

Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Tom McClintock, Chairman

Hearing Memorandum

February 23, 2018

To: All Federal Lands Subcommittee Members

From: Majority Committee Staff—Terry Camp
Subcommittee on Federal Lands (x6-7736)

Hearing: Legislative hearing on **H.R. 5005 (Rep. Al Lawson Jr.)**, To direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study to determine the suitability and feasibility of establishing the birthplace of James Weldon Johnson in Jacksonville, Florida, as a unit of the National Park System.
February 28, 2018, 2:00 PM; 1324 Longworth House Office Building

Summary of the Bill

H.R. 5005, introduced by Representative Al Lawson Jr. (D-FL-05), directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of James Weldon Johnson's birthplace in Jacksonville, Florida, to determine the national significance of the site and its suitability for inclusion in the National Park System.

Cosponsors

[20 cosponsors](#)

Witnesses

The Honorable Al Lawson Jr.
Member of Congress, Florida's 5th District

Background

James Weldon Johnson was born in 1871 in the LaVilla neighborhood at 120 Lee Street in Jacksonville, Florida. The birth home no longer exists and there are no structures on the property.¹ However, the lot was designated by the City of Jacksonville as "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park" in June 2015.²

James Weldon Johnson was accomplished in several fields: a renowned statesman, educator, songwriter, author, lawyer, and civil-rights activist. He served as principal at Stanton

¹ Patton, Charlie. "Jacksonville native left a huge legacy, but nothing marks it." The Florida Times. June 15, 2012. Accessed February 23, 2018. <http://www.jacksonville.com/article/20120615/ENTERTAINMENT/801251861>.

² McIntyre, Mary. "Jacksonville To Dedicate 'Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing' Park." WJCT NEWS. June 15, 2015. Accessed February 23, 2018. <http://news.wjct.org/post/jacksonville-dedicate-lift-ev-ry-voice-and-sing-park>.

Grade School in Jacksonville, and in 1898, became the first African American admitted to the Florida Bar.³

After moving to New York City at the turn of the century, he found success writing songs for Broadway shows with his brother. In addition, Johnson wrote poetry, fiction, and published anthologies contributing to the Harlem Renaissance. He wrote the song “Lift Ev’vy Voice and Sing,” which is often referred to as the “Black National Anthem.”⁴

Beginning in 1916, he worked for the NAACP in various roles, ultimately serving as Executive Secretary. He expanded the organization in the southern states and campaigned against lynching and segregation.⁵

Johnson served as the U.S. consul in Venezuela and Nicaragua under President Roosevelt. He was the first African American professor at New York University, where he taught courses in literature and culture. He also taught at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.⁶

Johnson’s New York City residence (187 West 135th Street), which he occupied from 1925 until his death in 1938, was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1976, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁷

H.R. 5005 directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of James Weldon Johnson’s birthplace in Jacksonville, Florida, to determine the national significance of the site and its suitability for inclusion as a unit of the National Park System.

Cost

A Congressional Budget Office cost estimate has not yet been completed for this bill.

Administration Position

The Administration’s position is currently unknown.

Effect on Current Law (Ramseyer)

None.

³ "James Weldon Johnson." Biography.com. April 02, 2014. Accessed February 23, 2018. <https://www.biography.com/people/james-weldon-johnson-9356013>.

⁴ "Lift Every Voice and Sing." PBS. Accessed February 23, 2018. <http://www.pbs.org/black-culture/explore/black-authors-spoken-word-poetry/lift-every-voice-and-sing/>.

⁵ "NAACP History: James Weldon Johnson." NAACP. Accessed February 23, 2018. <http://www.naacp.org/oldest-and-boldest/naacp-history-james-weldon-johnson/>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form – James Weldon Johnson Residence" NPS.gov, accessed February 23, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/14000527.pdf>.