



# James Weldon Johnson

By Deacon Clarice Scott

**Day 19**  
**March 15, 2023**

**Read Psalms 100:1-23**

“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

## **Critical Race Facts!**

In early July 1917, after several years of post war migration had increased the Black population of East St. Louis, Illinois, and created economic competition for white residents, white mobs in the city ambushed African American workers as they left factories during a shift change. The violence soon spread, surging to an attack of the city’s Black neighborhoods. Over the course of three days the area suffered more than \$400,000 in property damage; at least several dozen African American men, women and children were shot, hanged beaten to death, or burned alive after being driven into burning buildings; and an estimated 6000 Black residents’ – more than half the city’s Black population – fled.

## **Today’s Prayer Concerns:**

“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.” In Jesus name, amen.

My interest was piqued in James Weldon Johnson, because my husband, Paul Scott (1960) and Trustee Curtis Gunn (1964), both attended and graduated from the high school named after James Weldon Johnson. It is still located in York County, VA today, but has been renamed York Intermediate School. Because of his character, his many gifts, and his fight for equality for all, the naming of the school after him spoke volumes of how the people of that community felt about him and wanted to carry on his legacy.

James Weldon Johnson was born June 17, 1871, in Jacksonville, FL and died on June 26, 1938, in Wiscasset, ME from complications of a car accident at the age of 67. James was highly influenced by his mother who was a schoolteacher. She had a great passion for music and literature which James, as well, grew fond of. He graduated from high school at the age of 16. After achieving his education at Clark Atlanta University, (HBCU), Stanton College Preparatory School, Fisk University; Columbia University, James became an American writer and a Civil Rights activist. He returned to Jacksonville, FL and taught at the Stanton Elementary School for Black students. Once he became the principal, Mr. Johnson expanded the school to include high school education. James believed Black Americans should produce great literature and art to demonstrate their equality to Whites in terms of intellect and creativity.

To widen his range of diversity and further utilize his gifts, while at Stanton, in 1998, James began studying law and became the first Black man admitted to the Florida Bar since Reconstruction Era. God had not finished blessing him, because while balancing a dual career in education and law, he found the time to write poetry and songs. He penned, Lift Every Voice and Sing, now recognized by Blacks as “The Negro (Black) National Anthem” to honor Abraham Lincoln’s birthday in 1901.

Many connections to influential members of the Black community, led James to yet, another season in his career - diplomacy. In 1906 he was sent by President Theodore Roosevelt to serve the United States Consul in Venezuela and 3 years later, he moved to Nicaragua to serve as consul as well. During this time, James wrote; The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man in 1912; a story of a young biracial man living in the post- Reconstruction era. In 1916 Mr. Johnson left the diplomatic world to join the Civil Rights Movement and became field secretary for NAACP where he helped open branches and expanded membership. He also campaigned for a Federal Anti-Lynching Bill. Mr. Johnson brought awareness to a group of people, and he spoke at the National Conference on lynching in 1919. In 1920 he became NAACP executive secretary, a position he used to fight against segregation and voter disenfranchisement in the South.