

James Weldon Johnson (June 17, 1871 - June 26, 1938) distinguished himself equally as a man of letters and as a civil rights leader in the early decades of the twentieth century. A talented poet and novelist, Johnson is credited with bringing a new standard of artistry and realism to black literature in such works as *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* and *God's Trombones*. His pioneering studies of black poetry, music, and theater in the 1920s also helped introduce many white Americans to the genuine African American creative spirit, previously known mainly through the distortions of the minstrel show and dialect poetry. Meanwhile, as head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the 1920s, Johnson led determined civil rights campaigns in an effort to remove the legal, political, and social obstacles hindering black achievement. Johnson's multi-faceted career, including stints as a diplomat in Latin America, the first African American lawyer admitted to the bar in Florida, school principal and a successful Tin Pan Alley songwriter, testified to his intellectual depth and breadth, self-confidence, and deep-rooted belief that the future held unlimited new opportunities for black Americans.