



February 10, 2022 @ 10:00 AM
Peoria Riverfront Museum
222 SW Washington St., Peoria, IL

JACOB LAWRENCE: THE AMERICAN STRUGGLE

lecture by Lydia Gordon, Peabody Essex Museum

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) was the best-known African American artist of the twentieth century, and one of the first to break through the color line of New York City's segregated art world of the 1950s. Catapulted into the modern art world at age 23, he devised a signature style of narrative art to tell the stories omitted from most history books. In 1949, when the national political climate was fraught, freedoms were threatened, and the civil rights movement was gaining momentum, Lawrence boldly visualized a more complete American history through the words and actions of underrepresented historical actors. After reading and researching at The New York Public Library for more than five years, and just as the Supreme Court ruled to end racial segregation in public schools, Lawrence began a new series—*Struggle: From the History of the American People* (1954-1956).

In the 30 panels that comprise *Struggle*, Lawrence shows how women and people of color helped shape the founding of our nation. He interpreted pivotal moments from the American Revolution and the early decades of the republic, as a series of clashing angular patterns of color and form paired with text, quoting a range of voices and rendering figures from prominent Founding Fathers to underrepresented historical actors.

Lydia Gordon, coordinating curator of the nationally touring exhibition *Jacob Lawrence: The American Struggle*, will discuss the artist and this recently reunited series. Lawrence's prescient visual reckoning with American history remains profoundly resonant with ongoing issues of racial justice and national identity today. Gordon is Associate Curator for Exhibitions and Research at the Peabody Essex Museum. Previously she worked at the Art Institute of Chicago. Gordon earned her BA in arts administration from Simmons College and a dual MA in art history and art administration & policy from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



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