

Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem

In 1900 in Jacksonville, Florida, a group of young men arranged to celebrate the birthday of President Lincoln. J. Rosamond Johnson and his brother, James Weldon Johnson decided to write a song to be sung at the celebration. J. Rosamond wrote the words and James Weldon Johnson wrote the music. It was mimeographed by their publisher and taught to 500 school children to sing at the celebration. The song began to be passed on to other schools and within 20 years it was being sung in the South and in many other parts of the country. The song became known as the Negro National Anthem.

Over the years the title became "Lift Every Voice." In the 1920's, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) made "Lift Every Voice" its official song. It is sung in Black churches and at Black organization events and in recent years is sung in white churches and at national events.

Read and listen to the lyrics here to understand its message of courage, faith and hope.

The Spelman Glee Club singing the hymn:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRF9FOPgLpw>

Lift ev'ry voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.
Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered;
Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.
God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might, led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee.
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.