JOHNSON, JAMES WELDON, 1871-1938.
James Weldon Johnson collection,
circa 1886-1980 (bulk 1916-1930)

Emory University
Robert W. Woodruff Library
Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library
Atlanta, GA 30322
404-727-6887
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Johnson, James Weldon, 1871-1938.
Title: James Weldon Johnson collection, circa 1886-1980 (bulk 1916-1930)
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 797
Extent: 7 linear feet (11 boxes), 6 oversized bound volumes (OBV), 2 oversized papers boxes (OP), and AV Masters: .25 linear feet (CLP3)
Abstract: Collection of papers relating to James Weldon Johnson, African-American educator, journalist, diplomat, lyricist, poet, and human rights activist, including correspondence, literary manuscripts (by Johnson and others), printed materials, audio-visual materials, sheet music, legal documents, financial records, and general ephemera.
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access
Unrestricted access.

Terms Governing Use and Reproduction
All requests subject to limitations noted in departmental policies on reproduction.

Related Materials in Other Repositories
James Weldon Johnson and Grace Nail Johnson papers, Yale University Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Source

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Citation
[after identification of item(s)], James Weldon Johnson collection, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Processing
Processed by Susan Potts McDonald and Janell Hobson, December 1998.

Collection Description

Biographical Note
James Weldon Johnson, African-American educator, journalist, diplomat, lyricist, poet, and human rights activist, was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on June 17, 1871, to James and Helen Louise Dillet Johnson. He was raised in a comfortable, middle-class setting in which his father, as a headwaiter, and his mother, as a public school teacher, achieved economic security for their family. Their mother encouraged Johnson and his brother, John Rosamond, in their intellectual and artistic pursuits.

Although Johnson attended Stanton School in Jacksonville, which only extended through the eighth grade, he continued his education at Atlanta University, where he received his bachelor's degree in 1894. After graduation, he returned to Florida and served as the Stanton School principal, which he expanded to high school status. In addition, Johnson founded a short-lived newspaper, Daily American, and passed the Florida bar examination, after which he worked briefly as a lawyer. He later moved to New York in 1902, where he performed in a musical trio, with his brother Rosamond and Bob Cole, and wrote the lyrics to more than 200 popular songs. During this time, he met and, in 1910 married, Grace Nail Johnson, the daughter of John Bennett Nail, a successful real estate entrepreneur. Johnson also served as American Consul, appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt, in Central America and South America, from 1906 to 1913.

After his consular service, Johnson joined the staff of the New York Age, which later led him to join the NAACP in 1916 to fight racial prejudice and discrimination. All of these activities he engaged in while perfecting his literary talents as a poet and writer. Johnson was a founder and senior member of the Harlem Renaissance guiding and influencing many of the younger writers of the period, among them Langston Hughes, Claude McKay and Countee Cullen.

In 1930, Johnson retired from the NAACP to accept a teaching position at Fisk University. There, he served until his death by automobile accident on June 26, 1938. He is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.

Scope and Content Note
The James Weldon Johnson collection includes correspondence, literary manuscripts (by Johnson and others), printed materials, audio-visual materials, sheet music, legal documents, financial records, and general ephemera, dating from ca. 1886 to 1980 (bulk 1916-1930).

A small portion of the collection is correspondence, including letters to and from family, friends and associates in literary and other professional fields. These letters date from the 1880s up to 1980, the earliest occurring between the parents of Grace Nail Johnson. Most of the letters in this series fall between 1924 to 1930 and, also, between 1972 to 1978. Most of these letters relate to Johnson's literary and musical compositions. Prominent correspondents include William Stanley
Braithwaite, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Carl Van Vechten, Arna Bontemps, J. Rosamond
Johnson, and Charles S. Johnson.

Also significant are typed drafts of Johnson's individual poems and speeches and copies of his
pamphlets, programs, promotional material, and sheet music with his song lyrics. In addition,
there are various tributes in journals and programs, and other materials honoring Johnson's life
and work particularly related to his association with the Harlem Renaissance movement and
his work at Fisk University and for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored
People. Printed materials collected by Johnson's family include catalogs, pamphlets, booklets,
sheet music, newspaper clippings and other ephemera.

The audio-visual materials consists of an extensive collection of photographs and several
photograph albums depicting Johnson; his wife, Grace Nail Johnson; their families and friends;
and their country home, Five Acres, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Among the important
figures represented in photographs are W.E.B. Du Bois, Walter White, and Carl Van Vechten
(whose photography is also included). The phonograph albums include three recordings of
Johnson's God's Trombones.

Other items, such as legal and financial documents, are arranged chronologically. The final series
in this collection is general ephemera, which includes Johnson's handwritten notes, dance cards
from the early 1900s, personalized cards and stationery, and a map locating Johnson's grave.

Arrangement Note
Organized by record type: (1) General correspondence, (2) Writings by James Weldon Johnson,
(3) Writings about James Weldon Johnson, (4) General printed material, (5) Audio-visual
### Container List

#### General correspondence

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<td>10</td>
<td>Miscellaneous envelopes</td>
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#### Diary

1 11  Grace Nail Johnson, March 6-December 30, 1912 [begins when James Weldon Johnson left on trip]

#### Writings by James Weldon Johnson


2 2 Pamphlet, “Self-Determining Haiti”

2 3 Poem [printed], "The Creation"

2 4 Poem [printed], "Fifty Years"

2 5 Poem [typescript], “Helene”

2 6 Poem [typescript], “If I Were in Paris”

2 7 Poem [typescript], “Life”

2 8 Poem [typescript], “Man”

2 9 Poem [typescript], “The Miser”

2 10 Poem [typescript], “Moods”

2 11 Poem [typescript], “A Passing Melody”

2 12 Poem [typescript], "Unknown Bards" [originally filed in Correspondence, letter from J.W.J. to Dr. Brunstead, May 4, 1907]

2 13 Poem [typescript], “The River”

2 14 Poem [typescript], “The White Witch”

2 15 Program, “The League of Composers, Second Concert, 1926-1927,” Town Hall, N.Y., November 27, 1926

2 16 Program, “God’s Trombones and other readings,” Dayton Art Institute, May 1, 1932

Program, “God’s Trombones,” at Scarsdale Congregational Church, Scarsdale, N.Y., May 2, 1965

Program and flier, “God’s Trombones,” at Elizabeth City State University, Elizabeth City, N.C., April 30, 1972

Program, “God’s Trombones,” at Scarsdale Congregational Church, Scarsdale, N.Y., June 1, 1972

Promotional, American Literature by Negro Authors, The MacMillan Company

Promotional, “God’s Trombones,” Musicraft Album No. 21

Promotional, “God’s Trombones,” The Viking Press

Promotional, "Lectures by James Weldon Johnson"

Promotional, “Negro Americans, What Now?” The Viking Press

Promotional, "Negro Contributions to American Culture," lectures, New York University


Promotional, Viking Press, Third List: August-December 1935 with “St. Peter Relates…” advertisement


Speech, Commencement address, Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth, June, 1916

Speech, NAACP farewell dinner, New York, 1931

Speech, "The Shining Light," an appreciation of Julius Rosenwald, February 14, 1932, delivered at a memorial service in Fisk Memorial Chapel

**Writings about James Weldon Johnson**

American Missionary Association, "A Continuing Service, 1839-1938" [dedicated to JWJ]


Brown, Sterling A., Outline for the Study of the Poetry of American Negroes, 1931

*The Crisis*, September, 1938, pp. 291-299, 209-310 [articles on JWJ, 2 copies]
2 42 The Crisis, June, 1971, "James Weldon Johnson Centennial Issue" [2 copies]
2 43 Cullen, Countee, “In Memoriam”
2 44 Fisk University, "Fisk, after seventy years," ca. 1936 [3 copies]
2 45 Fisk University, "James Weldon Johnson," n.d.
2 46 Hampton Institute, Dedication Services for Samuel Chapman Armstrong Hall, February 2, 1964 [includes JWJ Communications Center Wing]
2 47 Hampton Institute, "James Weldon Johnson Celebration, April 29-May 3, 1973
2 48 Hughes, Langston, "In Memory of a Man"
2 49 Jacksonville Sesquicentennial Commission: invitation for James Weldon Johnson Day Luncheon, 1972
2 50 James Weldon Johnson Community Center, N.Y., N.Y.: dedication, May 24, 1967
2 51 James Weldon Johnson Elementary School, N.Y., N.Y.: dedication, April 21, 1966 [4 copies]
2 52 James Weldon Johnson Foundation and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, invitation to "A Tribute to James Weldon Johnson," November 24, 1996
3 1 Kenworth, Leonard S., "James Weldon Johnson speaks," leaflet, 1950 [4 copies]
3 3 Phylon, Vol. XXXII, No. 4 (Winter, 1971), Atlanta University [articles commemorating that centenary of JWJ, 2 copies]
3 5 Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery, exhibit catalogue, James Weldon Johnson [2 copies]
3 6 "Springarn Medal, The," National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, July 6, 1971 [lists JWJ as recipient in 1925]
3 7 Tennessee Dept. of Education, The Negro: A Selected List for School Libraries of Books by or About the Negro in Africa and America, November 1935
3 8 U.S. Postal Service, (1) First Day of Issue, JWJ Postage stamp [2 copies] and (2) Sheet of 50 stamps, 1988
3 9 Vechten, Carl Van: “Proposal for James Weldon Johnson Memorial” [3 copies]
3 10 Virginia Union University: fine arts festival, 1972
3 11 White, Walter: “James Weldon Johnson: A Biographical Sketch” [12 copies]
3 12 Yale University, "80 writers whose books and letters have been given over the past twenty years to the Yale University Library by Carl Van Vechten, Compiled in honor of his 80th birthday, June 17, 1960
3 13 Yale University, "Exercises marking the opening of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of Negro Arts and Letters," January 7, 1950
3 14 Yale University, Exhibit catalog for Carl Van Vechten, A Centenary Exhibition of Some of His Gifts to Yale, June 17-September 30, 1980
### General printed material

3 17 *The Crisis*, February-July, October-November 1977 [7 issues]
3 18 League of Composers, playbill, Times Square Theater, February 22, 1925
3 22 "Ricordi Vocal Catalogue, The" G. Ricordi & Co., Inc., a music catalogue
3 23 Rudwick, Elliot M., "Booker T. Washington's Relations with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The Journal of Negro Education, Spring, 1960
3 25 Sheet music: “Mem’ries of Violets,” lyrics by Estelle Pugsley, music by J. Rosamond Johnson
3 26 Sheet music: “Kiss Me Again,” lyrics by Henry Blossom, music by Victor Herbert
3 27 *Spingarn Medal*, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, ca. 1922
3 28 *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States*, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, April 1919
3 29 "Wilberforce Singers presented by Fifth Street Branch YWCA," May 19, 19??, advertisement

### Photographs: Portraits

4 1 Du Bois, W.E.B. [1 photograph]
4 2 Johnson, Grace Nail (Photographer: Carl Van Vechten) [2 photographs]
4 3 Johnson, Grace Nail [8 photographs]
4 4 Johnson, James Weldon [8 photographs]
4 5 Johnson, James Weldon (Photographer: Doris Ulmann) [14 photographs]
4 6 Johnson, James Weldon (Photographer: Carl Van Vechten) [7 photographs]
OP1  2 Johnson, James Weldon (Photographer: Carl Van Vechten) [1 photographs]
4 7 Nail, E. Frances (mother-in-law) [3 photographs]
4 8 Nail, John Bennett (father-in-law of) [4 photographs]
4 9 Nail, John E., “Jack” (brother-in-law) [1 photograph]
4 10 Van Vechten, Fania (wife of photographer, Carl Van Vechten) [1 photograph]
4 11 Williams, Harry [1 cabinet card]
4 12 Unidentified children (Photographer: Oscar Dunnor, NY, NY) [5 cabinet cards]
| 4 | 13 | Unidentified children (Photographer: Scholfield and Tingley, New London, Conn.) [5 cabinet cards] |
| 4 | 14 | Unidentified people [9 cabinet cards] |
| 4 | 15 | Unidentified people [7 photographs] |

**Photographs: Group portraits**

| 4 | 16 | Johnson family women, ca. 1912-1913 [1 photograph] |
| 4 | 17 | Johnson, James Weldon and Grace Nail Johnson [10 photographs] |
| 4 | 18 | Johnson, James Weldon and Grace Nail Johnson with Nail family [6 photographs] |
| 4 | 19 | Johnson, James Weldon with W.E.B. Du Bois [6 photographs] |
| 4 | 20 | Johnson, James Weldon with brother, J. Rosamond Johnson [2 photographs] |
| 4 | 21 | Johnson, James Weldon with Mary White Ovington in front of Johnson's cottage in Nashville, 1933 [4 photographs] |
| 4 | 22 | Johnson, James Weldon with Walter White [8 photographs] |
| 4 | 23 | Johnson, James Weldon with unidentified friends [3 photographs] |
| 4 | 24 | Johnson, Grace Nail at dedication of James Weldon Johnson Elementary School, N.Y., N.Y., 1966 [6 photographs] |
| 4 | 25 | Johnson, Grace Nail with George E. Haynes and others upon the presentation of Hayne's papers to Yale University Library, n.d. [1 photograph] |
| 4 | 26 | Johnson, Grace Nail with Dorothy Peterson and Mrs. Wakefield in Five Acres living room, 1938 [7 photographs] |
| 4 | 27 | Johnson, Grace Nail with the Van Vechtens, n.d. [1 photograph] |
| 4 | 28 | Johnson, Grace Nail with unidentified friends [9 photographs] |
| 4 | 29 | Nail family [18 photographs] |
| 4 | 30 | Okala, Ollie Sims, with friends, [11 photographs] |
| 4 | 31 | James Weldon Johnson Elementary School, tribute to JWJ, 1975 [16 photographs] |
| 4 | 32 | YWCA, unidentified children, n.d. |
| 4 | 33 | Unidentified people [18 photographs] |

**Photographs: Homes, buildings, etc.**

| 5 | 1 | Five Acres, Barn [7 photographs] |
| 5 | 2 | Five Acres, Bridge to Cabin [5 photographs] |
| 5 | 3 | Five Acres, Cabin (by Carl Van Vechten) [2 photographs] |
| 5 | 4 | Five Acres, Cabin [8 photographs] |
| 5 | 5 | Five Acres, House, exterior (by Carl Van Vechten) [14 photographs] |
| 5 | 6 | Five Acres, House, exterior [58 photographs] |
| 5 | 7 | Five Acres, House, interior [9 photographs] |
| 5 | 8 | Five Acres, Land around Five Acres (by Carl Van Vechten) [7 photographs] |
| 5 | 9 | Five Acres, Land around Five Acres [11 photographs] |
| 5  | 10  | Five Acres, Winter scenes [14 photographs] |
| 5  | 11  | Nashville, Tennessee, home [1 photograph] |
| 5  | 12  | Home of Lotta Griffin (aunt of Grace), Peekskill, N.Y. [3 photographs] |
| 5  | 13  | James Weldon Johnson Junior High School [5 photographs] |
| 5  | 14  | Unidentified photographs [14 photographs] |

**Photographic negatives**

| 5  | 15  | Negatives (1 of 3) |
| 5  | 16  | Negatives (2 of 3) |
| 5  | 17  | Negatives (3 of 3) |

**Framed photographs and sketches**

| OP1  | 4   | Framed pencil sketch of "Five Acres," Great Barrington, Mass., 1926. |
| 10   | 10  | Small framed portrait of a woman, possible Ollie Sims Okala [Damaged-in box] |
| 11   | 1   | Framed portrait of Grace Nail Johnson |
| OP1   | 5   | Framed portrait of James Weldon Johnson by Doris Ulman |
| 11   | 3   | Oval framed portrait of unidentified small child |
| 11   | 2   | Framed portrait of unidentified older woman |

**Photo albums and scrapbooks**

| OBV1   | Photo album - mostly Van Vechten shots of Five Acres |
| OBV2   | Photo album - Family photographs [mostly of James Weldon Johnson and family] |
| OBV3   | Photo album - Family photographs [mostly of Grace Nail Johnson and family] |
| OBV4   | Photo album - Portraits of James W. Johnson [mostly by Van Vechten and Blackstone] and J. Rosamond Johnson |
| OBV5   | Photo album - Portraits of Grace Nail Johnson |
| OBV6   | Scrapbook - Newspaper clippings, book covers, ephemera, and copies of family Bible |

**Phonograph albums**

| CLP3   | James Weldon Johnson *God's Trombones* and selected 20th century Negro poetry by Langston Hughes, Robert E. Hayden, Margaret Walker, Countee Cullen, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Waring Cuney, read by James Weldon Johnson, Alice Childress, and P. Jay Sidney, Lexington. (1 album) [Digital/digitized copy available in the Reading Room: id s6h6k] |
| CLP3   | Poems from James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones* interpreted by Harold Scott, Montclair Gospel Chorale, United Artists Records. (1 album) |
| CLP3   | James Weldon Johnson, Four readings from *God's Trombones* by the author, Musicraft Album, No. 21. (2 albums) [Digital/digitized copy available in the Reading Room: id b7wgf][Digital/digitized copy available in the Reading Room: id b7whk][Digital/digitized copy available in the Reading Room: id b7whk] |
Legal documents

6 1 Cole and Johnson and A.M. Edwards, agreement, August 19, 1907
6 2 Edwards, Agnes, application to Health Department for Transit Permit, January 8, 1929
6 3 Foster, Maria to J. Rosamond Johnson, warranty deed, July 8, 1912
6 4 Harold Flammer Inc. and J. Rosamond Johnson and Mrs. James Weldon Johnson, Royalty Agreement, "Three Questions" (song), August 20, 1945
6 5 Hays, St. John, Abramson and Heilbron, copyright research, January 19, 1970
6 6 Johnson, Grace Nail to The Inhabitants of the Town of Great Barrington, quitclaim deed, 1952
6 7 Johnson, J. Rosamond to James Weldon Johnson, Power of Attorney, December 23, 1912
6 8 Johnson, J. Rosamond to James Weldon Johnson, Power of Attorney, October 23, 1913,
6 9 Johnson, James, Letters of Testamentary, June 29, 1912
6 10 Johnson, James Weldon, Last Will and Testament, December 18, 1914 [2 copies]
6 11 Johnson, James Weldon to Helen Louise Johnson, Warranty Deed, December 1, 1913 [2 copies]
6 12 Johnson, James Weldon and Grace E. Johnson, Deed, July 9, 1917
6 13 Johnson, James Weldon and Grace E. Johnson to J. Rosamond Johnson, Bargain and Sale Deed, May 7, 1919
6 14 Johnson, James Weldon and Grace E. Johnson to Morris Steinberg, Release of Deposit, June 1934
6 15 Leuders, Frances and Frederick to Thomas W. Long, Penn Brooks, Peter Morrison, James Johnson, and Thomas LaGrande, Trustees, Certified copy of Abstract, November 4, 1907
6 16 Miller, Frances E., granting of Letters of Administration to Grace Nail Johnson, April 25, 1961
6 17 Nail, John B., biographical notes and description of death by Lucille V. Miller
6 18 Nail, John B., Notice of Application for Letters of Administration, March 17, 1947
6 19 Whetmore, J. Douglas, Last Will and Testament, December 18, 1903 [names J. Rosamond and James W. Johnson as beneficiaries]

Financial records

6 20 Johnson, Grace Nail, cancelled checks, 1966-1972
6 21 Johnson, Grace Nail, receipt for Frederick Douglass Book Center, 1953

Johnson, Helen Louise, bills for funeral, 1919

Johnson, James, cancelled checks, 1908-1912

Johnson, James, estate, 1917-1921

Johnson, James, notebook containing Statement of Accounts for Estate, July 1-August 23, 1912

Johnson, James Weldon, cancelled checks, 1938

Johnson, James Weldon, IOU to Lotta Griffin, December 21, 1932


Notes on property

Photograph of caricature of James Weldon Johnson by Covarrubias (image: 0797.001.tif)

Hair clipping of James Weldon Johnson

Dance Cards, (1) Pre-Lenten Dance, Central Hall, 1911 and (2) United Song Writers of America, 1915

Death notice of John Edward Nail, 1947

Map of Greenwood Cemetery [site of Johnson’s grave is denoted]

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, membership card for Mrs. H.L. Johnson, 1919

Notebook

Notes

Notes on JWJ from Atlanta University

Okala, Ollie Sims, personal papers

Stationery, calling card, etc. for JWJ

Stationery, for Grace Nail Johnson's death

Key: Cenacle

Lapel Pin: NAACP Gold Certificate Member

Pin: Beta Phi Epsilon

Pin: NAACP Life Member

Pin: Sigma Pi Phi

Letter wallet

Monogrammed handkerchief

Monogrammed leather wallet

Desk tray

Wall plaque: Proclamation from the City of Jacksonville proclaiming June 17, 1972 to be observed as James Weldon Johnson Day, dated May 24, 1972
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