbreak of TB-related illness and death in overcrowded black urban neighborhoods was a major concern, and Jacob Lawrence depicted the grim fate of one victim in Panel 55 of his Migration Series. 15 min.

**Henry Browne, Farmer.** 1942. USA. Directed by Roger Barlow. Narrated by Canada Lee. Produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a propaganda film, *Henry Browne* is the story of a 38-year-old African American father of three who does his part for the war effort by growing peanuts rather than his usual crops on his modest Georgia farm, and who looks on in pride at his son, a Tuskegee Airman. Courtesy National Archives. 11 min.

**The Negro Soldier.** 1944. USA. Produced by Frank Capra. Directed by Stuart Heisler. Screenplay by Carlton Moss. Jacob Lawrence made his 60-panel Migration Series in 1941, a watershed moment in the African American experience as millions of Southerners travelled northward and westward to escape poverty and violence, seeking economic opportunity and social advancement. The war, too, was a vital catalyst for change. This documentary, produced by Frank Capra for the U.S. Army following on the tremendous success of his *Why We Fight* series (and written by African American screenwriter Carlton Moss, a key figure of the Federal Theater), encouraged young black men to do their part for the American cause by enlisting in the armed forces; though segregation and prejudice remained a stark reality for many soldiers on the ground, the images they saw of themselves on screen marked a significant turning point in the history of racial representation in cinema, far more ennobling than the Hollywood stereotypes that preceded it and a shocking revelation to black and white audiences alike. 43 min.

Program 117 min.

7:15

**Laughter in Hell.** 1933. USA. Directed by Edward L. Cahn. Screenplay by Tom Reed. With Pat O'Brien, Clarence Muse, Tommy Conlon, Merna Kennedy. Responding in the African American weekly newspaper *The New York Age* to the controversy surrounding *Laughter in Hell*, a pre-Code chain gang melodrama from Universal Pictures, the Jamaican-born columnist Vere E. Johns wrote, “I journeyed all the way to the little Morningside Theatre at 116th street and Eighth avenue [sic] to see it. The complaint was that nine colored convicts were hanged in the picture…. The whole thing in my opinion...is intended to be an exposé of the appalling cruelty of Southern chain gangs, and with the known attitude to the Negro in the southern states, if such a picture did not show the colored convicts getting a rawer deal than the whites, then it would be faulty. Any picture that will tend to lessen the brutality in the South should be encouraged. I haven't heard of any white people complaining about the brutality meted out to Paul Muni in *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* or to Richard Dix and Tom Brown in *Hell's Highway*, and I can see no reason for objection in this case.” Courtesy NBC Universal. 70 min.

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2:30

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**Sunday, June 7**

2:00 **Daughters of the Dust.** 1992. USA. Written and directed by Julie Dash. With Cora Lee Day, Alva Rogers, Barbara O., Kaycee Moore, Adisa Anderson. The Sea Islands of
The Sea Islands of Georgia, described by filmmaker Julie Dash as a kind of "Ellis Island for Africans," is the beautiful and haunting setting for this tale of three generations of Gullah women in the Peazant family. Dash limns the bonds and strains between the ancestral mothers who were brought as slaves to St. Helena Island in the 18th century, and their children's children who, longing for the pleasures and freedom of modernity, restlessly prepare to "pass over" to the North in the year 1902. Astonishingly, *Daughters of the Dust* was the first feature film by an African American woman to have a theatrical release in the United States; elected to The Library of Congress' National Film Registry in 2004, it is now considered a landmark of independent American cinema. Courtesy UCLA Film & Television Archive. 113 min.

**A New Deal for African Americans, 1937-1944**

*We Work Again.* 1937. USA. Produced by the Works Progress Administration. This Depression-era WPA film promoted New Deal employment opportunities for African Americans, and features the only known footage of Orson Welles's legendary "voodoo" *Macbeth*, which transposed Shakespeare's play to 19th-century Haiti and was staged in 1936 at the Lafayette Theater, the home base for the New York Negro Unit of the Federal Theater Project. Courtesy National Archives. 33 min.

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*The Negro Soldier.* 1944. USA. Produced by Frank Capra. Directed by Stuart Heisler. Screenplay by Carlton Moss. Jacob Lawrence made his 60-panel Migration Series in 1941, a watershed moment in the African American experience as millions of Southerners travelled northward and westward to escape poverty and violence, seeking economic opportunity and social advancement. The war, too, was a vital catalyst for change. This documentary, produced by Frank Capra for the U.S. Army following on the tremendous success of his *Why We Fight* series (and written by African American screenwriter Carlton Moss, a key figure of the Federal Theater), encouraged young black men to do their part for the American cause by enlisting in the armed forces; though segregation and prejudice remained a stark reality for many soldiers on the ground, the images they saw of themselves on screen marked a significant turning point in the history of racial representation in cinema, far more ennobling than the Hollywood stereotypes that preceded it and a shocking revelation to black and white audiences alike. 43 min. Program 117 min.

**Monday, June 8**

4:00

*Daughters of the Dust.* 1992. USA. Written and directed by Julie Dash. With Cora Lee Day, Alva Rogers, Barbara O., Kaycee Moore, Adisa Anderson. The Sea Islands of Georgia, described by filmmaker Julie Dash as a kind of "Ellis Island for Africans," is the beautiful and haunting setting for this tale of three generations of Gullah women in the Peazant family. Dash limns the bonds and strains between the ancestral mothers
who were brought as slaves to St. Helena Island in the 18th century, and their
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release in the United States; elected to The Library of Congress' National Film Registry
in 2004, it is now considered a landmark of independent American cinema. Courtesy
UCLA Film & Television Archive. 113 min.

6:45

The Vanities. 1946. USA. Directed by William D. Alexander. Filmed in a cabaret in the
Deep South, this fascinating relic of burlesque features Charles Keith, a tenderhearted
out-of-work actor, doing his finest impersonation of Bette Davis in The Letter, followed
by a "Little" Audrey Armstrong dance number and torch song singer Joesfred Portee
cooing "I Love My Daddy But I've Got to Have My Fun." William D. Alexander, the
film's producer-director, is perhaps best known for his 1940s series of black-themed
newsreels, All-American News, which promoted racial uplift and wartime enlistment
among African American audiences in segregated movie theaters, churches, and film
clubs; and for his 1950s follow-up By-Line, which documented the burgeoning civil
rights movement in America and anti-colonial liberation movements in Africa. Courtesy
G. William Jones Film and Video Collection, Hamon Arts Library, Southern Methodist
University. 10 min.

Swing! 1938. USA. Directed by Oscar Micheaux. With Cora Green, Larry Seymour,
Hazel Diaz, Alec Lovejoy. This remarkable if lesser-known work by Oscar Micheaux,
arguably the most influential figure in the history of race films, is a backstage musical
set amid the thriving nightlife of Harlem in the late 1930s. Though the picture is
propelled by show-stopping numbers and an elaborate plot of romantic intrigue and
two-timing, it is also, at heart, a narrative of migration, centering on an ingénue's
journey from Birmingham to New York. As always, Micheaux does wonders with
meager means, visualizing a new black urban modernity in his own radically distinctive
style, unencumbered by the codes and conventions of classical Hollywood cinema.
Courtesy The Library of Congress. 69 min.

Introduced by Hilton Als.

Tuesday, June 9

4:00

Tributaries: Zora Neale Hurston and Other Chroniclers of the Deep South
Fieldwork Footage. 1927-29. USA. Directed by Zora Neale Hurston. Under the
tutelage of anthropologist Franz Boas (her former Columbia professor) and Harlem
Renaissance arts patron Charlotte Osgood Mason, Zora Neale Hurston spent nearly
two years studying the folkloric customs, work songs, spirituals, and vernacular
language of African American communities along the River Road and from New
Orleans to Florida—observations that culminated in her 1935 collection Mules and Men.
The "pressures [of Hurston's journey] were both racial and sexual," biographer Robert
E. Hemenway observes, "...as a woman who rejected sexual roles, traveling with only
a handgun, a two-dollar dress, a suitcase full of courage through some of the roughest
and remotest parts of the rural south." Hurston also took a 16mm movie camera with
her; in this unedited footage, she casts an empathetic eye on Cudjo "Kossula" Lewis,
believed to be the sole remaining survivor of the Clotilde, the last arriving slave ship to
the United States (in 1859); as well as workers for the Everglades Cypress Lumber
Company, and a river baptism. Courtesy The Library of Congress, the Zora Neale
Hurston Trust, and Victoria Sanders & Associates LLC. 7 min.

The River. 1938. USA. Directed by Pare Lorentz. Score by Virgil Thomson. 31 min.
Itinerant Negro Preacher. 1925. USA. The economic and social hardships of agrarian
life during the Great Depression—from drought in the Dust Bowl to boll weevil
infestation across the cotton belt, bank foreclosure to labor exploitation—were
exponentially more punitive for black sharecroppers and their families. (As Josh White
sang in "Southern Exposure," his protest song, "Boss takes my crop and the poll takes
my vote.") Lorentz's The River, which inspired Jacob Lawrence for his Great Migration
series, is a classic document of New Deal progressivism. Produced by the Resettlement
Administration/Farm Security Administration, it extols efforts by the Tennessee Valley
Authority to undo decades of man-made soil erosion along the Mississippi River while creating hydroelectric power for hundreds of Southern towns. 31 min.

**Itinerant Negro Preacher.** 1925. USA. Produced by Fox’s Movietone newsreel outfit, this modest, touching film follows the Reverend J. W. Evans as he preaches the gospel on a mule-driven cart along Indiana’s Lincoln Highway. Courtesy Moving Image Research Collections, University of South Carolina. Silent. 3 min.

**Sermons and Sacred Pictures.** 1989. USA. Directed by Lynne Sachs. A Memphis-based Baptist minister whose fiery sermons held his African American congregation in thrall, the Reverend L. O. Taylor was also an amateur photographer and filmmaker who documented black life in the Jim Crow South during the 1930s and 1940s. This penetrating and moving documentary by Lynne Sachs, herself a Memphis native, uses Taylor’s own images and sound recordings, together with reminiscences by his widow and circle of friends and colleagues, to create a portrait of a community leader who embodied the earliest stirrings of the civil rights movement, as well as a sobering image of contemporary Memphis at the century’s violent end. Courtesy the artist. 29 min.

Program 70 min.

6:15

**To Do Better: Migration and the Poetics of Everyday Life**

**Solomon Sir Jones Films.** 1924–28. USA. Directed by Solomon Sir Jones. The son of former slaves, in 1889 Solomon Sir Jones moved from the South to Oklahoma, where he found great success as a businessman and religious leader. His home movies document his extensive travels around the world, including Grand Tours of Europe and the Middle East, as well as members of his local congregation, providing a unique and fascinating perspective on African American life in the early 20th century. Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University. Silent. 10 min.

**Home Movies from the Ernest Beane Collection.** 1935–46. USA. Directed by Ernest Beane. These remarkable African American home movies were made by a Pullman porter and dedicated amateur filmmaker who chronicled his Bay Area community and his travels across the country to places like Salt Lake City and New York. Courtesy African American Library & Museum at Oakland. Silent. 10 min.

**Home Movies from the Charles “Teenie” Harris Collection.** 1935-55. USA. Directed by Charles “Teenie” Harris. These home movies extend the already epic documentary project of Charles “Teenie” Harris, who photographed African American communities in Pittsburgh from the 1930s through the 1970s, leaving behind an archive of nearly 80,000 images. Jacob Lawrence acknowledged Pittsburgh as “one of the great industrial centers of the North” in Panel 45 of his Migration Series. Courtesy Carnegie Museum of Art. 10 min.

**American Motor Company.** 2010. USA. Directed by Kevin Jerome Everson, in collaboration with Carmen Higginbotham. In this short film, two men install a billboard for Volkswagen. The ad features a beret-capped African American standing astride the tagline “there’s a bit of the cool in every bug,” recalling mid-century advertisements that trumpeted employment opportunities for southern black workers in northern car factories. Like many of Everson’s films, *American Motor Company* possesses the feel of a documentary yet is subtly staged, conflating history with the present, fact with fiction, and the archive with the imagination. 12 min.

**Company Line.** 2009. USA. Directed by Kevin Jerome Everson. A film about one of the first predominantly black neighborhoods in Mansfield, Ohio, narrated by city workers and former residents, *Company Line* considers the history and promise of northern migration from a contemporary perspective, with a mind to the stark realities of gentrification and the collapse of the manufacturing industry. 30 min.

Program 72 min.

**Wednesday, June 10**

4:30

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fascinating perspective on African American life in the early 20th century. Courtesy Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University. Silent. 10 min.

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Program 72 min.

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**Tributaries: Zora Neale Hurston and Other Chroniclers of the Deep South Fieldwork Footage.** 1927–29. USA. Directed by Zora Neale Hurston. Under the tutelage of anthropologist Franz Boas (her former Columbia professor) and Harlem Renaissance arts patron Charlotte Osgood Mason, Zora Neale Hurston spent nearly two years studying the folkloric customs, work songs, spirituals, and vernacular language of African American communities along the River Road and from New Orleans to Florida—observations that culminated in her 1935 collection *Mules and Men*. The “pressures [of Hurston’s journey] were both racial and sexual,” biographer Robert E. Hemenway observes, “...as a woman who rejected sexual roles, traveling with only a handgun, a two-dollar dress, a suitcase full of courage through some of the roughest and remotest parts of the rural south.” Hurston also took a 16mm movie camera with her; in this unedited footage, she casts an empathetic eye on Cudjo “Kossula” Lewis, believed to be the sole remaining survivor of the *Clotilde*, the last arriving slave ship to the United States (in 1859); as well as workers for the Everglades Cypress Lumber Company, and a river baptism. Courtesy The Library of Congress, the Zora Neale Hurston Trust, and Victoria Sanders & Associates LLC. 7 min.

**The River.** 1938. USA. Directed by Pare Lorentz. Score by Virgil Thomson. 31 min. Itinerant Negro Preacher. 1925. USA. The economic and social hardships of agrarian life during the Great Depression—from drought in the Dust Bowl to boll weevil infestation across the cotton belt, bank foreclosure to labor exploitation—were exponentially more punitive for black sharecroppers and their families. (As Josh White sang in “Southern Exposure,” his protest song, “Boss takes my crop and the poll takes my vote.”) Lorentz’s *The River*, which inspired Jacob Lawrence for his Great Migration series, is a classic document of New Deal progressivism. Produced by the Resettlement Administration/Farm Security Administration, it extols efforts by the Tennessee Valley Authority to undo decades of man-made soil erosion along the Mississippi River while creating hydroelectric power for hundreds of Southern towns. 31 min.

**Itinerant Negro Preacher.** 1925. USA. Produced by Fox’s Movietone newsreel outfit, this modest, touching film follows the Reverend J. W. Evans as he preaches the gospel on a mule-driven cart along Indiana’s Lincoln Highway. Courtesy Moving Image Research Collections, University of South Carolina. Silent. 3 min.
**Sermons and Sacred Pictures.** 1989. USA. Directed by Lynne Sachs. A Memphis-based Baptist minister whose fiery sermons held his African American congregation in thrall, the Reverend L. O. Taylor was also an amateur photographer and filmmaker who documented black life in the Jim Crow South during the 1930s and 1940s. This penetrating and moving documentary by Lynne Sachs, herself a Memphis native, uses Taylor’s own images and sound recordings, together with reminiscences by his widow and circle of friends and colleagues, to create a portrait of a community leader who embodied the earliest stirrings of the civil rights movement, as well as a sobering image of contemporary Memphis at the century’s violent end. Courtesy the artist. 29 min.

**Program** 70 min.

**Introduced by Lynne Sachs.**

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**Thursday, June 11**

4:00 **The Vanities.** 1946. USA. Directed by William D. Alexander. Filmed in a cabaret in the Deep South, this fascinating relic of burlesque features Charles Keith, a tenderhearted out-of-work actor, doing his finest impersonation of Bette Davis in *The Letter*, followed by a “Little” Audrey Armstrong dance number and torch song singer Joesfred Portee cooing “I Love My Daddy But I’ve Got to Have My Fun.” William D. Alexander, the film’s producer-director, is perhaps best known for his 1940s series of black-themed newsreels, *All-American News*, which promoted racial uplift and wartime enlistment among African American audiences in segregated movie theaters, churches, and film clubs; and for his 1950s follow-up *By-Line*, which documented the burgeoning civil rights movement in America and anti-colonial liberation movements in Africa. Courtesy G. William Jones Film and Video Collection, Hamon Arts Library, Southern Methodist University. 10 min.

**Swing!** 1938. USA. Directed by Oscar Micheaux. With Cora Green, Larry Seymour, Hazel Diaz, Alec Lovejoy. This remarkable if lesser-known work by Oscar Micheaux, arguably the most influential figure in the history of race films, is a backstage musical set amid the thriving nightlife of Harlem in the late 1930s. Though the picture is propelled by show-stopping numbers and an elaborate plot of romantic intrigue and two-timing, it is also, at heart, a narrative of migration, centering on an ingénue’s journey from Birmingham to New York. As always, Micheaux does wonders with meager means, visualizing a new black urban modernity in his own radically distinctive style, unencumbered by the codes and conventions of classical Hollywood cinema. Courtesy The Library of Congress. 69 min.

6:30 **To Sleep with Anger.** 1990. USA. Directed by Charles Burnett. With Danny Glover, Paul Butler, DeVaughan Nixon, Mary Alice. One of independent American cinema’s true masters (and the subject of a MoMA retrospective in 2011), Charles Burnett is perhaps best known for his 1981 masterpiece *Killer of Sheep*. *To Sleep with Anger* is every bit that film’s equal, a modern-day trickster narrative that draws significantly from traditions of African American folklore, and adds an undercurrent of the mystical to the poetic realism found in his earlier work. A film about the specter of migration, *To Sleep with Anger* centers on Harry Mention, a stranger in the village (played with satanic charm by Danny Glover) who threatens the domestic harmony and patriarchal authority of a contemporary middle-class black family in Los Angeles. Courtesy Sony Pictures Releasing. 102 min.

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**Friday, June 12**

4:00 **To Sleep with Anger.** 1990. USA. Directed by Charles Burnett. With Danny Glover, Paul Butler, DeVaughan Nixon, Mary Alice. One of independent American cinema’s true masters (and the subject of a MoMA retrospective in 2011), Charles Burnett is perhaps best known for his 1981 masterpiece *Killer of Sheep*. *To Sleep with Anger* is every bit that film’s equal, a modern-day trickster narrative that draws significantly from traditions of African American folklore, and adds an undercurrent of the mystical to the poetic realism found in his earlier work. A film about the specter of migration, *To Sleep with Anger* centers on Harry Mention, a stranger in the village (played with satanic


charm by Danny Glover) who threatens the domestic harmony and patriarchal authority of a contemporary middle-class black family in Los Angeles. Courtesy Sony Pictures Releasing. 102 min.

**Jacob Lawrence, Jay Leyda, and Soviet Montage**

On June 12, MoMA curator Leah Dickerman, the co-organizer of the Museum’s current exhibition *One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence’s Great Migration Series and Other Visions of the Great Movement North*, discusses Lawrence’s relationship with MoMA film curator Jay Leyda, The Harmon Foundation, and the cinematic aspects of his Great Migration panels.

**A Study of Negro Artists.** 1936. USA. Produced by The Harmon Foundation.

Founded in 1922, The Harmon Foundation supported numerous African American artists and writers, including Jacob Lawrence, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes, through awards and grants, and promoted their work through groundbreaking traveling art exhibitions and reading tours. This Harmon Foundation–produced documentary offers a unique perspective on the lives and work of painters and sculptors from the Harlem Renaissance. Courtesy National Archives. 13 min.

**A Bronx Morning.** 1931. USA. Directed by Jay Leyda. His sole film, *A Bronx Morning* is Jay Leyda’s city symphony of 1930s New York street-and-tenement life. Leyda, a film curator at The Museum of Modern Art, met Jacob Lawrence at the Works Progress Administration (WPA) offices and became a lifelong champion of his work. In addition to introducing Lawrence to the history of cinema, Leyda also introduced him to the Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco (and, it is believed, the author Richard Wright), as well as MoMA director Alfred Barr, who eventually acquired half of Lawrence’s Migration Series panels for the Museum. 11 min.

**Bronenosets Potemkin (Potemkin/The Battleship Potemkin).** 1925. USSR. Directed by Sergei Eisenstein. Through Soviet silent cinema, Jacob Lawrence gained a new appreciation of film’s unique language and its power to awaken political consciousness. Montage was based on the notion that the context and meaning of a film could be created through editing alone—more specifically, through the juxtaposition of disparate images to produce an emotional or intellectual association—and it was Eisenstein’s anti-illusionary use of repetition and synecdoche, his sense of the inexorable march of time, and his collision of images for their shock value (most famously in the Odessa Steps sequence), that perhaps resonates most strongly in Lawrence’s own Migration Series. Russian intertitles; English subtitles. Program silent, with piano accompaniment by Donald Sosin. Approx. 72 min.

Program approx. 96 min.