



James Weldon Johnson
Poet, Lyricist, Lawyer, Diplomat, Anthologist

From the Desk of
Senator
Lew Frederick

- Born in 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida
- First educated by his mother, who was a musician and public school teacher, he was encouraged to study English literature and European musical tradition
- Enrolled at Atlanta University at the age of 16, where he completed his bachelor's and some graduate level coursework
- Following his freshman year at Atlanta University, he spent his summer in a rural district in Georgia to teach the descendants of former slaves
- Became an influential campus speaker and won the Quiz Club Contest in English Composition and Oratory
- Founded and edited the *Daily American* newspaper in 1895 that covered both political and racial topics during the Jim Crow era
- After graduating he returned to Jacksonville where he taught at Stanton, a school for African American students that was the largest of all the schools in the city and was promoted to principal at age 35
- Despite being paid less than half of what his white colleagues made, he improved black education as principal by adding ninth and tenth grades to the school
- Prepared for the bar while working as a teacher and in 1897 he was the first African-American admitted to the Florida Bar since the Reconstruction era ended, despite the fact that one of the bar examiners left the room because he did not want to see a black man admitted
- Wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" with his brother in 1900, a song which later became the official anthem of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and was commonly referred to as the "Negro National Anthem"
- Wrote several successful Broadway plays with his brother, as well as an opera called *Tolosa* which satirized the US annexation of the Pacific Islands
- Appointed by the Roosevelt administration as consul of Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, in 1906 and later transferred to Corinto, Nicaragua, where a rebellion against President Adolfo Diaz erupted during his stay
- During his time as a diplomat he completed his most well-known book, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which he published anonymously in 1912 out of fear that any controversy might endanger his diplomatic career
- Upon returning to New York he became heavily involved in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s
- Became a field secretary and organizer for the NAACP where he built and revived local chapters and organized a silent protest of 10,000 African Americans in NYC in 1917 to protest lynchings
- Became the first black executive secretary of the NAACP in 1920 and served in that role for 10 years
- Lobbied for the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill of 1921 which passed easily in the House but was repeatedly defeated by the white Southern bloc in the Senate
- Shortly before his death in 1938, Johnson supported efforts by Ignatz Waghalter to establish a classical orchestra of African-American musicians

"But I must own that I also felt stirred by an unselfish desire to voice all the joys and sorrows, the hopes and ambitions, of the American Negro, in classic musical form."

(James Weldon Johnson)

Lift Every Voice And Sing – James Weldon Johnson

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

From the Desk of
Senator
Lew Frederick

Sing a song
full of 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 day that hope
Unborn had died;
Yet with a steady Beat,
Have not our weary feet,
Come to the Place on 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 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,
Least our hearts,
drunk with the wine of The world, we forget thee,

Shadowed beneath the Hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land