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New Homes, New Playgrounds for Inspiration – The Migration Stories of African American Artists in The Picturebook Format

Abstract: The aim of this paper to analyze the verbal and visual rhetoric of four picturebooks, *Jacob Lawrence in the City* (Rubin, 2009), *Jake Make A World* (Rhodes-Pitts and Myers, 2015), *The Block* (Hughes and Bearden, 1995), and *My Hands Sing the Blues* (Harvey and Zunon, 2011), which tell the story of young Black artists – Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden – who find their new homes in New York's Harlem in the context of the Great Migration. The narratives reveal how the artists perceive the unknown space, how they cross boundaries between the past and the present, and how they incorporate their new experiences into art. Drawing on the theory of "Black geographies" (McKittrick, 2007; Hawthorne, 2019) and "critical geographies of the home" (Blunt and Dowling, 1996), the paper explains how the picturebooks struggle with black despatialization and preserve the landscape created by African American migrants. It draws attention to the specific visual language of the books which recreates the atmosphere of the Black home in the urban environment. The analysis of the selected picturebooks is based on the visual grammar of Kress and Leeuwen (1996) and the working strategies of Painter (2014).

Keywords: African American children's literature, picturebooks, Black space, Great Migration, Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden

INTRODUCTION

More than one hundred years after the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance movement, an explosion of Black art and culture in the northern American cities caused by the Great Migration, African American artists are experiencing a resurgence of sorts.[1] The groundbreaking exhibition *The Harlem Renaissance*

[1] The Great Migration took place from 1916 to 1970. It was the largest movement of Black people in the history of the United States. About six million African Americans moved from the rural South to the urban North in order to escape racial oppression and pursue

and Transatlantic Modernism, held at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) February through July 2024, featuring 160 paintings of the most prominent Harlem Renaissance artists, led to a growing interest in the continuing legacy of Black arts from the early decades of the twentieth century (Esposito, 2024). The show also contributed to international debates on the impact of the Great Migration on the process of creating new Black communities in northern cities that became home to several million African Americans escaping from the racially segregated South. Amongst the most stunning exhibits of the collection are the paintings of Jacob Lawrence from *The Migration of the Negro* series (1940–41),[2] which depict the vibrancy of the process of migration, as well as Romare Bearden's six-panel collage *The Block* (1971), celebrating the heartbeat of Harlem with the images of its private and communal spaces.

Both of the artists spent their childhood in Harlem during the time of the Great Migration. Bearden moved to New York from North Carolina as a young child in 1914. Lawrence, born in New Jersey, came to Harlem as a thirteen-year-old to join his mother in 1930. Surrounded by crowds of newcomers trying to establish their new homes in the northern city, the artists became chroniclers of the Black community. They captured the nuances of everyday life as well as the process of Harlem becoming the mecca of Black culture in the northern part of the country. What the artists observed in their own homes as well as in public spaces was skillfully transferred into their elaborate visual narratives of the Great Migration.

Bearden's and Lawrence's portrayals of the Black community in New York's Harlem have inspired authors and illustrators of children's books to explain the process of Black migration to very young readers. Within the last few years U.S. publishing houses have released several migration stories of Lawrence and Bearden in the picturebook format. This article aims to discuss four picturebooks that focus on the impact of New York's Black community on the artistic development of the young migrants as well as the ways they render portrayals of the southern Black homes.

Jake Makes a World: Jacob Lawrence, a Young Artist in Harlem, written by Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts and illustrated by Christopher Myers, tells the story of a thirteen-year-old boy who finds inspiration for his art in the sounds and colors of Harlem. The book was published in 2015 by the Museum of Modern Art in New York to accompany the exhibition of Lawrence's works of the Great

better living conditions. New York City was one of the most popular places amongst migrants from the South. The Great Migration led to a cultural movement called the Harlem Renaissance, the development of Black culture in northern cities (Imani, 2020).

[2] Jacob Lawrence's *The Migration of the Negro* (1940–41) consists of sixty panels accompanied with short texts, consisting of four to twenty words, which guide the viewers to recognize specific aspects of the migration narrative (https://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/).

Migration – *One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Serries and Other Visions of the Great Movement*. The picturebook's illustrations depicting the private and public space of the Black community, marked with vivid colors, strong lines and schematic figures, resemble the style of Lawrence's own paintings. The book is also complemented with six images from Lawrence's *Migration of the Negro* series, which add authenticity to the story. The second picturebook, *Jacob Lawrence in the City* (2009), written by Susan Goldman Rubin, uses exclusively the artist's original paintings as illustrations. Comprising eleven images of city life, it is a celebration of all things that make places like Harlem home for people from all walks of life.

Jeanne Walker Harvey and Elizabeth Zunon's biographical story of Bearden, *My Hands Sing the Blues: Romare Bearden's Childhood Journey* (2011), introduces young readers to a boy from North Carolina who migrates to the North and finds his new home in Harlem where he begins his experiments with visual arts. The book shows how the young artist captures his memories of the southern home he left behind and how he sees his life in the urban setting. Lowery S. Sims and Daisy Murray Voigt's *The Block* (1995) differs from the other picturebooks discussed in this paper. The book combines parts of Bearden's collage painting of the same title with a collection of Langston Hughes's poems on Black lives in Harlem. Bearden's sights of inner city life and Hughes's lyrics help the readers envision all the sights and sounds of living in a Black urban community.

Drawing on the theory of "Black geographies" (McKittrick, 2007; Hawthorne, 2023) and "critical geographies of the home" (Blunt and Dowling, 1996), the article explains how the picturebooks struggle with black despatialization and preserve the landscape created by African American migrants. It draws attention to the specific visual language of the books, which recreates the atmosphere of the Black home in the urban environment. The analysis of the selected picturebooks draws on the existing methodologies of studying picturebooks (Painter, Martin, and Unsworth, 2014; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001; Kress and Leeuwen, 2006; Arizpe, Noble, and Styles, 2023), including the visual rhetoric of the illustrations, the interactions between text and images, and the ways they create the meaning of the stories.

BLACK SPACEMAKING

Although Black people in America have always been emotionally bound to certain locations, over the last two decades, one can recognize a growing academic interest in the cultural significance of Black spaces, which is caused by the current discourses that try to despatialize African Americans' sense of place, arguing that Black communities no longer exist. The scholars of Black Geographies (McKittrick; McKittrick and Woods; Hawthorne), an interdisciplinary field of

study exploring the relationship between humans and physical environment, believe that Black locations cannot be neglected or erased from public memory because they are sites of social activism and creativity. In *Demonic Grounds*, Katherine McKittrick argues that "Black lives are necessarily geographic" (McKittrick, 2006: xiii). African Americans have a deep sense of belonging to specific communities, which become their spiritual homes even if they do not have material possessions there. In their foundational 2007 volume *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, McKittrick and Clyde Woods argue that Black people's contributions to geographical locations should be perceived as political acts and expressions. With their social and cultural activism, they make certain areas their own homes, thus transforming the general perception of the place and rejecting false conceptions of Black neighborhoods as sites of crime rather than creativity and socialization. As Camilla Hawthorne and Jovan Scott Lewis argue in their study *The Black Geographic Praxis, Resistance, Futurity*, blackness is "not just a subjectivity that experiences, that is impacted by external means of definition and manipulation, but instead a situating force, a place-making apparatus that in every geographic context makes its location more meaningful, more substantial, more human" (Hawthorne, Lewis, 2023: 5).

Black homemaking is a complicated process. As Dan Bulley points out, it is never politically neutral, and especially in the context of migration when home is constructed as a contested space, "a product of selected inclusions and exclusions" (Bulley, 2015: 190). Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling propose the idea of the cultural geography of home to analyze Black domestic territories. They define home as "a material and an affective space, shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions" (Blunt, 2005: 506). In order to study home as "a multi-layered geographical concept" (Blunt, Dowling, 2006: 2), they have drawn out three components of the cultural geography of home. First, they propose to analyze home as simultaneously material and imaginative. Second, they point out the nexus between home, power and identity, arguing that "a place is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location" (Blunt, Dowling, 2006: 25). They use Doreen Massey's idea of 'power geometry' whereby people are differently positioned in relation to, and differentially experience, a place called home. Third, they argue that home is "multi-scalar," which means that it is neither public nor private but both – "Home is not separated from public, political worlds but is constituted through them: the domestic is created through the extra domestic" (Blunt, Dowling, 2006: 27).

Using the concept of Black Geographies as well as Blunt and Dowling's idea of cultural geography of home as a theoretical framework for the analysis of African American picturebooks about Black home makes it possible to recognize its multiple functions and varied meanings depending on geographical location and cultural background.

THE SOUTHERN HOME

The process of making a new home cannot be separated from one's memories of the previous locale. While the material home can be left behind, the emotional sense of belonging to that place does not easily fade. The biographical story of Romare Bearden, *Romare Bearden's Childhood Journey*, reveals that forgetting the past is even harder than the drive to discover the new location. The book shows the boy's family's transfer from North Carolina to New York during the Great Migration. Inspired by Bearden's own collage, *Watching the Good Trains Go By* (1964), as well as jazz music that Bearden loved himself, the author tells a poetic story of a migrant family leaving behind the old life in the South and finding their new home in Harlem.

The illustrations depicting the character's life in the rural South are combined into a collage format, which echoes Bearden's stylistic approach and allows the book to foreground a wide array of Black experiences.[3] Bearden called his collage paintings "visual jazz," which reflected a variety of social issues concerning the lives of African Americans, both in the South and in the North. Similarly, the book's collage-like illustrations, being a combination of realistic faces, painted landscapes and cut-out images of trains and urban architecture, reveal the thrills and stresses of leaving home in the rural South and finding a new one in the urban North.

There are two sides of migrant's experience presented in the story: the nostalgic reflection on the past and what is left behind, and uncertainty about the new life in the unknown location. Although the trip to the North is the main part of the story, it draws attention to what will never be forgotten – the southern fields and gardens, trains leaving the southern stations, and the time spent with grandparents. As the narrator says while staying in his Harlem studio:

> Like a flower, I have roots in my Carolina past,
> roots sunk deep in my childhood long past.
> The people and the places are in my art to last. [4]

The book likens finding home to a process of artistic discovery. Initially the descriptions of how artworks are created might seem like the background information, but once we discover that these are collage paintings about Black life, this part of the story takes on a different meaning. It emphasizes the need to be creative in making one's new home, as well as creativity in response to adversity experienced by many Blacks in the U.S. The title of the picturebook, *My*

[3] According to many art scholars, the genre of collage, based on combining pieces of paper or fabric produced by different people into one whole work, is a perfect art form to represent a variety of voices on Black life (Bishop, 2007; O'Meally, 2021).

[4] Three picturebooks selected for this article are unpaginated: *My Hands Sing the Blues*, *Jake Makes A World*, and *Jacob Lawrence in the City*.

Hands Sing the Blues, is a direct reference to the Black tradition of telling spontaneous stories, in the literary form, in music or art. The motif of creating art is like a frame, opening and closing the book. The first two double spread pages of the book show the young character sitting over the canvas and recreating his North Carolina past – sticking the image of a train upon Bearden's famous painting *Watching the Good Trains Go By*. The story ends with several verses of how the artist creates his paintings while staying in Harlem:

> I'm like a singer calling out, then holding back.
> I'm like a trumpet player blowing loud, then dropping back.
> When I put a beat of color on an empty canvas,
> I never know what's coming down the track.

The uncertainty of what comes out of the artistic endeavors is a metaphor of the migration experience, which is always marked with insecurity about the future. However, an artist can make the most of it and reverse negative feelings into a passionate approach to what is to become his new home.

The visual narrative of the Black migration, as presented in the picturebook, offers a new insight into the cultural meaning of the southern Black communities. As McKittrick points out, "The poetics of landscape discloses the underside, unapparent histories and stories …" as well as "creates a way to enter into, and challenge, traditional geographic formulations without the familiar tools of maps, charts, official records, and figures" (McKittrick, 2006: xxii). The images of the South in Harvey and Zunon's story show the relationship between the main character and the physical landscape which is broken by the process of migration. However, even if disconnected from the original place of living, the Black community survives. Though it might be threatened and alienated from the new urban setting, it thrives and makes history thanks to its strong sense of belonging to a culture rather than just physical location. Thus, it proves that Black spacemaking does not have to be limited to a specific location but can take place anywhere. Yet it does not mean that the past is erased from memory. The story of Bearden's migration points to "the geographic relationship between the past and the present" (McKittrick, 2006: xxvii). While staying in his new northern home, the young artist draws on his earlier experience and transfers his conception of Black life into the new setting. Like many other Black residents of the northern cities, he marks the new space with Black southern culture. As McKittrick points out, "geography is also a terrain through which blackness makes itself known" (McKittrick, 2006: xxvii).

THE NORTHERN HOME

The stories of Jacob Lawrence's migration to the North are focused on searching for an at-home feeling in the new location rather than bringing the past

life into contemporary moments. In the process of adaptation within the geographic shift, the sense of home is found both in the private space and the public locality. Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts' story *Jake Makes a World*, illustrated with vibrant pictures by Christopher Myers, depicts the development of future artist Jacob Lawrence, who is inspired by the atmosphere of his new surroundings. Being part of the Great Migration, he has just found his new home in Harlem and tries to understand the nuances of living in the northern city. The illustrations allow the reader to absorb the spirit of Black life by gazing into the main character's apartment as well as exploring the streets with their most typical community centers.

The picturebook begins with a double-spread illustration showing young Lawrence and his brother inside their Harlem apartment. The readers can easily recognize the special atmosphere of the Black home. It is created with the image of the quilt, which is part of the southern tradition brought by Blacks to the North (Wahlman 2001; Mazloomi 1998). Used as a home decoration or a bed cover, the quilt brings to mind the tradition of enslaved persons producing patchworks out of small pieces of fabric. Quilting was a means of expressing Black people's creativity. Nowadays, whether they are used as artworks or everyday objects, quilts have a special meaning in African American families, as the one in the story. Placed in the center of the home, the quilt gives the boys a sense of security in the new place in terms of comfort and belonging. The quilt produces a new space, bringing into contact unrelated objects, people and places.

The following illustrations reveal how the private space and the public space merge into one and become the home of the protagonist of *Jake Makes a World*. Initially, the image of the young character lying in bed covered with a quilt contrasts with the dark purple architecture of the city, visible through the window, which divides the secure space of the home and the unknown parts of his neighborhood. In the next illustration, the colors of the quilt are transferred to the window frame and some of the buildings outside. "With first light, the dancing dark shadows begin to fade. Then the colors come again," says the text on the same page. The colors symbolize the warm atmosphere of the place which spreads from Black people's homes into the streets and again from the public space into the private area. The young character is looking out of the window as if he was trying to leave his homeplace and taste the hustle and bustle of the street. The colors seem to arouse the readers' curiosity about the place. What we can see behind the window looks like a painting – a blue sky with a clear skyline marked with a yellow touch of paint, which is intended to evoke a positive attitude towards the presented world.

The readers are further invited into exploring the Black community once the window frame is breached by some elements of the city. In their study of visual narratives, Claire Painter, J.R. Martin and Len Unsworth maintain that

"the effect is to make greater connection with the reader's world and often to construe the breaching element as breaking through constraints" (Painter et al., 2014:109), which is true about the bounded images in Rhode-Pitt's story. When the frame is broken to include a larger space within the picture, the semiotic world of the story is no longer separated from the reader. The following illustrations, unlimited by any margins or frames, invite the reader to explore the town's architecture as well as its unique atmosphere of the streets. The strong colours and distorted figures with a variety of gestures and movements symbolize life-affirming African American culture. Black men passionately play chess and checkers in front of their home. A boy sells flowers in the street, shouting for people to come down. A preacher tells people about God, and across the corner on a stepladder someone else preaches about freedom and equality. All of these activities represent the vibrancy of the place as well as a sense of community it gives to its residents, which encourages the readers to explore other characteristics of the Black culture.

Despite the stigmatization of Black neighborhoods in popular media, the book makes readers of different races want to become part of this community. They are offered an insight into a Black way of life which is not marked with crime and violence but emanates with friendliness and openness to strangers. For white readers it might be their first contact with a positive image of Black space. For Black readers, struggling with a variety of social and economic issues, the book is a reminder that Black life is worth celebrating.

Obviously readers of different races might construct different meanings of the story depending on their background knowledge of the presented culture as well as their assumptions about the other race. Accordingly, the books can be interpreted through the lens of the culturally situated reader response model developed by Wanda Brooks and Susan Brown. The scholars take into account the "homeplace position," which is informed by four supporting positions: ethnic group, community, family and peers (Brooks & Brown, 2012: 78). Although textual features of books featuring diverse cultures should not be ignored, in the case of African American literature being interpreted by white readers, ethnicity seems to play the most significant role. Given the fact that many young African Americans live in urban ethnic communities, associated with distinct cultural markers and experiences, the readers' immersion in this specific environment is also an important factor in the process of meaning making of the story. As Brooks and Brown point out, "The community position can be seen as the children use urbanized understandings to compare character image and persona with realities of their own community" (Brooks & Brown, 2012: 81). As outsiders to the community, the readers might respond with curiosity about the other world, and, depending on the kind of expectations they hold, either accept or resist the presented reality. In general, picturebooks about other cultures are always educational and serve as tools of intercultural connections. As

Evelyn Arizpe concludes, picturebooks are inclusive of diverse cultures and challenge exclusionary views (Arizpe 2023: 137).

Irrespective of the race of the reader, the Black community presented in the picturebook can be a source of inspiration for creating works of art that reflect the mood of the location. Through the eyes of the main character of the story – a future artist, the readers absorb every single detail of the streetscape. Once Jake gets to Utopia House where he attends art classes, he transfers his observations into paintings. The illustrations in this part of the story depict a teenage boy involved in doing different hands-on activities. He transforms the sounds and colours of Harlem into a large African mask that symbolizes the Black community:

> Jake takes a stick of charcoal and draws a pair of eyes to see everything the people on the street see. He draws one pair of ears to hear all the shouts and songs, one mouth to carry all their voices. All the faces Jake sees on the street become one face. (Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, 2015)

Conventionally used to cover one's true identity, the metaphorical mask has been a means of Black survival in racist America (Black, 2005). However, in Myers's illustrations it no longer speaks to the need to hide one's racial allegiance but becomes a trope of the collage of voices that contributed to the richness of Black culture, thus manifesting the feeling of racial pride. As well as this, the image of the mask reminds readers of where the Black people come from. The mask is a link between the past and the present. Although their journey from Africa to America and then the migration within the country, from the South to the North, was long and strenuous, they never failed to maintain their Black community spirit that still nurtures contemporary African Americans.

Another work of art made by the young artist is a replica of a Harlem street made in a shoebox. It looks like a collage, which includes cardboard chessmen, tiny boys folded from construction paper, Black women wearing dresses cut from magazines, buildings made of matchboxes, and the street paved with sandpaper. The scene is full of life and emotions. The illustration of the young artist playing with "his Harlem" expresses his strong attachment to the place. As the accompanying text says: "Jake's Harlem has all the shouts and songs and noises of the Harlem outside, but here they are not sounds. They are colours, they are shadows dancing, they are rhythms, they are light." Harlem is no longer a strange area for the boy. He feels at home both in his new apartment and in the public space. To use Jenny Bavidge's words, the book's character is a "proto-flaneur wrestling some agency from the situations of the streets and forging [his] own space for self-definition" (Bavidge, 2014: 58). Thus he develops his own relationship with the city, and, with the imagination of an artist, he acquires new ideas for his creative work.

Jake Makes A World presents Harlem as a space of inspiration and a source of empowerment for African Americans. The city offers the young character the opportunity to explore the neighborhood's colours, rhythms and textures, and rearrange them into his own visual narratives of Black life. Finally, he appropriates the place as 'his home' – as a site of creativity, support and resilience.

The public space of Harlem as an extended home is similarly represented in Susan Goldman Rubin's picturebook *Jacob Lawrence in the City* (2009), which celebrates Black urban life with eleven paintings by Jacob Lawrence accompanied with several rhythmic statements from a child narrator. The combination of the simple text in bold typeface with well-known canvases creates the impression that Harlem streets are home to both ordinary people and artists for whom the location is an inspiration for new artistic creations. Although some of the compositions show only part of the original paintings, they draw readers' attention to nuances of Black life in an urban setting.

The book's cover, based on Lawrence's painting *Poster Design . . . Whitney Exhibition* (1974), features a Black couple walking with two young children along a busy street in Harlem. In the background we can see ladders and three construction workers of different races who are building someone's home. There seem to be no racial divisions in the public space, and African American residents can walk freely throughout the neighborhood. The illustration creates a homely atmosphere. It is used again at the end of the book together with the caption: "I love the city's sights and sounds! And most of all its beat!", which makes readers believe that Harlem home is all about having positive emotions.

The first illustration inside the book is a general view of the neighborhood. Reprinted from Lawrence's painting *This Is Harlem* (1943), it offers an introductory map of Harlem with the main streets and sidewalks, as well as a variety of "third places" where the residents meet after work – bars, churches, funeral homes, or barber shops.[5] Although the illustration seems to offer a wide panorama of the city, only a careful reader will notice all the details revealing a special character of the place. As Richard Powell describes the painting, "Though not immediately apparent, this rendering of a community is deeper than mere documentary reportage and illustration: it delves into the very psyche of the urban experience" (Powell, 1992: 3). Colorful patterns on apartments buildings, as well as such details as stained-glass windows or fire escape ladders highlight the everyday life of the place, which inspired Lawrence to create his vision of the new home.

Another painting reprinted as an illustration of the busy street in Harlem is *Brownstones* (1958). The picture brings readers closer to people's homes. It

[5] The term "third places" was coined by American sociologist Ray Oldenburg , and is defined as follows: "Third places are nothing more than informal public gathering places. The phrase 'third places' derives from considering our homes to be the 'first' places in our lives, and our work places the 'second' " (Oldenburg 1996–97, 6).

presents a busy sidewalk in front of three tenements, with many people moving around or staying inside their apartments. There is a couple pushing a baby carriage, a woman carrying groceries, and a crowd of children jumping rope, bouncing a ball or attending to a dog. Some figures are visible on the front porch as well as in the windows, which offer readers a glimpse into Harlemites' private lives. The accompanying text reflects the rhythm of the street scene: "Walk the dog and bounce a ball, swing a rope and jump up high," indicating the variety of activities you can do in a Harlem block. Similarly, the illustration of Black girls playing in the street, a reproduction of Lawrence's *Children at Play* (1947), further conveys the special atmosphere of the street. As Patricia Hills has observed, "children's play reflects the community. Activities of children have meaning and give a community its sense of generational continuity" (Hills, 2009: 190). The accompanying text suggests the games the girls play – "Gather round and clap it out – Shimmy, Shimmy, Pow!" – which is an old jump rope song popular in Black communities. In the African American context handclapping games, different forms of jump rope or cheers have always been a significant part of community building in such an inclusive space as the urban street. Such activities gave young people a sense of belonging and helped them to maintain positive self-esteem.

The story of Harlem in Rubin's picturebook is not limited to street life. Several illustrations feature individual Harlemites doing different kinds of jobs – builders, carpenters, typists, and students studying in the classroom. All of the pictures make a visual narrative of Black life in the new conditions, far away from the southern rural landscapes and amongst urban blocks offering a different lifestyle. The accompanying text sets a positive tone of the story. The pictures of the street are provided with the following comments: "But first it's time for fun," or "So much to do, so much to see – a treat on every street," suggesting that apart from everyday chores there is more to do in the Black neighborhood.

Jacob Lawrence's observations of Harlem streets served as an important inspiration for his art. The paintings are informative as far as everyday life is concerned. They are perfect materials for picturebook illustrations, and, if combined with catchy phrases, they offer an exuberant narrative of Black urban life.

A more detailed observation of Harlem streets as well as private homes is provided in *The Block*, published in 1995 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The picturebook combines the work of two African American masters – Langston Hughes's poetry about living in Harlem and Romare Bearden's six-panel collage *The Block* (1971), which reflects his observations of a new northern location. The block is a basic unit of American urban communities. This is where people socialize, do business, or hang out with friends. In the Black context the block has a special meaning. As an extended home of many African Americans, it is an area where social rituals take place, where young generations learn from the old ones, and where new art and culture is produced (Patillo, 2007).

Bearden's block consists of several tenement houses, images of apartments as seen through the windows, a church, a barbershop, as well as numerous encounters in the street.

In the Introduction to the picturebook, Bill Cosby – at that time still a national icon – stresses the significance of the verbal narrative and visual narratives in the construction of the meaning of the book: "If Bearden gives us the sights, then Langston Hughes gives us the sounds" (Sims, 1995: 6). The poems speak with the voices of ordinary Harlemites struggling with everyday life, preachers with their sermons, or artists singing out their concerns about the Black community. The words are echoed in Bearden's paintings which depict church congregations, street musicians, and the hustle and bustle of the streets. Putting selected parts of Bearden's panel into a sequence of scenes taking place in various city locations offers a new insight into Bearden's art. Although his collage illustrations are based on his memories of living in Harlem during the period of the Great Migration, they allow readers to revisit their current beliefs about the Black community, which is undergoing physical changes while maintaining its cultural distinctiveness.

Most of the illustrations show the communal aspect of living in Harlem. There is an image of a Baptist church located in one of the tenements, decorated with stained glass windows contrasting with the brownish color of the building façade. The accompanying poem "Testimonial" expresses the religiosity of the Harlem community which can gather anywhere to praise God: "But I don't need no piano, / neither organ / nor drum / for to praise my Lord!" (Sims, 1995: 17). The church gives the people a sense of belonging, which is especially helpful in the times of crisis. The Harlem congregation is also depicted in the image of the funeral home. While a group of Black men are carrying out the coffin and several women are moaning on the sidewalk, above the building we can see angels lifting a human body to heaven.

The picturebook demonstrates that there are lots of other occasions when members of the community get together. Hughes's poem "Corner Meeting" placed next to a composition of two images – children playing in the street in front of the barber shop and street musicians on the sidewalk – expresses the essence of Black community life. The poem enumerates what they need to have fun – "ladder, flag, and amplifier: what the soap box used to be" (Sims, 1995: 24), as well as a good speaker who "catches fire" (Sims, 1995: 24). The street corner is one of the space markers that characterize Black urban life. While mainstream media tend to focus on the corner as a site of crime and violence, Black artists and authors contextualize the place as a site of community gathering. As sociologist Elijah Anderson has put it, street corners "provide settings for sociability and places where neighborhood residents can gain a sense of self-worth… Here they can sense themselves to be among equals, with an equal chance to be somebody… This is their place" (Anderson 1978/2003: 1).

Although the streetscape dominates most of the illustrations depicting Harlem as an extremely busy place, a careful reader will find stories of individual Harlemites within the larger narrative. Some pages include several images coming from different panels, simultaneously showing what is going on in the streets and how Harlemites are spending their time in their private locations. Sometimes these are contrasting images, for instance, a picture of people dancing in the street is placed next to the images of miserable solitary figures staying in their homes, isolated from the rest of the community. One illustration shows a lonely man sitting on the steps of his tenement. As the accompanying poem "Late Last Night" says, he seems to be crying due to his disappointment with a romantic relationship. Another illustration, being reproduced from the middle panel of Bearden's collage, depicts a green tenement house. A Black man looks out of the window and talks to a woman standing on the sidewalk. Hughes's poem, "Juke Box Love Song," speaks with the voice of the man who address his lover with an invitation to dance according to the rhythm of Harlem:

> Take Harlem's heartbeat,
> Make a drumbeat,
> Put it on a record, let it whirl,
> And while we listen to it play,
> Dance with you, till day-
> Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl.
> (Sims, 1995: 15)

This kind of interaction gives us a sense of intimacy of Black life in Harlem. It allows us to invade people's privacy and see how living in Harlem shapes their minds and attitudes. Bearden's block is a dynamic landscape, a home to many Blacks who find a sense of belonging in a location that links them to their southern roots.

Although it is obvious that the authors of the selected picturebooks tried to provide children with the most positive images of the Black ghetto, so that they would no longer be associated only with poverty, crime and social exclusion, a careful reader will find a counterpoint to the nostalgic depictions. Harlem was an overpopulated racial ghetto when Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden moved there. Many of the people who flocked to the streets where the artists played as boys ended up there because the apartments were cramped and stuffy, poverty caused strife in families, and many Blacks could not afford to rest and entertain themselves in private establishments. There were no parks or safe playgrounds nearby, and the street was for many Harlem residents a space where they could earn extra money by selling fruit and vegetables and thus support their families.

By inserting the original paintings by Lawrence and Bearden into the stories, the picturebooks' creators problematize the retouched, nostalgic world

of books about Harlem. *Jake Makes a World* includes six panels from Lawrence's *Migration Series*. Two of them portray the poor living conditions of the new migrants – small cramped apartments with little furniture and no kitchen facilities (Panel 10 and 48). The other panels depict crowds of Black migrants arriving in northern cities. With such great numbers, it was hard for them to find jobs and accommodation, which affected their quality of life. Bearden's *Block* is also packed with details revealing difficulties of Blacks living in the North – housing problems, death issues, or community conflicts. Despite the drawbacks of living in Harlem, it emerges as a better option than staying in the South and facing unending hardships of Black life.

Artists like Lawrence and Bearden, as well as contemporary picturebook illustrators, do not eliminate negative aspects of living in the North. Instead, they portray the multiplicity of Black experience, marked with racial injustice and economic trouble, but not reducible to these issues.

CONCLUSION

Black home is not limited to a specific geographic location but can be easily transferred if there is a need to migrate. In their study on home and near-home territories, Ralph B. Taylor and Sidney Brower argue that "Home does not end at the front door but rather extends beyond" (Taylor, Brower, 1985: 183). The statement perfectly defines the social context of Black homes in America. As the selected picturebooks demonstrate, the Black home stretches not only across geographic boundaries but also from domestic area to public space. Private apartments adjoin and merge with sidewalks, porches, clubs, or churches. The stories of Harlem demonstrate the impact of public space on Black people's private lives. Many African American migrants gather in public spaces for sustenance, where they support each other in the process of adapting to a new home. As Ray Oldenburg argues in his study on third places, the streets, as public gathering places, "serve as 'ports of entry' for visitors and newcomers to the neighborhood where directions and other information can easily be obtained" (Oldenburg, 1996–7: 7). Harlem public space brings Black migrants together – children searching for play companions, amateur artists and musicians or church congregations. Except for giving Black people a sense of home, Harlem's third places offer a stimulating cultural setting for artistic creation. The sounds and colors of the Black community are easily transferred into nuanced works of art reflecting the unique experience of a Black migrant.

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