

STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXERCISING THE AUTHORITY OF THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING H.R. 5005, A BILL 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.

December 12, 2018

Chairman Daines, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 5005, a bill 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.

While the Department recognizes James Weldon Johnson as a nationally significant figure in American history, we do not support H.R. 5005. His birthplace is not a good candidate subject for a special resource study as it would be very unlikely to meet the criteria for eligibility as a new unit of the National Park System. In addition, funding for special resource studies is not a priority as the Department is focusing resources on addressing the National Park Service's \$11.6 billion deferred maintenance backlog and other critical national park needs.

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on June 17, 1871. He attended Jacksonville public schools and Atlanta University, where he graduated in 1894. After college, Johnson returned to Jacksonville where he became an educator; founded the short-lived publication, *The Daily American*, the first black daily newspaper of Jacksonville; and was admitted to the Florida Bar. In 1899, following a trip to New York City where Johnson was exposed to the world of musical theater, he wrote, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Originally composed as a poem, Johnson's words were set to music by his brother, John Rosamund Johnson, and became an important anthem of the civil rights movement. In partnership with his brother and Bob Cole, Johnson went on to produce numerous songs featured in Broadway musicals and elsewhere.

Johnson lent his musical talents to politics when he composed two campaign songs as part of his efforts in support of Theodore Roosevelt's successful 1904 presidential campaign. President Roosevelt appointed Johnson to diplomatic posts, first in Venezuela and later in Nicaragua. In 1912, while in Nicaragua, Johnson published his novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which explores themes of race in America. In 1916, Johnson began working for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, eventually rising to a leadership position within the organization, all the while continuing to publish poetry and pursue other artistic endeavors. Johnson died in a car accident in 1938.

When considering areas for designation as new units of the National Park System, the NPS considers four criteria: national significance, suitability, feasibility, and the need for NPS management. If the NPS determines that an area does not meet the initial criteria for national significance, it does not continue to consider the remaining criteria.

Criteria for national significance require that properties have a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. A property need not retain a high degree of all aspects of integrity, but it should possess the physical features necessary to convey the historic importance of the property. James Weldon Johnson's birthplace in Jacksonville has no existing building and the site of the former home does not possess any other physical features necessary to convey the nationally significant history of Johnson. However, his residence in New York City, where he lived from 1925 until his death in 1938, may be better suited to illustrate and memorialize his life.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.