

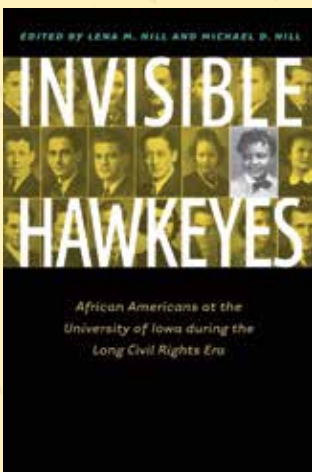
# FIELDS OF OPPORTUNITY: UI'S BLACK MIGRATION STORIES

Some UI stories remain largely untold. This makes telling them both exhilarating and essential, especially when an extraordinary stepping performance amplifies their meaning.

From the 1930s through the 1960s, the University of Iowa played a significant role in the Civil Rights Movement. Iowa City was not the site of famous sit-ins and violent confrontation; nonetheless, the university emerged as an important participant in the struggle for racial equality. During an era when many states restricted African American access to higher education, the UI welcomed black students seeking degrees in cutting-edge art and performance programs. These students brought rare talent, indomitable will, and collaborative spirits to their studies, and their accomplishments burnished the reputation of the State University of Iowa. Their experiences represent a different kind of migration narrative.

In contrast to the most prevalent Great Migration accounts that trace rural black Southerners' journeys to new job opportunities in the urban North and Midwest, the story of young black people traveling from numerous cities to the UI remains a veritable secret. When these students departed from hometowns as varied as Houston, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, they set their sights on Iowa City as a destination of academic opportunity. Their educational odysseys at the UI reflect the difficulties of making dreams realities in mid-twentieth century America.

*Fields of Opportunity: UI's Black Migration Stories* probes this era of university history. This three-day event unites the UI Press publication of *Invisible Hawkeyes: African Americans at the University of Iowa during the Long Civil Rights Era* and Hancher's commission of Step Afrika!'s *The Migration: Reflections of Jacob Lawrence*. With its expansive scope, the program honors the fullness of black student experiences.



*Invisible Hawkeyes* includes chapters on the departments of Music, Fine Arts, and Theatre—as well as athletics and the Writers' Workshop—and features testimonials that movingly preserve the memories of black alumni. This printed account of black student experiences resonates powerfully with Step Afrika!'s *The Migration*. Thus, with a long overdue flourish, *Fields of Opportunity* recuperates and celebrates the accomplishments of black Hawkeyes who introduced American pluralism to a Midwestern and a national citizenry that often resisted such progress. These students' artistic and athletic expertise, however, bridged cultural gaps and pushed forward the struggle for racial equality. In recognition of this

legacy, *Fields of Opportunity* demonstrates how the world of performance has long played—and continues to occupy—a pivotal role in the African American pursuit of the American Dream.

We invite you to pull back the curtain on this part of the UI history, and join us on an inspiring journey magnified by Step Afrika!'s unique art.

**Lena & Michael Hill**

Associate Professors of English & African American Studies

# FIELDS OF OPPORTUNITY EVENTS

October 19-21

## **Visible Hawkeyes**

Wednesday, October 19, 5 pm  
Strauss Hall in Hancher Auditorium

This event recalls the 2011 opening panel of the residency *Iowa and Invisible Man: Making Blackness Visible*. That panel, "Invisible Hawkeyes," kicked off a week of events that form the foundation of *Fields of Opportunity*. Honoring that legacy, "Visible Hawkeyes" will feature video filmed from the 2011 project, migration stories from prominent African American UI alumni, and a special appearance by Step Afrika! A reception will follow the program and the University of Iowa Press will have copies of *Invisible Hawkeyes* for sale.

## **A Life Through Letters: The True Biography of Ralph Ellison Written by Himself**

Thursday, October 20, 3:30 pm  
Gerber Lounge, English Philosophy Building

A scholarly presentation by John Callahan, Morgan S. Odell Professor Emeritus of Humanities.

## **Performing Migration**

Thursday, October 20, 7:30 pm  
Hancher Auditorium

This event showcases Step Afrika's Hancher-commissioned work, *The Migration: Reflections of Jacob Lawrence*. This new signature performance is based on Jacob Lawrence's visual portrayal of African-American movement from the rural South to the industrial Midwest and North in the early 1900s. Each piece incorporates motifs from Lawrence's paintings to tell the black migration story through body percussion and dance.

Tickets are available from the Hancher Box Office (335-1160, 800-HANCHER, or hancher.uiowa.edu).

Michael and Lena Hill will be signing copies of *Invisible Hawkeyes* from 6:30-7:30 pm in the Hancher lobby.

## **Records of African American Excellence**

Presentations by contributors to *Invisible Hawkeyes*  
Friday, Oct. 21, 3-5 pm  
Iowa City Public Library

This program features one scholarly panel and one alumni roundtable. Presenters will draw on their published work in *Invisible Hawkeyes* to expand on the civil rights history of black students at UI. As a concluding event, these public performances will be recorded and included in *Black Faces in White Spaces*, the digital project that will build upon and expand the textual work commenced by *Invisible Hawkeyes*.

## **University of Iowa Museum of Art Exhibition: Political Prints**

On display through January 15, 2017  
UIMA@IMU Visual Classroom, Third Floor, Iowa Memorial Union

The current UIMA exhibition includes Jacob Lawrence's *The 1920's... The migrants cast their ballots and cast their ballots*, from the *Kent Bicentennial Portfolio: Spirit of Independence*, 1974. The exhibition also includes two works by famed artist Elizabeth Catlett, one of the first three MFA graduates from the University of Iowa and the first African American woman to earn the degree. Visitors to the exhibition can see Catlett's *Malcom X Speaks for Us* and *Homage to the Panthers*.