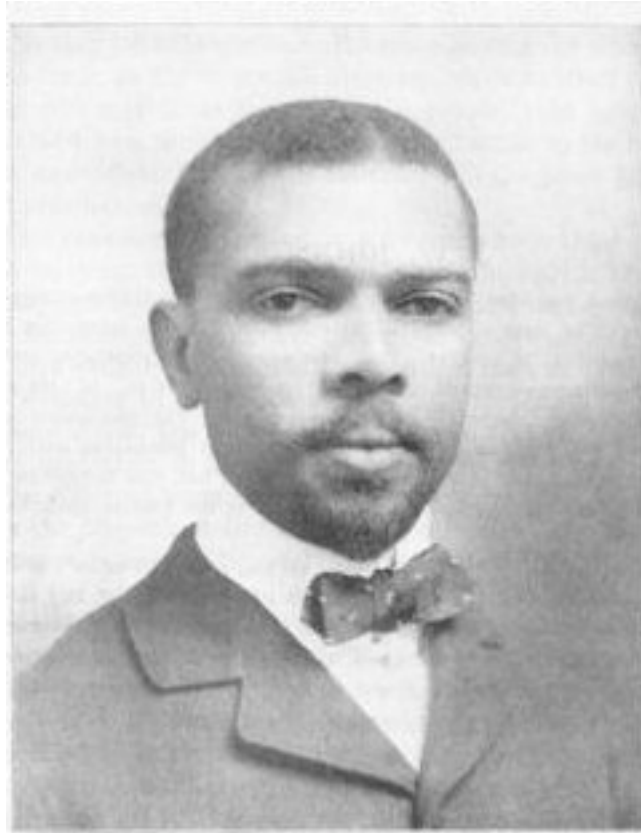


James Weldon Johnson, Teacher, Activist, and Poet (1871-1938)

Observed 25 June



Educated in Florida by a mother who was a pioneering and dedicated teacher, James Johnson was home-schooled and went on to get a rigorous classical education at Atlanta University. He was a man of many accomplishments who wrote novels and poetry, as well as songs for Broadway plays. He was the first black man to pass the Florida bar after the Civil War. He was active in Theodore Roosevelt's presidential campaign and subsequently served in diplomatic posts in Latin America. He later spent many years as a professor, first at NYU and then at Fisk. Johnson was a major force in the work for full civil rights for black Americans in the first decades of the 20th century, not only through his writing and advocacy, and his leadership of the NAACP, but also through his personal example as a black man of extraordinary accomplishment in a variety of fields, one of the brightest and most respected leaders in American society of his time. People read his words, listened when he spoke, and followed his lead toward a better and more just society. It was a measure of his impact that at his death (as a result of a train crushing the car he was driving), his funeral (in Harlem) was attended by 2000 people. One of his most inspiring poems has become a frequently sung hymn, popularly referred to as the 'Black National Anthem'

Here is the first verse:

Lift ev'ry 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.

Lessons Sirach 39:1-11; Psalm 46:1-8; Ephesians 6:10-18; Luke 1:57-75

Collect Eternal God, we give thanks for the gifts that you gave your servant James Weldon Johnson: a heart and voice to praise your Name in verse. As he gave us powerful words to glorify you, may we also speak with joy and boldness to banish hatred from your creation, in the Name of Jesus Christ; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.