

Voting doesn't change everything. Voting doesn't change the system. Of course not. But it is the small step we can take. Jacob Lawrence is reminding us that it's not just about Election Day.

It's not just about whether you're excited about this candidate or whether you think voting matters. We are part of a legacy of people who fought and died just for that right. The print I'm looking at is called the 1920s.

The migrants cast their ballots and it's a screen print by an artist named Jacob Lawrence. But the things that you can see really clearly when you first look at it is that this is what's called a polling place which is where people go to vote in person.

A lot of people today vote by mail or absentee which means they're voting from far away. They might be in the military or they move to another state. state. But this is still the primary way that folks vote in person on election day.

So in this print, you can see all kinds of people huddled together in this one polling location. You can see in the back of the room, there's a person pulling a lever, which is how previously you used to cast your vote. Then most of the people standing around are waiting in line, waiting their turn to vote.

It's something that folks for generations, particularly African -American folks who fought and died to get the right to vote, and now they finally have won the right to vote and are waiting to cast their ballot.

So for a lot of Black Americans, this was a really sacred place. The ability to be in this room and cast your vote meant that you were living the dream of folks who fought and died and bled and were bruised before you.

It's always a challenge to try and get folks all onto the same page of understanding what voting can actually mean, how we actually build a society together.

And when I look at this print, I see some of that. being true. You'll see a lot of signifiers in the print, such as there's somebody holding a cane. You can tell the age of certain people by the color of their hair or their posture.

Primarily we're looking at folks who are elders in the community. And these are folks for whom voting might feel more important, whereas young folks might not feel the same urgency, the same necessity to go vote. So this print is titled not just the migrants cast their ballots, but the 1920s the migrants cast their ballots.

So Jacob Lawrence has very specifically said, this print is about a specific time. It's not about every election, it's about this one specific time. And the 1920s was a very important moment for African Americans all across the country because those communities were experiencing what's now called the Great Migration, which is something that Jacob Lawrence has made a

bunch of paintings about and a bunch of images about. And so this print takes place in that same time of the Great Migration.

There was so much white supremacist terrorism happening in the south at that time that millions of black families fled up to northern cities where once they got up north they had the right to vote in some cases and so this print capturing that moment is not just thinking about how important it is to vote But it's also reminding us how hard folks had to fight It's reminding us that there are a lot of people who died who were killed who were assassinated and beaten because they wanted themselves and their children to be able to vote, who saw that the only way that you could claim your own destiny is to choose how you exist in relationship to your government.

They saw that as such an important thing for not just African Americans, but for all people to have, that they were willing to die for it. And so Jacob Lawrence is reminding us that it's not just about Election Day, it's not just about whether you're excited about this candidate or whether you think voting matters. We are part of a legacy of people who fought and died just for that right.