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James Weldon Johnson

James W. Johnson was a man with many talents. Johnson was a poet, novelist, journalist, song writer, educator, and diplomat. He was born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1871. He grew up in cultured and economically secure surroundings that were unusual among Southern black families at the time. Johnson Had one brother, Johnson father whose name is also Johnson was a resort hotel headwaiter of the ST. James Hotel and his mother Helen Dillet Johnson was a school teacher. Because of his mother Johnson had an early interest in reading, drawing, and music.

Johnson attended a segregated school where his mother taught at Stanton School. His mother imparted to him her considerable love and knowledge of English literature and the European tradition in music. Since high schools were closed to blacks in Jacksonville, Johnson left home to attend both secondary school and college at Atlanta University, where he got his bachelors degree in 1894. Same year when Johnson receive his B.A. degree, he was appointed to be a teacher and principal of Stanton School, same place where his mom taught.

During Johnson's college years he became aware of racial problems that occur in America. When he taught as a schoolteacher in a poor district in Georgia for two summers left a deep impression in him. The struggles that black Americans had left a theme for the thirty or more poems that he wrote as a student.

Johnson was also a spokesman on black social and political issues. In 1895 he founded the first American Daily, the first black oriented newspaper in the United States. The newspaper was a voice against racial injustice, and encourages black advancement. Because of Johnson's vision to improve black American struggles, he attracted other black leaders like W.E. Dubois, and Booker T. Washington.

In 1898, Johnson became the first black Lawyer admitted to a Florida since reconstruction. Johnson practice law for many years in Jacksonville with a former classmate from college while still being a principal at Stanton School. In 1900, Johnson, wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" for a school ceremony in Lincolns birthday. The song is still song in many high schools today. After writing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," Johnson left to New York to collaborate with his brother, and a black performer named Bob Cole on writing popular songs and librettos. Johnson then met his future wife Grace Nail.

After getting married Johnson had many more accomplishments in his life. He decided to abandon song writing to work for the diplomatic Corps, which he served as a U.S. console, then became head of U.S. consulate. During those years Johnson published poems and wrote the *Autobiography of an Ex- Colored Man.* In 1913 Johnson resigned from the Foreign Service. In 1916 Johnson was the organizer of the NAACP, soon in 1917 he was elected to head the NAACP, first African American to hold this position.

In 1920, Johnson resigns from leadership of the NAACP to accept the Spence Chair of Creative Literature at Fisk University, which he held until his death in an automobile accident in 1938.

Johnson was a man who had much success in his life. He was a multi talented man. Johnson is not talked about as much as W.E.B. Dubois, or Booker T. Washington, but he still plays in important role in our black history culture.

Work Cited

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