



March 12, 2020
Juarez Hawkins
AFRICAN AMERICAN ART IN
BRONZEVILLE

By the 1930s the Bronzeville neighborhood on Chicago's South Side was home to a quarter of a million African American migrants, mostly from the rural South. African Americans saw Chicago, like other cities of the north, as a chance for freedom from legally sanctioned racial discrimination. Migrants mainly found work in [meatpacking plants](#),

steel mills, garment shops, and private homes. The Great Migration established the foundation of Chicago's African American industrial working class.

When the stock market crashed in 1929 and the Great Depression resulted, thousands of people lost their jobs. African Americans were hit particularly hard. This catastrophe allowed for an emergence of new ideas and institutions among the black community. With a revitalized community spirit and sense of racial pride, a new black consciousness developed resulting in a shift toward [social activism](#). African Americans on the south side coined the word [Bronzeville](#), a word that described the skin tone of most its inhabitants, to identify their community.

Rivaling the Harlem Renaissance, Bronzeville became Chicago's epicenter of black working, middle-, and upper-class culture and establishments from the 1920s through the '50s. It was well-known for its nightclubs and dance halls; the jazz, blues, and gospel music that developed with the migration of Southern musicians attracted scores of diverse listeners and admirers. Gwendolyn Brooks and other authors documented the era through their poetry, novels and plays. The visual arts flourished with the creation of the WPA's Federal Art Project, the founding of the South Side Community Art Center, and the artistic production and promotion of Chicago black arts scene by predominant artists.



Archibald Motley
Nightlife, 1943
Art Institute of Chicago

This lecture will explore the artists who worked within and documented this cultural phenomenon. Juarez Hawkins, a native of Chicago, is a second-generation artist. Her mother is one of the painters of Chicago's famous Wall of Respect. Hawkins is a member of the Sapphire and Crystals collective. She has exhibited widely, been showcased in literary works, and won numerous awards. She has taught art at a number of Chicago-area schools and a variety of galleries; she currently teaches Art History at Chicago State University.