

BAHAMAS



JAMES WELDON JOHNSON, 1871-1938

Born James William Johnson in Jacksonville, Florida, on 17 June 1871 — he changed his middle name to Weldon in 1913 — the future teacher, poet, songwriter, and civil rights activist was the son of a headwaiter and the first female black public school teacher in Florida, both of whom had roots in Nassau, Bahamas.

When Johnson's younger brother, John Rosamond, graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music in 1897, the two began collaborating on a musical theater. Though their attempts to get their comic opera "Tolosa" produced in New York in 1899 were unsuccessful, Johnson's experiences there excited his creative energies. He soon began writing lyrics, for which his brother composed music, including "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which subsequently came to be known as the "Negro National Anthem."

