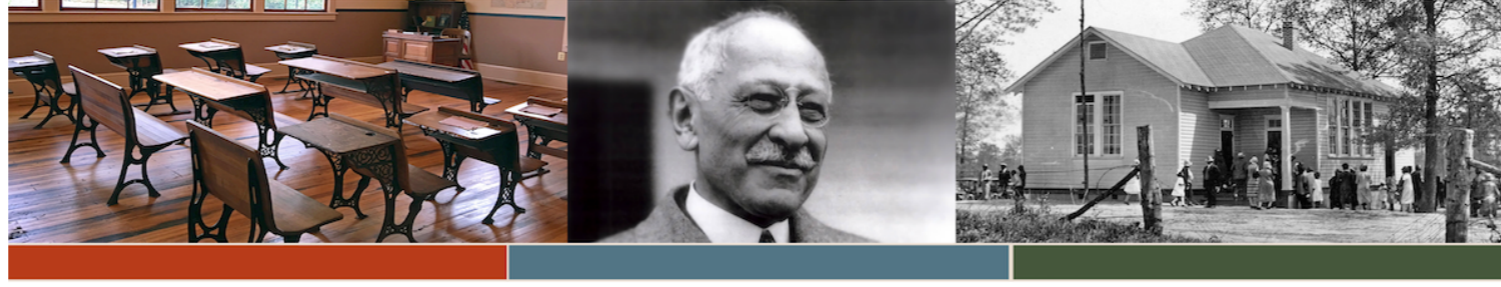


The Campaign to Create the  
**Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools  
National Historical Park**



**BLACK HISTORY MONTH SPECIAL EDITION**

**Honoring James Weldon Johnson  
During Black History Month**

By Stephanie Deutsch

In the year 1900 young James Weldon Johnson was the principal of the Stanton School for Negroes in Jacksonville, Florida, a school that had been established in 1869 to educate the newly emancipated sons and daughters of slaves so that they could become teachers. He and his brother Rosamund had attended the school, and his mother was for many years a teacher there.



Class photo of Johnson as a student at the Stanton School  
Yale University Library

Scheduled to give an address to the students at an assembly in honor of Abraham Lincoln's birthday on February 12, Johnson found that, try as he might to write a speech about Lincoln, his thoughts kept going in a different direction. After discussion with his brother, Rosamund, a musician teaching at the next-door Florida Baptist Academy, he decided instead to write a poem which could then be set to music. Some accounts say the resulting work was to be dedicated to Booker T. Washington; others report that the famed educator attended the school ceremony where 500 children first sang the deeply moving and melodic song now widely considered the "Black National Anthem" and sung regularly at graduations, church services, dedications of historic landmarks, Black History Month celebrations and other gatherings -- "Lift Every Voice and Sing."



Johnson while Principal at the Stanton School  
Yale University Library

Johnson went on from this achievement to a career remarkable for its variety and impact. He and his brother wrote some 200 songs for the musical theater on Broadway. The first Black man admitted to the Florida Bar since Reconstruction, he later served as U.S. consul in Venezuela and Nicaragua, headed the NAACP for a decade, pushed for anti-lynching legislation, wrote several volumes of poetry and a novel, "The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man," and ended his career teaching creative writing at Fisk University. In 1925 he was awarded the Spingarn Medal for excellence by the NAACP. In 1928 he received the very first Rosenwald fellowship in creative writing and went on to be awarded two more in 1930 and 1931.



Portrait of Johnson  
Library of Congress

James Weldon Johnson believed that African Americans could achieve recognition through their unique contributions to the arts as was happening in the period known as the Harlem Renaissance, to which he was a major contributor. His was a remarkable career, tragically cut short when he died as the result of a car accident in 1938. He left behind an enormous body of work that includes the beautiful song of faith, hope and affirmation long treasured by African Americans and, increasingly, known and valued by all Americans.

*Lift every voice and sing,  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the list'ning 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.*

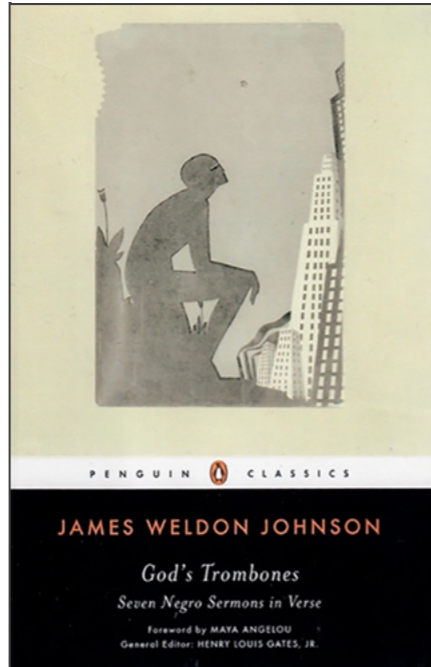
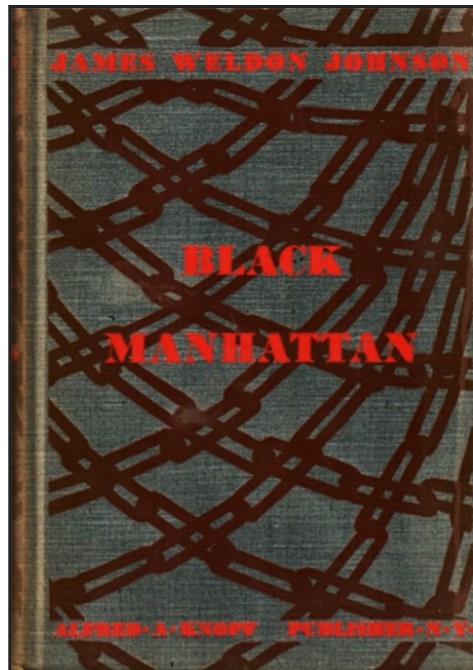
*Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chast'ning rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.  
We have come, treading our path through 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 hast brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who hast 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.*

**Memorabilia of James Weldon Johnson**

The Campaign has purchased two important books by James Weldon Johnson, which, like the rest of the memorabilia we have collected, will be donated to the National Park Service for use at the ultimate Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park.

Johnson's book "God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse," was published in 1927 to significant acclaim. It contains illustrations by Aaron Douglas, later to become, like Johnson, a Rosenwald Fund Fellow. Douglas received a fellowship in 1937 for painting and went on to become Chairman of the Art Department of Fisk University. The Campaign has acquired a Penguin Edition of this book.



The Campaign was also able to purchase another book by Johnson, a first edition of "Black Manhattan," which was published in 1930. The book traces Black experience in New York City from the earliest settlements during the colonial period to the exceptional achievements of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.

In the final sentence of his preface Johnson writes:

*To the JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND and its president, MR. EDWIN R. EMBREE, I wish to express my especial thanks for the grant of the Fellowship which has made possible the writing of the book.*

**Carter G. Woodson: The Father of Black History**

In 1926 Dr. Carter G. Woodson created Negro History Week selecting the second week in February because it included the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.



Dr. Woodson  
Photo from ASALH

Woodson believed that the history of African Americans was worthy of study, celebration and pride. In 1976, President Gerald Ford established February as Black History Month.

Woodson was the son of former slaves, a child laborer in West Virginia coal mines, a secondary school teacher in the District of Columbia, and the second African American to attain a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University. With four other men Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now called the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, ASAALH) in September 1915. Woodson also created two publications in support of the Association - the Journal of Negro History and the Negro History Bulletin. The Carter G. Woodson National Historic Site in Washington, DC, commemorates the life and enduring legacy of Dr. Woodson.

**And the Final Words...**

Dave Schwan of WGN Radio in Chicago shared the link below for the story entitled Rosenwald: To Give and Receive that was posted on the station's website last week as part of its series on Black History Month.

<https://wgnradio.com/black-history-month/julius-rosenwald-to-give-and-receive/>

Schwan conceived of the story after reading the article Remembering Rosenwald in the Summer 2023 issue of the National Parks magazine. He interviewed Alan Spears and Dorothy Canter of the Campaign and gave credit to his girlfriend who lives in Virginia and took him to the Ridgeley Rosenwald School in Prince Georges County, MD, to further his research on the story.

**"I do not see how America can go ahead if part of its people are left behind."**

- Julius Rosenwald

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**We need your support to create the  
Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park.**

For questions and suggestions, please write to [info@rosenwaldpark.org](mailto:info@rosenwaldpark.org).

Stephanie Deutsch, editor

February 2024