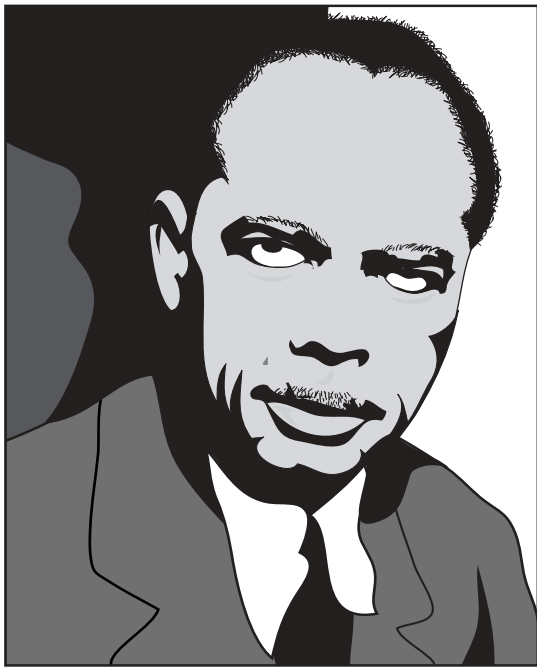


Famous Floridians: James Weldon Johnson

James Weldon Johnson wrote *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, the national anthem to millions of black Americans. He was widely known as a man of many talents, all of which he used in some form to help shape America's history. Johnson was a poet, novelist, historian, diplomat, lawyer, civil rights leader, editor, educator, and songwriter.



James Weldon Johnson used his writing to battle discrimination.

In 1871, Johnson was born in Jacksonville, Florida. His father was a headwaiter and his mother was a teacher. Johnson's mother was a great influence on his interest in music and reading. She taught in the segregated Stanton school, which Johnson attended through the eighth grade. Since there were no high schools for blacks in Jacksonville, his parents sent him to high school and college in Atlanta, Georgia.

After graduation from Atlanta University, he returned to Jacksonville and became principal of the Stanton elementary school. He converted Stanton to a 12-year school. While at Stanton, he also studied law and became the first black lawyer in the state of Florida.

In 1895, Johnson started the first black newspaper in the United States, *The Daily American*. The paper lasted only a year but gave Johnson the opportunity to reflect on racial issues.

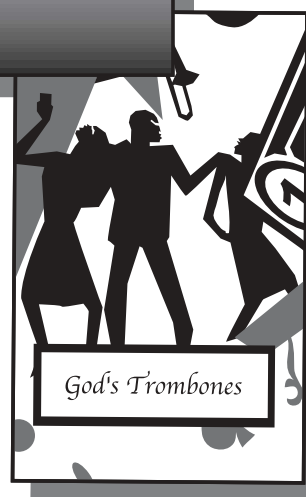
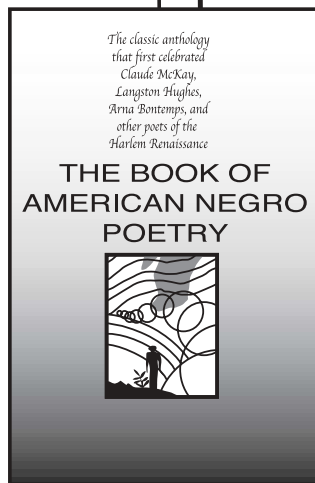
His writings became popular with blacks in America. In 1900, he wrote his famous poem *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. His talented brother, John Rosamond Johnson, set the poem to music. The brothers wrote over 200 songs for Broadway musicals.

Johnson was named Ambassador to the countries of Venezuela, Nicaragua, and the Azores. While in the Azores, he wrote a major novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*. It tells the story of a musician who rejects his black roots for a life of material comfort in the white world. The novel explores the issue of racial identity in the twentieth century.

In the 1920s, Johnson was a leader in the Harlem Renaissance, a significant literary and artistic movement. He had a talent for persuading people of differing ideas to work together for a common goal. Using this talent, he became the national organizer for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

He edited *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, a major contribution to the history of African-American literature. His book of poetry *God's Trombones* was influenced by his impressions of the rural South.

With words, Johnson battled discrimination. His life illustrated that African-Americans could embrace their past and traditions while succeeding in a diverse culture.



Johnson's books are still popular today.

Lift Every Voice and Sing

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith
That the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope
That the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way
That with tears have been watered,
We have come, treading our path
Through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places,
Our God, where we met Thee;
Lest, our hearts drunk
With the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our GOD,
True to our native land.