

EXAMINING THE HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF  
“LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING”

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HEARING  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION, CIVIL  
RIGHTS, AND CIVIL LIBERTIES  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS  
SECOND SESSION

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2022

**Serial No. 117-54**

Printed for the use of the Committee on the Judiciary



Available via: <http://judiciary.house.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

WASHINGTON : 2022

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## EXAMINING THE HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF “LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING”

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Friday, February 4, 2022

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION, CIVIL RIGHTS,  
AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

*Washington, DC*

The Committee met, pursuant to call, at 9:05 a.m., via Zoom, Hon. Steve Cohen [Chair of the Subcommittee] presiding.

*Members present:* Representatives Nadler, Cohen, Raskin, Ross, Johnson of Georgia, Garcia, Jackson Lee, McBath, Jordan, Johnson of Louisiana, Fischbach, and Owens.

*Staff present:* John Doty, Senior Advisor and Deputy Staff Director; Moh Sharma, Director of Member Services and Outreach & Policy Advisor; Cierra Fontenot, Chief Clerk; John Williams, Parliamentarian and Senior Counsel; Keenan Keller, Senior Counsel; Gabriel Barnett, Staff Assistant; Merrick Nelson, Digital Director; Kayla Hamed, Deputy Communications Director; James Park, Chief Counsel for Constitution; Will Emmons, Professional Staff Member/Legislative Aide for Constitution; Abbie Petty, Counsel for Constitution; Matt Morgan, Counsel for Constitution; Betsy Ferguson, Minority Senior Counsel; Caroline Nabity, Minority Counsel; James Lesinski, Minority Counsel; Andréa Woodard, Minority Professional Staff Member; and Kiley Bidelman, Minority Clerk.

Mr. COHEN. The Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties will come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare recesses at any time.

Welcome, everyone, to today’s hearing on Examining the History and Significance of “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

Before we continue, we have established an email address, previously shared distribution to be used through that line for today’s hearing. Members mute your microphone when you are not speaking unless at any time you seek recognition.

I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” is an inspiring and moving hymn, one that increasingly has gained a central and important place in American culture. As the Nation begins its commemoration of Black History Month, it is worth the Subcommittee’s time to consider the history and continued cultural importance of this iconic

song. The origins of the historical context of African Americans' struggles against the racism and inequality that undergirded slavery. It was later repeated and enforced by Jim Crow laws and racist social norms, as well as its universally human nature, the whole perseverance and face of extreme adversity, a very inspiring song.

We will also learn about H.R. 301, a bill that designates this particular song or hymn, "Lift Every Voice," as the national hymn. The proposal would not displace "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the national anthem or rather add "Lift Every Voice" to an official repertoire of national songs. I know in Tennessee we have five or six different songs.

Indeed, today, we find ourselves going through the latest round of fierce and ongoing national debate about what it means to be an "American" and who counts as part of our national story. This meta-debate overlays many of the policies, specific debates that this Committee has engaged in recent years on issues raised on voting rights to policing reform to hate crimes. Perhaps understandably this debate can become very heated and take on some rough edges. It has even threatened to pull our nation apart.

This is all the more reason why it is perfect for us to embrace inclusive national symbols and patriotic customs and make people understand what they are about. It is not just a song for a particular group of Americans. It is a song that could be and should be for every American.

We have national symbols and customs, history, creativity, and ingenuity and the American people is much broader and deeper with these symbols and customs embodied. Adding "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to our nation's canon of official music could be just the thing that serves as a form of healing, brings this country together. That is what Majority Whip Clyburn said. Its purpose is to bring this country together.

Perhaps our Witnesses will be able to successfully make that case today. I thank Representative Clyburn and all our Witnesses for being here today. I very much look forward to the testimony.

Now, I would like to recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Johnson, for his opening statement.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank our Witnesses for being here this morning. This is a hearing, as you noted, that is focused on the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing," for the United States to make it a national hymn.

As one scholar wrote, this song is "an omnipresent part of African American worship traditions and an enduring refrain." The song's first public performance was during the celebration of Abraham Lincoln's birthday in 1900 and it has been since sung by many notable people on many notable occasions over the last 120 years. The song honors the fact that each of us is made in God's image and every single person has an estimable dignity and value that is not related in any way to the color of our skin, or where we live, or what we do for a living. All of us are created equally in God's image. That is part of the DNA of America. It is what we believe. Racism and racial violence violate the most fundamental principles of our great nation and the will of our Creator and we all acknowledge it.

America is not perfect, but it is an exceptional country, and we are always growing. We are always learning. We are always striving toward a more perfect union and that is our charge and that is our calling. So, at this hearing, we will consider and explore our history. We will learn from it, and it will show us in the end how exceptional our country truly is.

In recent years, we have seen the lowest unemployment rate for African Americans in history. Thankfully, we have seen historic criminal justice reform. We've seen expanded educational opportunities for all children in the country and there is much more work to do as you know. We have to unite and empower all communities in America, and I love what Mr. Clyburn said. We have to bring this country together. So, any measure that will help do that we think is worthy of our time and discussion.

So, I thank the Witnesses for being here. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Johnson, for your statement and the spirit contained therein.

Mr. Nadler, you are now recognized for up to five minutes.

Chair NADLER. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The song "Lift Every Voice and Sing" has been a beacon of hope to generations of Americans. Its message, while rooted in and shaped by the experience of African Americans and their struggles against racial oppression is universal, offering hope and faith in the face of darkness.

I appreciate the opportunity today to examine the origins and the historical context in which "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was written, as well as its continuing importance to American culture and values. I am also pleased that we will be able to hear from our colleagues, the distinguished House Majority Whip, Congressman James Clyburn, about his legislation, H.R. 301 which would designate "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as our country's national hymn.

The song, which was first sung by school children in 1900 to commemorate Abraham Lincoln's birthday, has persisted in influence over the past 120 years. The brothers, James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at the turn of the 20th century. This was a period in which the promises of racial equality made by the nation to African Americans during Reconstruction were betrayed. Previous advances towards equality were being dismantled. Segregation had been codified through *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the Jim Crow reign of terror was gaining its foothold. All the while, the Ku Klux Klan wreaked havoc against African Americans, initiating a campaign of racist terror, violence, and murder.

Through all this, African Americans continue to risk their lives for their own visions of what freedom could be in the aftermath of slavery. Even in the face of horrific violence, they never ceased in their struggle for freedom.

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" is a song about transcending those difficulties and maintaining hope for the future. To sing this song is not only to acknowledge the suffering in the past, but also to look ahead to a brighter future. It is a reminder that while the journey ahead may be arduous, obstacles are surmountable if we join together in the fight for equality.

Although “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is a song that recognizes the history and progress of African Americans, its influence and appeal extends beyond the boundaries of race. From its inception to today, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” has and continues to unify individuals of all cultures. It is a song of uplift and solidarity. It speaks to the universal human condition of struggle and triumph and connects us to a common purpose, equality for all.

The song’s sermon quality, coupled with powerful lyrics of hope and perseverance, has resonated at key gatherings such as presidential inaugurations of both political parties and at civil rights demonstrations. It was endorsed by Booker T. Washington in 1905 and later adopted by the NAACP becoming a rallying cry during the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” is a reminder of how far we have progressed as a country, while simultaneously calling upon us to continue our work towards a better future. The song represents patriotism in the best possible sense. It commands us to be dedicated to our nation and to honor the sacrifices of the generations that came before us by continuing to work towards the full promise of freedom for all Americans.

I want to thank Congressman Clyburn for bringing forth this bill. I also welcome all our Witnesses. I look forward to their testimony and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Nadler. I don’t know if Mr. Jordan is present or not. I don’t see on my screen.

Mr. Jordan, do you want to be recognized for an opening statement? If Mr. Jordan is not with us, we will go right into the opening remarks that I will make. Thank you.

We welcome our Witnesses on both panels. Thank you for participating in today’s hearing. I warn you that we have votes around 9:30 a.m. or so and might have to break up during your testimony and come back.

I will now introduce each of the Witnesses and after each introduction, will recognize that Witness for his or her oral testimony. Please note, each of your written statements will be entered into the record. If you say anything that is false, you could be subject to penalties under section 1001 of title 18 of the U.S. Code.

There is a five-minute—please limit your remarks to five minutes. The timer is on the screen that has all the different folks on it. I don’t know what you call that, but it is the screen where everybody’s picture comes up. The feed, I guess.

The sole Witness on the first panel is the distinguished House Majority Whip, the Honorable James E. Clyburn. Congressman Clyburn represents the Sixth Congressional District of South Carolina, having served in Congress since 1993. In 2007, he was first elected the Majority Whip, the third ranking position in the House, and served in that position from 2007–2011. Once again, elected Majority Whip when we came into the majority in 2019 and has served in that position since.

During the times we were in the minority, 2011–2019, he was the Assistant House Democratic Leader. He has proudly served as Chair and Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus and as Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus and the recipient of the “I AM A MAN” Award.



One of his many accomplishments, his introduction of H.R. 301, to designate "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as the national hymn.

Whip Clyburn, I welcome you to today's hearing and I recognize you for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JAMES E. CLYBURN,  
HOUSE MAJORITY WHIP**

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all of you who are joining here today, most especially our Witnesses this day who will be giving testimony.

I particularly want to welcome my long-time friend, Leon Russell. Leon and I enjoyed almost three decades of a professional relationship before I came to Congress and both of us are still hanging in here. He is the Chair of the National Board of the NAACP and I welcome him and the others here today.

I want to thank you, Mr. Chair, and the Ranking Member, Mr. Johnson, for calling this hearing, and I particularly want to associate myself with the comments made by Ranking Member Johnson. They were very prolific, and I did really appreciate them so much so that I am going to be skipping through some of what I had to say because he said it all for me.

Chair Nadler, thank you, so much as well, my classmate. You have risen to elevated heights, and I enjoy being here with you today.

So, recently, I have been reflecting on this whole notion of what Benjamin Franklin reported to have said when he was asked what he and the Founding Fathers had wrought. He is reported to have replied "a Republic, if you can keep it."

Later, Franklin, joining with John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson to propose that the Latin phrase *E pluribus unum*, out of many, one, be placed on our currency as the nation's motto.

Our nation continues to struggle with the issues of race and equity. The threads of our fragile democracy are frayed. As the people's representatives, it is incumbent upon us to make every effort to heed Franklin's words of concern and his and Adams' and Jefferson's expression of unity. It is our responsibility to demonstrate not only with our words, but by our actions that we can and will keep this republic intact and its people unified.

That is why I introduced H.R. 301 to designate the iconic hymn, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the national hymn for the United States of America. Designating "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as our national hymn will be one such substantive step forward.

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" was written by James Weldon Johnson as a poem and set to music by his brother, John Rosamond Johnson. The hymn was first performed as you heard on February 12, 1900, by a choir of 500 school children from the segregated Stanton School in Jacksonville, Florida. In 1905, Booker T. Washington recognized the hymn, and it became popular throughout the Black community across the United States.

In 1919, the NAACP designated "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as its official song and it was dubbed the Black national anthem. I and scores of people with whom I have interacted have never been comfortable with that designation. We believe that out of many backgrounds and experiences there should be but one national an-

them. We believe “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is a hymn that is so cherished by so many people of all faiths, creeds, backgrounds, and experiences that designated it as our national hymn would be very fitting and proper.

Its wide appeal is no accident. It is currently produced and distributed by approximately 40 religious publishing houses throughout the United States. It is sung by all faiths and persuasions. Recent renditions have proven just how wide its appeal is from Alicia Keys’ performance at the Super Bowl to Beyoncé’s rendition in 2018 Coachella.

The lyrics of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” are applicable to the experience of nearly every ethnic background in America. We also acknowledge the challenges of our future.

Just consider the words, “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.”

I thank the Committee for holding this hearing and look forward to hearing from today’s Witnesses. I am hopeful that this hearing and this legislation will help us more fully realize our nation’s motto as we continue our pursuit of a more perfect union. I thank you for having me.

[The statement of Mr. Clyburn follows:]

JAMES E. CLYBURN REMARKS

JUDICIARY – SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION, CIVIL  
RIGHTS, AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

“Examining the History and Importance of Lift Every Voice and Sing”

February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Thank you very much Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of this committee. Before I begin, I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record two letters in support of this legislation: one from Reverend Dr. James Forbes, Jr. and the other from Mr. Jarrett Johnson.

I am very appreciative for the opportunity to speak about my legislation to make “Lift Every Voice and Sing” the National Hymn of the United States.

Recently, I have been reflecting upon the reported response of Benjamin Franklin when asked what he and the Founding Fathers had wrought. “A Republic, if you can keep it,” is reported to have been his reply. Franklin would

later join with John Adams and Thomas Jefferson to propose that the Latin phrase, *E Pluribus Unum* (“Out of many, one”), be placed on our currency as the nation’s motto.

Our nation continues to struggle with issues of race and equity. I feel very strongly that as the people’s representatives the threads of our fragile democracy are fraying

It is encumbered upon us to make every effort to heed Franklin’s words of concern and his and Adams and Jefferson’s expression of unity. It is our responsibility to demonstrate not only with our **words** but by our **actions** that we **can** and **will** keep this Republic intact and its people unified.

That is why I introduced H.R. 301 to designate the iconic hymn “Lift every Voice and Sing” the National Hymn of the United States of America. Enshrining “Lift

Every Voice and Sing” as our national hymn would be one such substantive step forward.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” was written by James Weldon Johnson as a poem and set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson. The hymn was first performed on February 12, 1900, by a choir of 500 school children from the segregated Stanton School in Jacksonville, Florida.

In 1905, Booker T. Washington recognized the hymn, and it became popular throughout Black communities across the United States. In 1919, the NAACP designated “Lift Every Voice and Sing” as its official song and it was dubbed the “Black National Anthem.”

I and scores of people with whom I have interacted, have never been comfortable with that designation. We believe that out of our many backgrounds and experiences there should be but one national anthem. And we believe “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is a hymn that is so cherished

by people of all faiths, creeds, backgrounds, and experiences; that designating it as our “National Hymn” would be very fitting and proper.

Its wide appeal is no accident. It is currently produced and distributed by approximately 40 religious publishing houses throughout the United States. It is sung by all faiths and persuasions. Recent renditions have proven just how wide its appeal is, from Alicia Keys’ performance at the Super Bowl to Beyonce’s rendition in 2018 Coachella..

The lyrics of “Lift Every Voice and Sing’s” are applicable to the experiences of nearly every ethnic background in America. They also acknowledge the challenges of our future. Just consider the following words:

*“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”*

I thank the committee for holding this hearing and look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses. I am hopeful that this hearing and this legislation will help us more fully realize our nation’s motto as we continue our “pursuit of a more perfect Union.” Thank you.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Clyburn, as always, well delivered. Now, the second panel, if the Witnesses will come forward and we will recognize as our first, Leon Russell. Mr. Russell is the Chair of the National Board of Directors of the NAACP, a position he has held since 2017 after having served in various other roles on the Board. He previously served as President of NAACP Florida State Conference of Branches, and was for 35 years the Director of the Office of Human Rights in Pinellas County, Florida. Mr. Russell, you are recognized for five minutes.

#### **STATEMENTS OF LEON W. RUSSELL**

Mr. RUSSELL. Thank you. Good morning, Chair Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties.

Founded on February 12, 1909, the 100th birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP, is our nation's oldest, largest, and most widely recognized grassroots civil rights organization. Our membership consists of hundreds of thousands of card-carrying individuals representing diverse racial, ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds, participating in more than 52,200 units throughout the nation. We have active units on college and university campuses and even units behind prison walls. Units are supported by millions of digital followers and military members serving in units throughout the world.

I am Leon Russell, Chair of the 64-member National Board of Directors of the NAACP, the governing body of our national organization. In this capacity, I am responsible for overseeing the development of the Association's policies and strategy implementation and monitoring.

I was delighted to receive your invitation to testify with respect to H.R. 301, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." So, allow me to first thank my longtime friend who keeps changing the number of years we have known each other, James Clyburn, for introducing the bill and let me at the outset indicate that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People fully support adoption of "Lift Every Voice" as a national hymn.

I will address the history and significance of the song and why we at the NAACP believe it should be designated as the national hymn. Let me recognize that we do not call for this great hymn to supplant or replace the national anthem. The composers never intended for that to happen. It is clear that they wrote a song that spoke reverently to the lived experience of a people who were here from the beginning of this great experiment in democracy and that they intended through the words and its triumphal music to ensure that our nation be ever mindful of that people's role in the development of our democracy. The fact that this song has been sung continuously for more than 122 years since it was first performed in venues large and small, by children in school, by civil rights activists in mass meetings in the midst of the civil rights struggle, by college choirs, by the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square, and even lately by crowds at National Football League stadiums is a testament the spiritual impact and meaning for millions of Americans.



The song was written by James Weldon Johnson and set to music by his brother, John Rosamond Johnson, from Jacksonville Florida. The inspiration for the song was a request that James Weldon Johnson provide a poem to be included in a community celebration of the birthday of the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, in February of 1900.

It is important to note that James Weldon Johnson was principal of Stanton School in Jacksonville. The school was the primary school serving the Black community of Jacksonville when Johnson became the principal, however, it added high school classes under his leadership. Johnson's life experience was reflective of the lived experience of Black folks that is so eloquently described in the words of the song. Facing the threats posed by racism in his hometown, Johnson and his brother would move North to New York City where he would become a historically recognized civil rights activist, diplomat, author, politician, journalist, poet, educator, lawyer, songwriter, and one of the prime movers of the Harlem Renaissance.

He was indeed the embodiment of many early African American trail blazers. Most people recognize Johnson as the author of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," however, few are aware of his hard work and dedication to the cause of civil rights and social justice advocacy exemplified by his fight against racism and his fight for equality during the ten years that he served as the Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

I need to note here that James Weldon Johnson succeeded John Shillady, a White man, who had served in the position until he was beaten nearly to death by a White mob in Texas where he had gone to investigate a lynching in 1919. Johnson had been hired as Field Secretary by the Association in 1916. When Shillady resigned, Johnson became the first Negro to hold the senior staff position at the Association in 1920. For context, I remind you that the Association was founded in 1909. Johnson's personal story is emblematic of much of the spiritual meaning that I recognize in the song. I commend it to you for further study.

Asked to speak at the 1900 Abraham Lincoln birthday celebration, Johnson wrote a poem for the occasion. While reflecting on what he had written, he decided to change the poem to a song, so he asked his brother, music professor John Rosamond Johnson, to write the music. There is much speculation about what the Johnsons intended "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to be. What is clear is that a song written as part of that celebration has become synonymous with, if not the very theme for, the modern civil rights movement.

Although "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was written to be sung as part of a program in tribute to Lincoln, Lincoln's name never appears in the song. What is clear, is that the invitation to participate in the Lincoln Day Celebration inspired the creation of the song. Also, clear is the fact that the children who sang the song were so inspired that they carried it with them the rest of their lives. The celebration included the students from across the city, 500 voices.

After that, the song has been sung in public meetings in Florida and across the country. It would not be forgotten, but I cannot find any indication that it was promoted.

The song became the National NAACP Hymn, and let's be clear, during Johnson's tenure as Executive Secretary. He served from 1920–1930. The Board adopted the Song in 1923 as the NAACP's hymn. Let me also say—

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Russell, let me ask you to conclude your remarks. We have gone fairly long.

Mr. RUSSELL. Okay. Just let me make it clear that the NAACP fully endorses "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as a national hymn because we feel it brings this country together. It speaks to oppression of any people. Let me add that we strongly urge you to adopt this song.

Mr. Cohen, I would say that Maxine Smith would have loved your rendition, even though—

[The statement of Mr. Russell follows:]



## TESTIMONY OF LEON W. RUSSELL

*CHAIRMAN, NAACP NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS*

BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION, CIVIL RIGHTS  
AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

ON

EXAMINING THE HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE INSPIRATIONAL SONG

*LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING*

*February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022*

Good morning Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

Founded on February 12, 1909, the 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP, is our Nation's oldest, largest and most widely-recognized grassroots civil rights organization. Our membership consists of hundreds of thousands of card carrying individuals representing diverse racial, ethnic, social and economic backgrounds, participating in more than 2,200 units throughout our Nation. We have active units on college and University campuses and even units within prison walls. These units are supported by millions of digital followers and military members serving in units throughout the world.

I am Leon W. Russell, Chairman of the 64 member National Board of Directors of the NAACP, the governing body of our national organization. In this capacity, I am responsible for overseeing the development of the Associations policies, strategy implementation and monitoring.

I was delighted to receive your invitation to testify with respect to H.R. 301 *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. So allow me to first thank our longtime friend Congressman Jim Clyburn for introducing this important bill.

This morning, I will address the history and significance of the song and why we at the NAACP believe it should be designated as the National Hymn. Let me, from the outset, recognize that we do not call for this great Hymn to supplant or replace the National Anthem. The composers



never intended that to be the case. It is clear, however, that they wrote a song that spoke reverently to the lived experience of a people who were here from the beginning of this great experiment in democracy and that they intended, through its words and its triumphal melody, to ensure that our nation be ever mindful of the people's role in the development of our democracy. The fact, that this song has been sung continuously for more than 122 years since it was first performed in venues large and small, by children in school, by civil rights activists in mass meetings in the midst of the civil rights struggle, by college choirs, by the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square, and even lately by crowds at National Football League stadiums is a testament to its spiritual impact and meaning for millions of Americans.

The song was written by James Weldon Johnson and set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson from Jacksonville Florida. The inspiration for the song was a request that James Weldon Johnson provide a poem to be included in a community celebration of the birthday of the "Great Emancipator," President Abraham Lincoln in February of 1900.

It is important to note that James Weldon Johnson was principal of Stanton School in Jacksonville. The school was the primary school serving the Black Community of Jacksonville when Johnson became the principal, however, it added high school classes under his leadership. Johnson's life experience was reflective of the lived experience of black folks that is so eloquently described in the words of the song. Facing the threats posed by racism in his hometown, Johnson and his brother would move north to New York City where he would become a historically recognized civil rights activist, diplomat, author, politician, journalist, poet, educator, lawyer, songwriter, and one of the prime movers of the Harlem Renaissance.

He was indeed the embodiment of many early African American trail blazers. Most people recognize Johnson as author of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," however, few are aware of his hard work and dedication to the cause of civil rights and social justice advocacy exemplified by his fight against racism and his fight for equality during the ten years he served as the Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

I need to note here that James Weldon Johnson succeeded John Schilladay, a white man who had served in the position until he was beaten nearly to death by a white mob in Texas where he had gone to investigate a lynching in 1919. Johnson had been hired as Field Secretary by the Association in 1916. When Schilladay resigned because of the severity of his injuries, Johnson became the first 'Negro' to hold the senior staff position at the Association in 1920. For context, I remind you that the



NAACP was founded in 1909. Johnson's personal story is emblematic of much of the spiritual meaning that I recognize in the song. I commend it to you for further study.

Asked to speak at the 1900 Abraham Lincoln birthday celebration, Johnson wrote a poem for the occasion. While reflecting on what he had written, he decided to change the poem to a song, so he asked his brother, music professor John Rosamond Johnson, to write the music. There is much speculation about what the Johnsons intended "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" to be. What is clear is that a song written as part of that celebration has become synonymous with, if not the theme for, the modern civil rights movement.

Although "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" was written to be sung as part of a program in tribute to President Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln's name never appears in the song. What is clear, is that the invitation to participate in the Lincoln Day Celebration inspired the creation of the song. Also clear, is the fact that the children who sang the song were inspired and carried it with them the rest of their lives. The celebration included the students of the city, 500 voices according to the record, taking the song with them to their churches and family celebrations and public meetings in Florida and as they moved around the country. It would not be forgotten, but there is no record that says it was promoted, that I have seen.

The song became the National NAACP Hymn during Johnson's tenure as Executive Secretary. He served from 1920-1930. The Board adopted the Song in 1923.

All that said, why should the song, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," be made the National Hymn?

The word Hymn derives from the Greek and means "a song of Praise". A Hymn can be devotional and it may be written as a form of adoration or a prayer. The Johnson brother's song is all of that and more.

Johnson is writing only 35 years removed from the end of the civil war and thereby the end of slavery. He clearly paints the picture of a world viewed from the perspective of a Black person in America. He wrote lyrics that included the inescapable facts of the lived experience in America. The history of America. Yet he wrote lyrics that challenge the listener and the singer not to despair because "we will march on 'til victory is won." He was not gazing into some crystal ball and invoking a march across the Edmond Pettus Bridge, nor did he see the March on Washington, which would come. Victory would come based on faith, belief, hope and trust in God.



The song should be made a National Hymn because as noted sociologist E. Franklin Frazier points out, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing...endowed the African American enslavement and struggle for freedom with a certain nobility." He said Johnson expressed an acceptance of the past and a confidence in the future. I would say that the song tells what our experience has been and challenges us not to deny it. It's part of us, we must fight on for the bright future we all deserve.

When we think about the verse we need to consider each one separately.

First verse—

Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring,

Second verse—

Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chastening rod,

Third verse—

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who has by thy might  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray

The song is at once a song of praise, a devotional and a prayer. It is a Hymn about our National experience. It reflects our true history.

I would point finally to the fact that although the song speaks to the Black experience, any American who has experienced oppression can relate to its words.

Although written in the heart of Jim Crow America, it was adopted as the NAACP Hymn at a time when on average 3-5 Blacks were lynched every day in this country, the song admonishes us not to lose faith. It inspires us to be uplifted.

As my predecessor Julian Bond and Dr. Sondra Wilson wrote in their book, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" "is ingeniously crafted and does not fuel the fires of racial hatred." It challenges us to seek



higher ground.

I am no theologian, But I hear James Weldon Johnson's immortal words, "Shadowed beneath thy hand, may we forever stand, true to our God, true to our native land," I hear this HYMN telling us to maintain our faith in God, and to maintain an unwavering faith in this nation's founding principles and the promise of America. That message is a message to the nation about ourselves.

For those reasons, I want to again thank Congressman James Clyburn the original sponsor, and the other Members of the House, for their courage and leadership in introducing this important legislation. I also strongly urge this committee and the Congress to support HR 301 through passage and make "Lift Every Voice and Sing" our National Hymn.



Mr. COHEN. Thank you. That means a lot to me. Maxine Smith was my friend, and her picture is on my wall outside, along with Ben Hooks and Julian Bond and others. She was a wonderful woman and a treasure of the NAACP, a national treasure for many, many years. Thank you for remembering her today at this hearing.

Our next Witness is Dr. Dwandalyn Reece. Dr. Reece is Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs, Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. She brings more than 30 years of knowledge and experience to the field of museum works and more than 10 years as Curator of Music at Performing Arts in the National Museum of African American History. In that role, she built a collection of 4,000 objects and curated the museum's inaugural permanent exhibit, Musical Crossroads, for which she received the Secretary's Research Price in 2017. She curated the museum's grand opening music festival, Freedom Sounds, and served as Executive Committee Chair of the pan-institutional group of Smithsonian Music and co-curated the Smithsonian Year of Music Initiative in 2019. She received her Ph.D. from NYU, Master's at the University of Michigan, and an undergraduate degree from Scripps College.

Dr. Reece, you are recognized for five minutes.

#### **STATEMENT OF DWANDALYN R. REECE**

Dr. REECE. Thank you. Chair Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan, Chair Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you today for giving me the opportunity to testify on H.R. 301.

As was introduced, my name is Dwandalyn R. Reece and I have the pleasure of serving as the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture's Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs.

In "Lift Every Voice and Sing" the Johnson Brothers captured the full story of the African American experience, acknowledging the emotional and physical toll of enslavement and the strength and faith it took to survive it and persevere. The poignant lyrics and majestic accompaniment galvanized the Black community and quickly began to make its way through communities across the country. By 1919, the NAACP had designated "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as its official song. It wasn't long before you could find copies of the hymn inserted or pasted into the hymnals of Black churches across the country.

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" is the perfect fusion of poetry and music. The lyrics trace the experience of Black people through slavery and freedom using visual metaphors that capture the emotion and significance of each line. J. Rosamond Johnson's arrangement amplifies these lyrics. The shift from major to minor keys in each verse mirrors the highs and lows of that experience that are embodied merely through the Act of singing. The plodding speech-like setting of the first three words in each refrain provide the direct connection to the emotional gravity of the text.

Johnson was steadfast in describing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as a hymn. Hymns are used in a variety of religious traditions and are written to foster a shared experience as voices come together



in song. The text can focus solely on religious themes or focus on universal themes that speak to the moral, spiritual, and emotional concerns that are part of the human condition. “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is a combination of both. The language is largely universal, but there are also words and phrases that invoke the presence of God and a higher power.

Johnson took great pride in the way his hymn served the Black community. He was also inspired in a way people across the world identified with his core message and embraced it as their own. Since its publication, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” has been sung at community meetings, public events, conventions, conferences, schools, official gatherings, and ceremonial occasions. The hymn has served this nation much in the same way Julia Ward Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic” did in the Civil War.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” has been in the hymnals of Black denominations for more than a century. However, it wasn’t until the 1980s when the song started to show up in the hymnals of larger, main-line denominations. The Episcopal Church was one of the first to respond when it included the hymn in the publication of its standard 1982 hymnal. Today, the count is 44 hymnals where “Lift Every Voice and Sing” appear.

James Weldon Johnson’s poem honored Lincoln’s legacy by reflecting on the symbolic meaning of his presidency and what it meant for African Americans and the nation overall. “Lift Every Voice and Sing’s” legacy is a source of pride and inspiration and a meditation on the transformative power that resilience, hope, and a collective sense of purpose have in the pursuit of liberty for all.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today about the historical importance of “Lift Every Voice and Sing”. I am happy to answer questions you might have.

[The statement of Ms. Reece follows:]

**Written Statement of Dr. Dwandalyn R Reece, Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs,  
Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture  
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, Civil Liberties  
House Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
February 4, 2022**

Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan, Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Johnson and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you today for giving me the opportunity to testify on HR 301.

My name is Dwandalyn R. Reece and I have the pleasure of serving as the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture's Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs. Prior to assuming this position, I served as the Museum's Curator of Music and Performing Arts for twelve years.

In 1900, James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) a lawyer, and principal of a segregated school in Jacksonville, Florida was asked to provide remarks for an event to be held in honor of Lincoln's birthday. Johnson, initially planned to write a poem about Lincoln, however, as he started to write, he found his ideas raking him into another direction. After consulting with his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954), a classically trained musician, Johnson decided to write a song instead. The result of their collaboration was the hymn, "Lift Every Voice and Sing"

*Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening 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*

A chorus of 500 children introduced the song at the public celebration, and it quickly began to make its way through communities in the north and south. It received a public endorsement by Booker T. Washington, president of Tuskegee University and by 1919, had been designated as the official song of the NAACP. By the 1920s you could find copies of the song inserted or pasted into the hymnals of black churches across the country. Both of the Johnson brothers had moved to New York by this time to pursue their careers. J. Rosamond continued to work in music as a musical theater composer, singer and actor, while James Weldon served as a diplomat under President Theodore Roosevelt's administration, published numerous books and Anthologies, and served as executive secretary of the NAACP from 1930-1940.

The song is a masterpiece of lyrics put to music. The lyrics trace the experience of black people through slavery and freedom through visual metaphors that capture the emotion and significance of each line. The shift from major to minor key in each verse mirrors the highs and lows of that experience that are embodied merely through the act of singing. And the plodding speech-like setting of the first three words of each refrain, “Sing a song ....” have a tone and rhythm that emphasizes the importance of its message.

Johnson was steadfast in classifying “Lift Every Voice and Sing” as a hymn. The evocative imagery in the three stanzas of praise, lament and prayer are reminiscent of the congregational songs used in church. Hymns are written to elicit a communal response to the music and text and are used in a variety of religious traditions as a way to bring people together. While the hymn could be easily found in the hymnals of black denominations, it wasn’t until the 1980s that “Lift Every Voice and Sing” started to appear in the hymnals of large mainline denominations. Black Lutheran and Episcopalian musicians had advocated for its inclusion in their denominational hymnals and their efforts were rewarded when “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was included in the Episcopal Church’s standard 1982 hymnal. Today, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” appears in forty-four hymnals and is sung in churches of all denominations.

During his lifetime, Johnson expressed great pride in how this hymn served the black community, but also in the way it spoke to the experiences of people across the world. The hymn has been used in contexts outside the church including community-based and public events, meetings, conferences, official gatherings, and other ceremonial occasions. “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” has served this nation much in the way another hymn, “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” did when it was embraced by Americans over a century ago.

In abandoning his original idea to write a poem about Abraham Lincoln, James Weldon Johnson took the opportunity to write something that served a larger purpose. His poem was a reflection on the symbolic meaning of Lincoln’s presidency, from leading the country through a civil war to signing the document that abolished slavery in the United States, held for African Americans and the nation overall. “Lift Every Voice and Sing’s” legacy rests in the pride and inspiration that it brings to African Americans but also as a meditation on the transformative power that a collective sense of aspiration, perseverance, and hope have in the face of struggle and overcoming adversity.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today about the historical importance of “Lift Every Voice and Sing”. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you very much, Dr. Reece. Since this is Black History Month, I should clarify Ms. Smith was not the National Treasurer. That was Jesse Turner who was part of her team with Russell Sugarmon. She was the Executive Director of the local NAACP in Memphis for like 40 years.

Our next Witness is Dr. Naomi André. Dr. André is Professor of Women Studies, Department of African American and African Studies in the Residential College of Arts, Ideas, and Humanities Program at the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on opera and issues surrounding race, voice and race and gender. Her publications include topics on Italian opera, Schoenberg, women composers, and teaching opera in prisons. She recently published *Black Opera: History, Power, and Engagement*. In 2019, she was named the Inaugural Scholar in Residence at the Seattle Opera. She has a Ph.D. and an M.A. from Harvard and a B.A. from Barnard College.

Professor André, you are recognized for five minutes.

#### STATEMENT OF DR. NAOMI ANDRÉ

Dr. ANDRÉ. Thank you, Chair Cohen, Chair Nadler, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am happy and very honored to have my voice included in this hearing supporting “Lift Every Voice and Sing” to become a national hymn. My entrance in this discussion gets to the core of what I want to emphasize: The sense of belonging. While belonging might be a birthright of citizenship, it is not always experienced in the happenings of daily life. Belonging is not proven by statistics or enforced through surveys and in person and online workshops. Belonging should not be an aspiration; instead, it is a feeling we have when we are seen as being fully human.

As a musicologist, I want to spend a moment unpacking the musical term, hymn. Going back to the ancient Greeks, with discussions by Pindar, Bacchylides, and in Homeric poems, the *Grove Music Dictionary*, and this is the gold standard for scholar music reference, the *Grove Music Dictionary* describes the hymn and its ability “to weave or to combine words artfully.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces its history from Latin, Greek, and Hebrew words with hymn being “a metrical composition adapted to be sung in a religious service; sometimes distinguished from psalm or anthem, as not being part of the text of the Bible.” In the second listing from OED, there is a broadening away from the religious connotations with the hymn being “an ode or song of praise in honor of a deity, a country,” et cetera.

I like this term “hymn” because it has a long-continued history up through the present. In addition to the Jewish, Greek, and Roman uses, there are also medieval Christian and Byzantine versions of the hymn as a poetic object. The hymn was a genre that was later adapted by Protestant faiths to support congregational singing and worship. This is important for the unity it can create for belonging in a community. In the mid-twentieth century, the hymn has a special use in the civil rights movement and linked the themes of devotion, praise, liberty, and protest all together. Hence, since antiquity and up to the present, as a genre, the hymn has

spiritual, religious, political, and social capacities that center it in articulations of culture and community.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” was written by a Black compositional team, James Weldon Johnson and his brother, John Rosamond Johnson. There is nothing in the three stanzas of the text that exclusively refers to African Americans. The Black experience is embodied while also referencing the triumph, struggles, and strength that all humans encounter. The text refers to the hard work, aspiration, motivation, and moving towards victory.

National songs that have connections to a country’s heterogeneous population present the opportunity to elevate voices from its larger community. When South Africa dismantled apartheid and created a new national anthem, the Committee was chaired by its most prominent Black South African composer, Mzilikazi Khumalo. The National Anthem of South Africa, adopted in 1997, brings together the five most widely spoken of South Africa’s eleven official languages: IsiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans, and English. Sections of the anthem contain previous national anthems from South Africa’s White and Black populations. The intended result was for the national music, their national anthem, to voice the sound through language and music of its diverse communities.

A nation has the potential to create its own sonic landscapes. Such power comes from the connectedness its people feel; how are their experiences embraced in emblems of national representation? Sounds can generate belonging. As a national hymn, “Live Every Voice and Sing” will engage familiar audiences while embracing new communities.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on today’s important topic. I will be happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.  
[The statement of Ms. Naomi André follows:]

**Written statement of Naomi André.** HR 301 House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties. Hearing on the history and continuing social and cultural relevance of “Lift Every Voice and Sing”. February 4, 2022

Thank you Chairman Cohen, Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Johnson, Ranking Member Jordan, and Members of the subcommittee. I am happy and very honored to have my voice included in this hearing supporting “Lift Every Voice and Sing” to become a national hymn. My entrance in this discussion gets at the core issue I want to emphasize: the sense of Belonging. While Belonging might be a birthright of citizenship, it is not always experienced in the happenings of daily life. Belonging is not proven by statistics or enforced through surveys and in person—or online—workshops. Belonging should not be an aspiration; instead it is a feeling. We have that feeling when we are seen as being fully human.

As a musicologist I want to spend a moment unpacking the musical term: Hymn. Going back to the ancient Greeks, with discussions by Pindar, Bacchylides and in Homeric poems, the *Grove Music Dictionary* (this is the gold standard for scholarly music reference) describes the hymn and its ability “‘to weave’ or ‘to combine words’ artfully.”<sup>1</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces its history from Latin, Greek, and Hebrew words with a hymn being “a metrical composition adapted to be sung in a religious service; sometimes distinguished from *psalm* or *anthem*, as not being part of the text of the Bible.” In the second listing from the *OED*, there is a broadening away from the religious connotations with the hymn being “an ode or song of praise in honour of a deity, a country, etc.”<sup>2</sup>

I like this term “hymn” because it has a long-continued history up through the present. In addition to the Jewish, Greek, and Roman uses, there are also medieval Christian and Byzantine versions of the hymn as a poetic object.<sup>3</sup> The hymn was a genre that was later adapted by Protestant faiths to support congregational singing and worship. This is important for the unity it can create for belonging in a community. In the mid-twentieth century, hymns had a special use in the civil rights movement and linked the themes of devotion, praise, liberty, and protest all together. Hence, since

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Many thanks to my colleagues Professor Anne Stone (City University of New York) and Professor Scott Ellsworth (University of Michigan) for their helpful suggestions. All text and context is my own.

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, Warren, Thomas J. Mathiesen, Susan Boynton, Tom R. Ward, John Caldwell, Nicholas Temperley, and Harry Eskew. “Hymn.” *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 30 Jan. 2022. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000013648>. [from first paragraph “Nature of the hymn”]

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary: The definitive record of the English language*, “Hymn” <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/view/Entry/90208?rskey=FDSKtW&result=1&print> [from Anne Stone, medievalist, CUNY]

<sup>3</sup> For Jewish hymns see Ruth Ellis Messenger “Old Testament Hymns,” on [https://biblehub.com/library/messenger/christian\\_hymns\\_of\\_the\\_first\\_three\\_centuries/ii\\_old\\_testament\\_hymns.htm](https://biblehub.com/library/messenger/christian_hymns_of_the_first_three_centuries/ii_old_testament_hymns.htm)

antiquity and up to the present, as a genre the hymn has spiritual, religious, political, and social capacities that center it in articulations of culture and community.

There is a terrific story behind this song “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” that I will relate in words told by James Weldon Johnson (related in 1935).

A group of young men in Jacksonville, Florida, arranged to celebrate Lincoln’s birthday in 1900. My brother, J. [John] Rosamond Johnson, and I decided to write a song to be sung at the exercises. I wrote the words and he wrote the music. Our New York publisher, Edward B. Marks, made mimeographed copies for us, and the song was taught to and sung by a chorus of five hundred colored school children.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly afterwards my brother and I moved away from Jacksonville to New York, and the song passed out of our minds. But the school children of Jacksonville kept singing it; they went off to other schools and sang it; they became teachers and taught it to other children. Within twenty years it was being sung over the South and in some other parts of the country. Today the song, popularly known as the Negro National Hymn, is quite generally used.

The lines of this song repay me in an elation, almost of exquisite anguish, whenever I hear them sung by Negro children.<sup>5</sup>

At this time (in 1899-1900 when the song was written) James Weldon Johnson was the school principal at the Edwin M. Stanton School in Jacksonville, Florida (the same school he and his brother, John Rosamond Johnson, had attended). This was an all-Black school (due to the segregation of the time) and in 1900 they were celebrating a visit to the school by Booker T. Washington and honoring the 91<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth (1809-1865). There are different versions of this history that have the students reciting the text (by James Weldon Johnson)

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<sup>4</sup> Colored and Negro (a word mentioned in the next lines of this quotation) were polite terms used for African Americans in 1935.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jamesweldonjohnson.org/lift-every-voice-and-sing>. The Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46549/lift-every-voice-and-sing> These comments by James Weldon Johnson are reprinted on many websites. One website says that these words were “among the pages of a 1935 collection of his poems” (<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/09/us/lift-every-voice-and-sing-trnd/>), which might be *Saint Peter Relates an Incident: Selected Poems* (a collection from 1935 mentioned on Wikipedia).

in 1900 and then the melody by John Rosamond Johnson added in 1905. Most versions say that there were 500 children who sang this song in 1900.

There is a version of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” that was recorded (via zoom) by PS 316, Elijah Stroud Elementary School on June 15, 2020. This recording was made right around Juneteenth, one year before Juneteenth became a federal national holiday. PS 316, Elijah Stroud Elementary School is in Crown Heights, Brooklyn in NYC. The notes about this recording say “Our students virtually and collectively singing “Lift Every Voice and Sing” the Black national anthem. They did so every morning at school even before the pandemic.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-wrj97dVVg> and on their homepage website:

<https://www.ps316brooklyn.org/music>

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” has been sung and recorded by many populations, a testament to those who already feel that this “hymn” holds a special place in the American imagination. One of my favorite videos is from the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service recorded by Petty Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class Jesse Carmona and the Navy Band Southeast.<sup>6</sup> In this 2.12 minute video we see The Navy Band Southeast of Jacksonville, Florida (the place where this hymn was first performed by James Weldon Johnson’s school children in 1900) The first stanza of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is performed by the service men and women representing multiple races and ethnicities (it looks like there are white, Black, and Latina/Latino [Latine/Latinx] performing as singers and on musical instruments). It is a moving and beautiful performance that visually and sonically demonstrates how this song is already serving the function of a national hymn.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/785335/lift-every-voice-and-sing>

During the Civil Rights era, especially in the 1950s-1960s, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was sung along with “We Shall Overcome” and “This Little Light of Mine” as community building emblems of faith, solidarity, and resistance. This past fall (of 2021) the National Football League decided to start week 1 of the season with “Lift Every Voice and Sing”—a gesture that has been both celebrated as well as criticized as a weak mollifying gesture after the treatment of Colin Kaepernick the former quarterback who took a knee to protest the police brutality of African Americans during the national anthem in the 2016 season (and he has not played in the NFL since).

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<sup>6</sup> This video recording was arranged by Chief Musician Jesse Carmona and Musician Second Class Benjamin DeAngelis. It was made on 2/16/2021 and posted a month later (3/8/2021) with a video id: 785335, VIRIN: 210216-N-HR578-875 with a PIN:123456.



In 1919 the NAACP called this song the “Negro National Anthem” and since then it has been frequently referred to that way. However, a statement Faith Karimi and AJ Willingham (2 CNN reporters) wrote in September 2020 about this work captures the fault lines between hymn and anthem well. Referring to this song they state “The hymn is known as the Black National Anthem, but it’s more than that. It’s a history lesson, a rallying cry, a pledge of unity, and as people gather to fight for equality and justice, it is an ever-present refrain.”<sup>7</sup> This brings us back to the power of this work as a hymn and the collective sense of belonging that, as in the past, it continues to create.

I have set up the hymn as a separate genre of praise that is adjacent to, but not replacing our national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Dr. Mark Clague has a book coming out about the history and complications around our national anthem—including the references to slavery in the third verse (not usually sung) and the problematic history of Francis Scott Key and slavery.<sup>8</sup> I assert that there is room for both a national anthem—“The Star-Spangled Banner”—that we all know and have associated with patriotic occasions and, a national hymn, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

To have the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” be formally recognized as a national hymn would elevate its importance and aid to recognize the artistry of writer James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) and the composer John Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954); two Black brothers from the first generation when all Black people were born free in an America that newly saw them as full citizens legally entitled to a sense of belonging. As a national hymn “Lift Every Voice and Sing” can sit side by side the official “Star-Spangled Banner” national anthem and send a new message to African Americans who have felt a special affinity to this song for over 100 years.

Though “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was written by a Black compositional team, there is nothing in the three stanzas of the text that exclusively refers to African Americans. The Black experience is embodied while also referencing the triumphs, struggles, and strength that all humans encounter. The text refers to hard work, aspiration, motivation, and moving towards victory. In the first verse we have “every voice” called up on to rejoice and “face the rising sun of our new day begun.” In the second verse, there is a very important recognition of difficulties, tears, and “days

<sup>7</sup> Faith Karimi and AJ Willingham, CNN “What Makes ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’ so Iconic” (September 10, 2020). <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/09/us/lift-every-voice-and-sing-trnd/> NAACP page, <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/lift-every-voice-and-sing#:~:text=Often%20referred%20to%20as%20%22The,the%20music%20for%20the%20lyrics.> NFL: <https://operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/diversity-inclusion/the-nfl-and-hbcus/lift-every-voice-and-sing/>

<sup>8</sup> Mark Clague, *O Say Can You Hear? A Cultural Biography of “The Star-Spangled Banner.”* Forthcoming 2022 from W.W. Norton. Dr. Clague is a Professor in Musicology at the University of Michigan.

when hope unborn had died.” The “weary years” and “silent tears” are brought into the third—final—verse. The concluding lines “True to our God, True to our native land” combine praise and national pride; sentiments that perfectly encapsulate the mission of a “national hymn.”

National songs that have connections to a country’s heterogenous populations present the opportunity to elevate voices from its larger community. When South Africa dismantled apartheid and created a new national anthem, the committee was chaired by its most prominent Black South African composer, Mzilikazi Khumalo. The National Anthem of South Africa (1997) brings together the five most widely spoken of South Africa’s eleven official languages: isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans, and English. Sections of the anthem contain previous national anthems from South Africa’s white and Black populations.<sup>9</sup> The intended result was for the national music—their national anthem—to voice the sound (language and music) of the diverse communities.

A nation has the potential to create its own sonic landscape. Such power comes from the connectedness its people feel; how are their experiences embraced in emblems of national representation? Sound can generate belonging. “Lift Every Voice and Sing” engages familiar audiences while welcoming new communities.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today on this important topic. I will be happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.

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<sup>9</sup> Ludumo Magangane. *The National Anthem of South Africa*. South Africa: Partridge Publishing, 2016.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Professor André. We have had the bell go off, but we will hear from our Witnesses for a few more minutes and then we will see what we can do.

Our next Witness is Mr. Clarence Henderson, President of the Frederick Douglass Foundation of the State of North Carolina, a participant of the sit-ins at Woolworth's lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina during the 1960s, served on the Advisory Board of Black Voices for Trump. You are now recognized for five minutes, Mr. Henderson.

#### STATEMENT OF CLARENCE HENDERSON

Mr. HENDERSON. Good morning to all the Members of the Subcommittee. "Lift Every Voice and Sing" will forever have a powerful place in American history and will be a continual reminder that equality and justice must be defended.

It was written in the time of Jim Crow which was a dark time in our history of which I lived in and had the opportunity to put Jim Crow on trial when I participated in the 1960 Woolworth Sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina.

The song was first performed in public to celebrate the birthday of President Abraham Lincoln which reminds me of the resiliency that we exhibited when we came up out of slavery and continued until we eventually broke the back of Jim Crow.

One of my concerns is that this great inspirational song is not used out of context as a racial divide to take us back to times that were and no longer are, that those who may vote against this measure are not viewed as racist for having a difference of opinion.

History shows us the unifying progress that America has made since then. One of the examples of progress are the elections of Black Americans in some of the highest political positions in the land such as electing President Obama as the first Black President, appointing Justice Thomas to the Supreme Court, the election of North Carolina's first Black Lieutenant Governor, Mark Robinson, and Virginia's first Black female Lieutenant Governor Winsome Sears, just to name a few. This did not happen within a vacuum with just the Black vote. The voting in of these officials is an example of forming a more perfect union.

As a matter of fact, the Preamble of the Constitution is an introduction to the reason for forming a new nation and it begins with "We the People." Before that, we had the Declaration of Independence in which the second sentence shows what American exceptionalism looks like, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It ends with the reason for forming our government, "that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

For those of you have been elected, let us lean toward practical and essential approaches for addressing issues that are facing the country as a whole.

According to the Pew Research Center as of April 15, 2021, America's top ten views facing the nation indicated as a very big problem are:

- (1) The affordability of healthcare with 56 percent;
- (2) the Federal budget deficit of 49 percent;
- (3) violent crime, 48 percent;
- (4) illegal immigration, same at 48 percent;
- (5) gun violence at 48 percent;
- (6) the corona virus outbreak, 47 percent;
- (7) racism, 45 percent;
- (8) economic inequality, 43 percent;
- (9) unemployment, 41 percent; and
- (10) climate change, 39 percent.

As we see, 45 percent of Americans view racism as the very important issue that needs to be addressed. However, as I stated earlier, my concern is that we do not use “Lift Every Voice and Sing” as a symbolic gesture to further divide.

It is my hope that we understand the progress of the American experience is never complete but continues to grow with concentrated efforts to become a unified country.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Henderson follows:]

**Clarence Henderson's**  
**Statement for Congressional Hearing 02/04/22**  
**Examining the History and Importance of "Lift Every Voice and Sing"**

Good morning,

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" will forever have a powerful place in American history and will be a continual reminder that equality and justice must be defended.

It was written in the time of Jim Crow which was a dark time in our history of which I lived in and had the opportunity to put Jim Crow on trial when I participated in the 1960 Woolworth Sit-in in Greensboro NC.

The song was first performed in public to celebrate the birthday of President Abraham Lincoln which reminds me of the resiliency that we exhibited when we came up out of slavery and continued until we eventually broke the back of Jim Crow.

One of my concerns is that this great inspirational song not be used out of context as a racial divide to take us back to times that were and no longer are. That those who may vote against this measure are not viewed as racist for having a difference of opinion.

History shows us the unifying progress that America has made since then. One example of the progress are the elections of Black Americans in some of the highest political positions in the

land such as Electing President Obama as the first black President, Appointing Justice Thomas to the Supreme Court, the election of NC's first black Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson and Virginia's first black female Lt. Gov. Winsome Sears, just to name a few. This did not happen within a vacuum with just the black vote. The voting in of these officials is an example of forming a more perfect union.

As a matter of fact, The Preamble of the Constitution is an introduction to the reason for forming a new nation and it begins with [We the People](#). ... Before that we had the Declaration of Independence in which the second sentence shows what American exceptionalism looks like - [We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness](#) - and it ends with the reason for forming our government, - [That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed](#).

For those of you have been elected, let us lean toward practical and essential approaches for addressing issues that are facing the country as a whole.

According to Pew Research Center April 15 2021, Americas' top ten views facing the nation indicated as a very big problem are:

1. The affordability of health care. 56%
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7. Racism. 45%
8. Economic inequality 43/%
9. Unemployment 41%
10. Climate change 39%

As we see 45% of Americans' view Racism as the very important issue that needs to be addressed.

However, as stated earlier, my concern is that we do not use "Lift Every Voice and Sing" as a symbolic gesture to further divide.

It is my hope that we understand the progress of the American experience is never complete but continues to grow with concentrated efforts to become a unified country.

Thank you

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Henderson, and thank you for your bravery for participating in the Woolworth sit-in that set the movement in strong action.

I think we should take our break. There are six minutes remaining in the vote. Lots of people have voted and I would ask all Members of the Committee to vote immediately and return immediately. I am going to move and by the time I get back I hope everybody will be back with me.

So, at this point we are going to recess for approximately eight minutes and return for Dr. Redmond. Thank you.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Mr. Chair, real quick.

Mr. COHEN. Yes, sir.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. I got a note saying we had a four-vote series. Are you seeing something different? Yes. So, we may be stuck there for a while. We want to come back at four.

Mr. COHEN. Well, I guess not. I didn't realize we had four votes. You did a better job than I. Let's go ahead and see if we can't conclude the three and maybe we can get there. And let me—

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Chair?

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. I think—

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Chair, I think it goes to the other two because we are going to have a lot of proxy voting. The other two Witnesses will have time to finish.

Mr. COHEN. All right, well, let's go ahead with Professor Redmond. If you can exclude any matter of historical that others have already mentioned.

Professor Redmond received her Ph.D. from Yale, an M.A. from Macalester College. She is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia, author, teacher, has won the American Book Award from Before Columbus Foundation, writing about Paul Robeson. It was the best book in 2020. Co-editor of the University of California Press series *Phono: Black Music and the Global Imagination*.

Dr. Redmond, you are recognized for five minutes.

#### STATEMENT OF SHANA L. REDMOND

Dr. REDMOND. Thank you very much. Thank you to the leadership, Membership, and the staff who invited me here today and made this conversation possible.

Hello, and thank you to my colleagues who are also Witnesses in this event today.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the influence and impact of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is immeasurable. My comments today will only scratch the surface of its importance but will, I hope nonetheless, assist in deliberations.

As we know, it was written at the turn of the century by the Brothers Johnson and was carried from its original Jacksonville community out into the rest of the U.S. segregated South via Black school teachers, faith workers, and families for decades before it was adopted as the hymn of the NAACP.

It was and remains a standard performance within that organization, one that comes with its own official and unofficial rules, including standing during its performance.



The song served as an introduction to the NAACP for many who knew the song but had little or no knowledge of the organization in the 1920s and 1930s when it began major organizing campaigns in the South.

The song was a greeting, a familiar piece of Southern Black history and a welcome into the future of that interracial organization.

The Johnsons received requests to reprint and perform “Lift Every Voice and Sing” from all over the country and the world in the early decades of the 20th century—religious organizations and camps, hymnal projects, missions in Africa, intercultural propaganda in Japan.

People wanted this song. They cared for it, and they wrote to its authors to inquire about how exactly it should be sung—crescendo here, diminuendo here—to honor all that it signaled.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” called to historical and present experiences of racism and other forms of dispossession, while also highlighting the greatest principles of democratic possibility, which the elder Johnson believed in wholeheartedly.

As a party of Lincoln, Republican and appointed consul abroad, James Weldon understood that the Black experience of violence in the U.S. was vile but not insurmountable, distinct but unexceptional globally.

His investment in the promises of democracy meant that “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was not an end but a beginning, an opening into the community from which our best futures are made.

When people gather to sing, things begin to change, from the pressure in the air to the ways in which people live. As I wrote in my first book, “Anthem,” music is a method that allows us to do and imagine things that may otherwise be unimaginable or seem impossible.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” is a perfect example of this process. It is a song with vision that was readily accessible to and adopted by a wide variety of communities.

Unlike the “Star-Spangled Banner,” “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is not coerced. It was and is chosen for performance by people invested in and inspired by its message.

Although institutionalized by the NAACP, the song retained its value to people beyond the organization, who took it up in protest and in praise, then as well as now.

Historically Black colleges and universities who are facing increasing assault, jazz musicians in protest against police violence in New York City, a joint recital in 2021 by gospel choirs at Arizona State University and York University in Ontario, Canada, as well as the song’s appearance on stages for the NFL and popular music festival Coachella documents that the song is not a relic, but a resource that is tapped regularly because it means something that is reinvented with every performance.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” is significant not because of its exceptional author or even its dynamic history with the NAACP but because it is useful to people. Regularly adopted for the concert stage as well as enactments of dissent, it is an actively sought-after song with recognizable ambitions and consequences.

The investment in the song is so high that while Johnson consistently described the song as a hymn, it has been known for genera-

tions as the Black national anthem. This designation is a testament to its power and vision, and a strong suggestion that its time of usefulness is far from over.

Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Redmond follows:]

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Testimony for the Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties  
re: Hearing on H.R. 301—"LEVAS" the official national hymn of the United States

February 4, 2022

It is not an exaggeration to say that the influence and impact of "Life Ev'ry Voice and Sing" (LEVAS) is immeasurable. My comments today will only scratch the surface of its importance but will, I hope, nonetheless assist in deliberations. Written in 1899 by the brothers James Weldon Johnson (lyrics) and J. Rosamond Johnson (music), LEVAS was carried by its original Jacksonville community out into the rest of the segregated U.S. South via Black schoolteachers, faith workers, and families for decades before it was adopted as the hymn of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1921. It was and remains a standard performance within that organization, one that comes with its own official and unofficial rules, including standing during its performance. The song served as an introduction to the NAACP for many who knew the song but had little or no knowledge of the organization in the 1920s and 30s when it began major organizing campaigns in the South. The song was a greeting, a familiar piece of southern Black history, and a welcome into the future of that interracial organization.

The Johnsons received requests to reprint and perform LEVAS from all over the country and the world in the early decades of the twentieth century. Religious organizations and camps, hymnal projects, missions in Africa, intercultural propaganda in Japan: people wanted that song. They cared so much for it that they wrote to its authors to inquire about how exactly it should be sung—Crescendo here? Diminuendo there?—in order to honor all that it signaled. LEVAS called to historical and present experiences of racism and other forms of dispossession while also highlighting the greatest principles of democratic possibility, which the elder Johnson believed in wholeheartedly. As a party of Lincoln Republican and appointed consul abroad, James Weldon understood that the Black experience of violence in the U.S. was vile but not insurmountable; distinct but unexceptional globally. His investment in the promises of democracy meant that LEVAS was not an end but a beginning—an opening into the community from which our best futures are made.

When people gather to sing, things begin to change—from the pressure in the air to the ways in which people live. As I wrote in my first book, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*, "music is a method...[that] allows us to do and imagine things that may otherwise be unimaginable or seem impossible" (1). LEVAS is a perfect example of this. It is a song with vision that was readily accessible to and adopted by a wide variety of communities. Unlike the "Star Spangled Banner," LEVAS is not coerced—it was and is *chosen* for performance by people invested in and inspired by its message. Although institutionalized by the NAACP, the song retained its value to people beyond the organization who took it up in protest and in praise then as well as now. Historically Black Colleges and Universities, jazz musicians in protest against police violence in New York City (2020), a joint recital in 2021 by gospel choirs at [Arizona State University and York University](#) (Ontario, Canada), as well as the song's appearance on stages for the National Football League (2020) and popular music festival Coachella (2019) document that the song is not a relic but a resource that is tapped regularly because it means something—something that is reinvented with every performance.

LEVAS is significant not because of its exceptional author or even its dynamic history with the NAACP but because it is useful to people. Regularly adapted for the concert stage as well as enactments of dissent, it is an actively sought after song with recognizable ambitions and consequences. The investment in the song is so high, that while Johnson consistently described the song as a “hymn,” it has been known for generations as the “Black National Anthem.” This designation is a testament to its power and vision and a strong suggestion that its time of usefulness is far from over.



Shana L. Redmond, Ph.D.  
Professor, English and Comparative Literature and the Center for the Study of Ethnicity & Race  
Columbia University  
New York, New York

Attachments:

- Truth in Testimony Form
- Testimony
- Table of Contents, Chapter 2, and end notes from *Anthem*
- CV

Ms. GARCIA. Mr. Chair, we can't hear you, sir.

Mr. COHEN. Yeah, thank you. Our next Witness is Lloyd Washington. Mr. Washington is President of the Durkeeville Historical Society Museum in Jacksonville, Florida.

He's held that position since 2011, active member of the historical society there, and he's championing the creation of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" on the birth site of James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson, the brothers who wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

Mr. Washington, you're recognized for five minutes, sir.

#### STATEMENT OF LLOYD WASHINGTON

Mr. WASHINGTON. Good morning to the Chair and Members of the Committee.

The song "Lift Every Voice and Sing" has been performed by many popular singers such as Marian Anderson, the most celebrated singer of her era. It is still being performed today by singers such as Beyoncé and Alicia Keys.

Here in Jacksonville, Reverend James Henry and the Summer-ville Baptist Church sing it every second Sunday. During the month of February, the song will be performed by the children's choir, and the Lavilla School of the Art performed the song during its European tour.

It continues to be performed in schools, faith communities, and civic gatherings in Jacksonville. The hymn has brought hope, solidarity in Jacksonville as the importance of this song cross different races, creed, and cultures, whether at a citywide celebration of Dr. King or a prayer vigil in the town square.

The very Act of singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" embodies the hope, justice, and freedom that is the core of our democratic system. I support making this hymn our national anthem—I'm sorry, national hymn. Let me correct that.

[The statement of Mr. Washington follows:]

Lloyd Washington

President Durkeeville Historical Society

Jacksonville, Florida

February 4, 2022

Hearing Title: The Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

Hearing on H.R. 301

### **Lloyd Washington Bio**



#### **Mr. Lloyd Washington**

President, Durkeeville Historical Society Museum

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[DurkeevilleHistory@gmail.com](mailto:DurkeevilleHistory@gmail.com)

Mr. Lloyd Washington was born and raised in Jacksonville and has a great love for the history of Afro-Americans in Jacksonville. He has served on the board of directors of Jacksonville Housing Partnership, the Weed and Seed Program, and Northwest Jacksonville Community Development Council.

He has served as Community President of the Grand Park Community Association for 16 years. He has been a member of the Durkeeville Historical Society for 15 years and has served as president since 2011. He has champion the recognition and development of the "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park", the birth site of James Weldon and John Rosamond Johnson. His commitment is to preserve and protect Afro-American history in the Jacksonville area.

**DURKEEVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**1293 West 19<sup>th</sup> Street \* Jacksonville, FL 32209

To: The Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

RE: Written Testimony for February 4, 2022 Hearing on H.R. 301

To the Chair and Members of the Committee,

The song Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing has been performed by many popular singers; such as Marian Anderson one of the most celebrated singers of her era. It is still sung today by singers of our time, such as Beyonce and Alicia Keyes. Here in Jacksonville, Reverend James Henry & Summerville Baptist church sing the song every second Sunday. During February the Jacksonville youth Choir will perform the song. Lavilla School of the Arts performed the song during their European tour. It continues to be performed in schools, faith communities and civic gatherings in Jacksonville. The hymn brings hope and solidarity in Duval County as the song's importance crosses different races, creeds and cultures. Whether at a city-wide celebration of Dr. King or at a prayer vigil in the town square, the very act of people singing "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" embodies the hope, justice and freedom that is the core of our Democracy. I support making this hymn our national hymn.

Lloyd Washington, President





Durkeeville Historical Society



2013

Lift every 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  
faith that the dark  
past has taught us....

Designation Application and Report  
Planning and Development Department  
Of the City of Jacksonville regarding  
PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF LS-13-01  
The James Weldon Johnson and  
John Rosamond Johnson Birth Site

Submitted by Lisa Ransom  
Prepared in accordance with Chapter 307, City of Jacksonville Ordinance Code  
July 26, 2013

**REPORT OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION  
AS A CITY OF JACKSONVILLE LANDMARK**

**LS-13-01**

**James Weldon Johnson and  
J. Rosamond Johnson Birth Site @ the  
Northwest corner of Lee and Houston Streets**

**GENERAL LOCATION:** Lot 6, Block 1-C, LAVILLA Division C, as recorded in Deed Book W. Page 566 and 567 Jacksonville of the Former Public Records, Duval County Florida  
Containing 10,428 Square feet or 0.24 acres more or less

**RE# 074829 0000**

Prepared in accordance with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department hereby forwards to the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, its "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations" on the Landmark Designation, LS-13-01, sponsored by Mayor Alvin Brown.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

- (A) At the request of Mayor Alvin Brown, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department began preparing a designation application for the property located at the northwest corner of Lee and Houston streets
- (B) Consistent with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104(d), the Planning and Development Department determined that the application for designation of the property at the northwest corner of Lee and Houston Street as a Landmark was complete. As required, the Planning and Development Department had signs posted in front of the property being considered for designation, as well as sent notices by U.S. Mail to each owner of real property within three hundred and fifty (350) feet of the proposed site. There were 7 notices sent. Notice of the public hearing on the designation of the property at the northwest corner of Lee and Houston Streets, the birth site of James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, as a Landmark was

published in the *Financial News and Daily Report*. Proof of publication will be attached to this report.

- (C) If designated, any work, including ground disturbing activities that impacts the property identified as Lot 6, Block 1-C, LaVilla Division C, as recorded in Deed Book W, Page 566 and 567 Jacksonville of the former Public Records, Duval County Florida, will require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Planning and Development Department. Some work, such as new construction and building relocation will required the COA application to be reviewed and approved by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. Routine repairs and maintenance, alterations, and new construction not seen from the public right-of-way and other projects consistent with the Secretary's Standards can be pre-approved by the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department. However, the following activities will require a review by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission.
1. New construction and additions.
  2. Relocation of historic buildings.
  3. Other work that the Planning and Development Department has determined to be in conflict or in potential conflict with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*
- (D) At the close of the public hearing, the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission shall determine, whether based upon the evidence, the James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson Birth Site located at the northwest corner of Lee and Houston, meets the criteria for designation. In reviewing the application, the Planning and Development Department has found the application to meet three of the seven criteria.

The three criteria include the following:

- A. *Its value as a significant reminder of the cultural, historical, architectural, or archaeological heritage of the City, state or nation.***

The site is located in the LaVilla neighborhood of the downtown area of the city. The LaVilla area was first documented after the transfer of Florida back to Spain in 1784, when the Spanish government continued the liberal land grant policy initiated during the British Period (1763-1783). In 1801, John Jones received a Spanish land grant of 350 acres defined as a triangular tract-stretching north from the mouth of McCoy's Creek. This same parcel was re-ceded to Isaac Hendricks by the governor of Spanish East Florida in 1804, and confirmed by the land commissioners in 1819. By the time the

property was deeded as a gift to Catherine Hendricks, the wife of Isaac Hendricks, the parcel has been expanded to 500 acres bounded by McCoy's Creek to the south, the Taylor Grant to the east, and public lands to the north and west. In 1831, the tract came under the ownership of Rebecca Jones, later the wife of Calvin Reed, who divided the property into two separate tracts. After a series of owners, both tracts came under the ownership of Reverend James McDonald, the pastor of the Baptist Church in Jacksonville.

After acquiring the property in 1842, McDonald sold 150 acres in 1851 to Reverend Joseph S. Baker, who later in that same year acquired the remaining 350 acres. Reverend Baker had succeeded Reverend McDonald as pastor of the Baptist Church. According to early Jacksonville historian, T. Frederick Davis, J. McRobert Baker, the son of Reverend Baker, remodeled the existing farmhouse constructed by Reverend McDonald, and named the new plantation, LaVilla. He later built a school on the property called the LaVilla Institute that continued until the Civil War. Founded in 1838 by Reverend McDonald, the Baptist Church moved to LaVilla, and built a brick church along present day Myrtle Avenue between West Adams Street and West Duval Street.

During the Civil War, Jacksonville was occupied four times by Union forces. Much of the military action near Jacksonville occurred in the west part of LaVilla that was connected to the interior of the state by the Old Plank Road and the railroad. The Baptist Church, which was eventually destroyed, was used by the Federal troops for pickets and outposts. Following the war, the west part of LaVilla continued to be occupied by Federal troops, many who were freedmen that stayed in the area after being mustered out of military service.

After the Civil War, Reverend Baker sold his LaVilla tract to Francis F. L'Engle and other white owners who subdivided and incorporated the Town of LaVilla in 1869. A member of one Jacksonville's prominent families that included the L' Engles and the Daniels, Francis F. L'Engle, who had been purchasing property in LaVilla since before the Civil War, leased for ninety-nine years  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre plots to forty-one freedmen in 1866.

Immediately following the Civil War, many freedmen were attracted to urban areas such as Jacksonville because of potential jobs and housing, as well as the protection and welfare services provided by the Freedmen's Bureau. The LaVilla area specifically attracted union veterans from the three black regiments that had been stationed in Jacksonville during and immediately after the war. By 1870, the population of LaVilla had swelled to 1,078 with over seventy-seven percent being African American. Since the majority of these new LaVilla residents were originally from Florida, they began developing a social network based on kinship, previous friendships, shared military service, and worship. These African American residents were primarily employed in unskilled day labor at the docks, sawmill and railroads or did domestic work. However, within a few years, several black owned businesses and professions were established in the neighborhood.

Being a majority population, African American males were to play a significant role in the political life of LaVilla. The first elected government for the Town of LaVilla in 1871 included Frances L'Engle as mayor, and four whites as council members. However, African American males were elected as Town Marshall, Tax Collector, Tax Assessor, as well as five serving as Aldermen. Based on surviving records for the Town of LaVilla (1869 – 1887), two African Americans, Mitchell P. Chappelle (1874-1876) and Alfred Grant (1876-1877) were elected mayor. During this same period, six African American males served as Town Clerk, two as Tax Assessor, three as Tax Collector, one as Town Treasurer, four as Town Marshall, and thirty-six as Councilman. Other African Americans were appointed to perform municipal duties such as police officer, lighting street lamps, and trash removal.

According to James Weldon Johnson's autobiography *Along This Way*, Johnson states that "long after the close of the Reconstruction period, Jacksonville was known far and wide as a good town for Negroes; several members of the city council were Negroes; one or two justices of the peace were Negroes. When a paid fire department was established, one station was manned by Negroes; ...the city government was reorganized and Joseph E. Lee, a Negro and a very able man and astute politician, was made Judge of the Municipal Court. He also observed that there were many stalls in the local city market that was owned by Negroes and that they also were land stewards for the Clyde Steamship Company; and there was no such thing as a white-owned barber shop."

In an 1886 report produced by the Jacksonville Board of Trade, LaVilla was the largest suburb with a population of 3,228 compared to Jacksonville's population of 11,545. By 1886, 814 buildings had been constructed in LaVilla, with 93% being residential structures. In addition, the community reportedly had six churches, two public and three private schools, three livery stables, two public halls, and one cemetery (old Baptist Church Cemetery). Two early churches founded in LaVilla included St. Paul's AME Church and Shiloh Baptist Church (1871). Several freedmen in LaVilla formed the Trustees of the Florida Institute with the stated purpose of increasing educational opportunities for African Americans. With the support of the Freedmen's Bureau, the Trustees established the Stanton Normal School named in honor of General Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War under President Lincoln. Opening in 1869, the Stanton Normal School was located on the block in LaVilla bound by West Ashley Street, West Beaver Street, Clay Street and North Broad Street. The 1.5-acre block, which was purchased from Florida Governor Ossian B. Hart, the son of Jacksonville's founder, Isaiah D. Hart, has been the site of four separate school buildings with the current one being constructed in 1917.

With the development of the railroad, the old Union Terminal and finally, the Jacksonville Terminal, the commercial and warehouse district along East and West Bay Street in Downtown Jacksonville began to expand west towards LaVilla. Eventually much of the south part of LaVilla was occupied by large warehouses, wholesale and retail establishments, boarding houses and small hotels, as well as the notorious "red light district" along Houston Street. As a result by the 1880's, LaVilla had established

an unsavory reputation for gambling, drunkenness, prostitution, and political corruption. With the end of political reconstruction and the return of political control back to the Democratic Party, the state legislature in 1887 approved the annexation of LaVilla, along with Riverside, Brooklyn, Springfield, East Jacksonville, Oakland, and the Town of Fairfield, as part of the City of Jacksonville. Although the stated purpose was to broaden the tax base and provide additional city services to the growing suburbs, annexation diluted African American political power, significantly reducing their involvement in local politics until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's.

LaVilla also attracted many of Jacksonville's early Jewish families, particularly during the flood of Eastern European immigration in the 1880's and 90's. The first Jewish migration during the middle of the nineteenth century brought Jews of German descent. Followers of a Reformist faith, these Jewish citizens became successful business owners and were so highly regarded in the Jacksonville community that one of their members, Morris A. Dzialynski, was elected mayor in 1881. The second migration during the 1880's and 90's brought Russian and Romanian immigrants who had stronger ties to the Orthodox Judaism of their homelands. Establishing their homes and businesses in LaVilla, these immigrants formed an Orthodox Temple named B'nai Israel in 1901. In 1908, construction of a new Orthodox synagogue was started at the northwest corner of West Duval Street and North Jefferson Street. With the growth of the Jewish community in LaVilla, a Young Men's Hebrew Association was established in 1910, and opened its own facility at 712 West Duval Street across from the Congregation B'nai Israel in 1914. Now serving as the Maceo Elks Club, the YMHA building originally housed numerous recreational, social, cultural and educational activities and programs for Jacksonville's Jewish community. With the shift in Jewish settlement from LaVilla to the more popular suburbs of Springfield and Riverside, both the Congregation B'nai Israel and the YMHA had relocated by 1932 to the new Jacksonville Jewish Center at 205 West Third Street in Springfield.

Although starting at the Cleveland Fiber Factory at West Beaver Street and Davis Street, most of LaVilla was spared by the Great Fire of May 3, 1901 that destroyed Downtown Jacksonville. For over a century, the northern part of LaVilla has been the commercial and social center of Jacksonville's African American community. Significant African American institutions first developed in LaVilla included Old Stanton High School (521 West Ashley Street); the Masonic Temple (Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge at 410 Broad Street); Old Brewster Hospital (915 West Monroe Street), and the Clara White Mission (611 – 615 West Ashley Street). Numerous commercial enterprises such as stores, restaurants, hotels, theaters and funeral homes, serving the African American community were established along West Ashley, North Broad, North Jefferson and North Davis Streets. The area around the intersection of West Ashley and North Jefferson Street also was a hub for African American entertainment for many years. Many great early jazz performers played and stayed in LaVilla during the 1920's, 30's and 40's, including Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles and Billie Holliday.

It should also be noted that Genovar's Hall, located at 638-644 West Ashley Street (LM-95-22) was a significant commercial building within the LaVilla area. Owned by Harry Finkelstein, Genovar's Hall during the 1920's and 1930's began to be associated with a significant period in the history of the LaVilla area. During this period, LaVilla became the primary commercial and entertainment district for Jacksonville's African American community. In response to state sanctioned segregation, numerous commercial enterprises such as stores, restaurants, hotels, theaters and funeral homes, serving the African American community, were established along West Ashley, North Broad, North Jefferson and Davis Streets.

By 1918, Genovar's Hall was completely occupied by black owned businesses including barbers, cleaners, shoe repair, filling station, restaurants, taverns, as well as furnished rooms. 1931, Jack D. Wynn opened the Wynn Hotel on the second and third floors with the Lenape Tavern being located on the first floor. According to oral tradition, the Wynn Hotel, which operated under that name until 1941, was a popular lodging spot for some of these early jazz performers playing in LaVilla and the surrounding area. Reportedly, Louis Armstrong, who played at the Knights of Pythias Hall at 733 West Ashley Street, would prefer the Wynn Hotel over more "upscale establishments" since it was located closer to the street action generated by such nearby entertainment amenities as the Hollywood Music Store, The Top Hat, Manuel's and the Bronx.

In addition, the January 1942 monthly magazine of the NAACP, "The Crisis", highlighted Jacksonville's African American community and featured many of the famous establishments that were well-known throughout LaVilla and the county at large. The article states that the earliest forms of commerce in Jacksonville were largely retail merchandising. Later businesses formed included investment and insurance companies and banks. The Afro-American Life Insurance Company was founded in 1901 by Abraham Lincoln Lewis and seven business associates. Over the 40 years in business, the company expanded to include a savings department, pension bureau as well as an investment department. By 1937, the company held over one million dollars in assets and was responsible for the creation of American Beach in Nassau County, Florida.

With the end of state sponsored segregation, many African American residents and businesses left the LaVilla area to seek opportunities in other parts of the city. As a result the economic and social vitality of LaVilla declined resulting in marginal businesses or empty commercial buildings and a predominance of low-income rental units. Continued lack of investment fostered significant deterioration of LaVilla's building fabric resulting in numerous demolitions. Except for several landmark structures, as well as a cluster of older commercial buildings along North Broad Street, most of the area is vacant undeveloped land.

*3. It is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the City, state, or nation.*

The subject property is the birth site for two highly regarded, nationally and internationally known natives of Jacksonville, James Weldon Johnson and his brother John Rosamond Johnson. For the purposes of this report, James Weldon Johnson's accomplishments will be identified first and then those of J. Rosamond Johnson will be described afterward.

**James Weldon Johnson 1871-1938**

James Weldon Johnson was born on June 17, 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida. A true Renaissance man, Johnson was a lawyer, educator, songwriter, poet, foreign diplomat, novelist, and civil-rights leader. Much of Johnson's childhood and young adult life in Jacksonville is told in his own words in his autobiography, Along This Way. Johnson graduated from Atlanta University in 1894. He returned to Jacksonville and became principal of Stanton Grade School. At that time, the state of Florida did not have a high school for Negro children. While he was principal, Johnson improved the educational standards of the school until Stanton became a high school. Subjects like algebra, English composition, physical geography, bookkeeping, geometry, English literature, elementary physics, history and Spanish were included. In 1897, while serving as the principal, Johnson became the first African American in Duval County to pass the bar exam through open examination in court in Florida.

In early 1900, he and his brother Rosamond, an accomplished musician, collaborated and wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing," an anthem commemorating Abraham Lincoln's birthday. The song was originally written to be sung by 500 Negro school children. According to his autobiography, James Weldon and J. Rosamond wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at the Johnson family home in LaVilla. James Weldon recounts the story with emotion as each stanza was created. Eventually, the song was taught to the school children for the Lincoln celebration. However, the children and churches kept singing the song until the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People adopted it. Known today as the Negro National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is an uplifting song that is sung with reverence as it commemorates the civil rights struggles of the past. Today, the song is sung nationwide in churches and at special ceremonial occasions in African-American institutions.

The Great Fire of 1901, burned 146 city blocks, destroyed more than 2,368 buildings, and left almost 10,000 residents homeless in Jacksonville. Stanton was lost despite the efforts of James Weldon Johnson and others. Immediately following the fire, the



Duval County School Board replaced the burnt facility with a wooden "temporary building". Johnson described it as being "huge, crude, three-story hideous structure that looked more like a granary than like a schoolhouse". According to Johnson, the school board contemplated doing away with Stanton as a central school. Stanton was sited in one of the best locations in the city and the school and facilities encompassed one city block. In addition, the School Board planned to sell the land that Stanton stood on and to break the larger school into several "more accessible" smaller schools. As noted in his autobiography, Johnson stated that "these plans meant the destruction of a traditional and important element in the life of Jacksonville Negro citizens and the sweeping away of one of its main centers of pride and affection. Furthermore, they probably meant the end of a Negro high school."

Despite the school board's plans, the high school and the site remained intact. James Weldon Johnson wrote that he reminded the school board that the Stanton property had been deeded to "a board of trustees made up of white and colored men as a site for a Negro school by Governor Hart, a Reconstruction governor of Florida. This deed, furthermore, stated that, if the property ceased to be used for the purpose of a Negro school, it would revert to the heirs of the Hart estate. *Although saved at this juncture*, eventually, the third building became unsafe and was condemned". Ultimately, the school board built the structure that currently stands.

In 1915, there was a \$1 million bond issued in Duval County for the construction and improvement of school buildings. As a part of the proposal, the school board planned to eliminate the Stanton School and replace it with smaller schools in different locations. In response, the trustees along with prominent members of the Black community responded with a petition to the school board on February 23, 1915. The petition requested that an equitable portion of the bond money provide a new Stanton that would be adequate for the county's African American population in its original location. When the school board refused, the trustees responded by filing an injunction in Circuit Court. The parties settled out-of-court. In September 1915, the school board agreed to construct another Stanton High School on the same site. The new building was opened for classes in the fall of 1917.

The victory that began with James Weldon Johnson has endured for all of Jacksonville's children. The school continues to hold classes for some of Jacksonville's youngest students. The present building represents the culmination of nearly 150 years of Black education at its present location. In addition, the building that James Weldon Johnson fought to have constructed was listed on the *National Register of Historic Places* in 1983. In June 2013, the Jacksonville City Council adopted an ordinance designating the Edwin M. Stanton High School as a historic landmark. The historic Stanton building continues to be a source of pride for the community. The institution

that began in 1869, by funding from the Freedman's Bureau for the education of former slave children, was bolstered and fought for by James Weldon Johnson. The legacy of this great institution endures for future generations.

James Weldon Johnson produced an independent newspaper, *The Daily American*, in 1895. He also was the first African American to pass the Florida Bar through an oral exam before a state judge. Johnson was multi-talented and a prolific writer. By 1902, Johnson was making seasonal trips to New York City to join his brother and Bob Cole in the production of several musical pieces. After marrying New York native, Grace Nail, in 1910, Johnson went on to publish his book, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* in 1912. In addition to being a contributing editor to the *New York Age*, Johnson was appointed field secretary of the NAACP in 1916, and later served as an Executive Secretary. During the 1920's and 30's, he was responsible for several publications, such as *God's Trombones* (1927), re-print of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (previously printed anonymously), editor of *The Book of Negro Poetry* (1922 & 1931), and his autobiography, *Along This Way* (1933).

In 1906, he was appointed by President Teddy Roosevelt as U.S. Consul to Venezuela and later served in the same position in Nicaragua.

James W. Johnson began his work with the NAACP in December 1916 as field secretary. Johnson's first task as field secretary was to organize the Association efforts in the South. In three years there were 310 branches of the Association, 131 of them were in the South. Johnson became the first African American Executive Secretary of the NAACP. Johnson is also credited with organizing the historic Silent March of 1917 to protest the national crime of lynching.

During his life, James Weldon Johnson has received numerous honorary degrees and awards including Master of Arts degree from Atlanta University (1904); doctor of literature from Talladega College and Howard University; the Spingarn Medal as "author, diplomat and public servant"; and the Harmon Award for *God's Trombones*. In addition to receiving a Rosenwald fellowship for writing, Johnson was appointed in 1931 as the Adam K. Spence Professor of Creative Literature and Writing at Fisk University, as well as the visiting professor of creative literature at New York University. James Weldon Johnson died on June 26, 1938 in an automobile accident near Wiscasset, Maine, and is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.

In conclusion, James Weldon Johnson life and legacy demonstrated that he was a strong advocate for civil rights for all Americans, but especially for African Americans at a crucial time in American history. Many of Johnson's accomplishments occurred despite the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (1866-1870), Jim Crow, the dismantling of Reconstruction era politics and the horrific, shameful season when the lynching of African Americans was commonplace in this country. Johnson was a leader through his personal actions and his powerful writings.

**James Weldon Johnson's Activities and Accomplishments**

- 1894: Graduated from Atlanta University
- 1895: Published the Daily American, the first Negro daily ever published
- 1894-97: Made Stanton Grade School into a high school
- 1897: First black admitted to Florida bar in an oral exam before a judge
- 1899: Wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" with his brother, Rosamond
- 1906: Appointed US consul, Puerto Cabello, Venezuela
- 1909: Appointed US consul, Corinto, Nicaragua
- 1920: Appointed executive secretary of NAACP and served 10 years in this position
- 1921: Wrote first novel: "The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man"
- 1922: Collected poems of black poets in "The Book of American Negro Poetry."
- 1925: Compiled, edited "The Book of Negro Spirituals" with his brother
- 1927: With brother Rosamond, published "God's Trombones", a collection of folk sermons
- 1930: Became professor at Fisk University
- 1930: Published Black Manhattan
- 1933: Wrote autobiography, "Along This Way"

**James Weldon Johnson's Awards**

- 1925: Awarded the Spingarn Medal which is the awarded annually for "the highest or noblest achievement by an American Negro"
- 1929: Received the Julius Rosenwald Fund Grant, 1929.
- 1933: Awarded the W. E. B. Du Bois Prize for Negro Literature, 1933, named after first incumbent of Spence Chair of Creative Literature at Fisk University.
- N/A Rewarded with honorary doctorates from Talladega College and Howard University.
- 1988: The United States Postal Service issued a 22 cent postage stamp in his honor
- 1990: The James Weldon Johnson Middle School in Jacksonville is named in his honor.
- 2000: Inducted into the Florida Artist's Hall of Fame

**John Rosamond Johnson 1873 - 1954**

John Rosamond Johnson was one of the more important figures in black music in the first part of the 20th century, usually in partnership with Bob Cole or with his brother James Weldon Johnson. While some feel that his memory lives in the shadow of his famous older brother, John Rosamond enjoyed a varied career as a pianist, songwriter, producer, soldier, singer, and actor. Professionally, he was known as J. Rosamond Johnson.

J. Rosamond Johnson was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on August 11, 1873. His mother was his first music teacher and he began playing the piano at age four. Johnson received his music degree from the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. By the end of the 19th century, Johnson served as the musical director for the Florida Baptist Academy. Johnson moved to New York City in 1900 and plunged into his life as a musician, actor and composer. After contributing a song to Williams and Walker's *Sons of Ham* (1900), Johnson and his brother teamed up with Robert Cole with whom he began creating a vaudeville act and writing songs. In 1901 the brothers signed a contract with Joseph W. Stern and Company guaranteeing them monthly payments against future royalties, the first such contract between African American song writers and a Tin Pan Alley publisher. Their first popular hit was "My Castle on the Nile" (1901), and this was followed by popular songs such as "The Maiden with the Dreamy Eyes," "The Old Flag Never Touched the Ground," "Didn't He Ramble," and the amusing ragtime song "Under the Bamboo Tree," the melody of which is a syncopated inversion of the spiritual "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." The brothers teamed with Bob Cole to write a suite of six songs, "The Evolution of Ragtime" (1903). For seven years, the pair toured as "Cole and Johnson," and wrote and published more than 200 songs. *Under the Bamboo Tree* was highly successful. The song sold more than 400,000 copies, making it one of the nation's most popular tunes at the time.

Besides crafting a sophisticated vaudeville style, Cole and Johnson produced two musicals, *The Shoo-Fly Regiment* (1907) and *The Red Moon* (1909). While these

shows were successful, they lost money and Cole and Johnson returned to vaudeville performance. This partnership lasted until Cole's death in 1911.

A passion for musical comedy soon drew Johnson into show business. By age 23, he was touring as a vocalist with the company of *Oriental America*, thought to be the first all-black show on Broadway that was not a burlesque house act. While in New York, Johnson met numerous celebrities of the day in the music field, most notably Oscar Hammerstein, who would ultimately help shape his career. His brother James Weldon Johnson joined his brother and Robert Cole during the summers off from Stanton.

Johnson's compositions skills were the strongpoints of his musicals and vaudeville performances. Shortly after Cole's death, Johnson performed as a pianist in "A Concert of Negro Music" the great Carnegie Hall concert of May 2, 1912. When World War I broke out, Johnson received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 15th Regiment. After the war, he toured with his own groups, and even sang and played the part of a lawyer in the original production of *Porgy and Bess* in 1935. J. Rosamond Johnson died in New York City on November 11, 1954. In 2006, John Rosamond Johnson was inducted into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame.

#### **G. Its suitability for preservation or restoration.**

In utilizing this criterion, it has been the practice of the Planning and Development Department to evaluate proposed landmarks based on evidence of significant exterior alterations that have negatively impacted character-defining features, as well as represent alterations difficult, costly, or impossible to reverse. Further, the degree and nature of any exterior deterioration, as well as the evidence of long term and potentially on-going neglect are also a factor in evaluating potential landmarks for their suitability for preservation or restoration.

Based on a site visit by a representative of the Planning and Development Department, the James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson birth site is currently an undeveloped city-owned parcel. However, if approved, the accomplishments of the Johnson brothers could be commemorated by the designation of their birth site. It should be noted that the two brothers have been acknowledged by the state of Florida and at higher learning institutions throughout the nation. Both brothers have been awarded and honored for their contributions in various disciplines including the arts, politics, literature and music. Once designated, the site could be set aside for development as

a public monument/public space honoring the brother's contributions to art, music, civil rights and education for the citizens of Jacksonville, and for the nation.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings of this report, the Planning and Development Department recommends that the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission **APPROVE** the designation of Lot 6, Block 1-C, LAVILLA Division C, the northwest corner of Lee Street and Houston Street, **(LS-13-01)** as a City of Jacksonville Landmark site.



## OFFICE OF MAYOR ALVIN BROWN

ST. JAMES BUILDING  
117 WEST DUVAL STREET, SUITE 400  
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32202

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May 20, 2013

Angela Schifanella  
Chairman  
Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor – Ed Ball Building  
214 North Hogan Street  
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Dear Ms. Schifanella:

Please accept this letter as my application for the landmark site designation of the James Weldon Johnson birth site at the northwest corner of Lee Street and Houston Street in LaVilla pursuant to Section 307.104 (a), Ord.Code. It was at this site on June 17, 1871 that Jacksonville's most famous native son was born, James Weldon Johnson. A true renaissance man, James Weldon Johnson was a successful educator, journalist, lawyer, author, songwriter, and diplomat. Honored both nationally and internationally, his achievements are truly legendary. It was also on this site in 1899 that James Weldon Johnson collaborated with his brother John Rosamond Johnson, to produce the famous piece, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, now recognized as the Negro National Anthem.

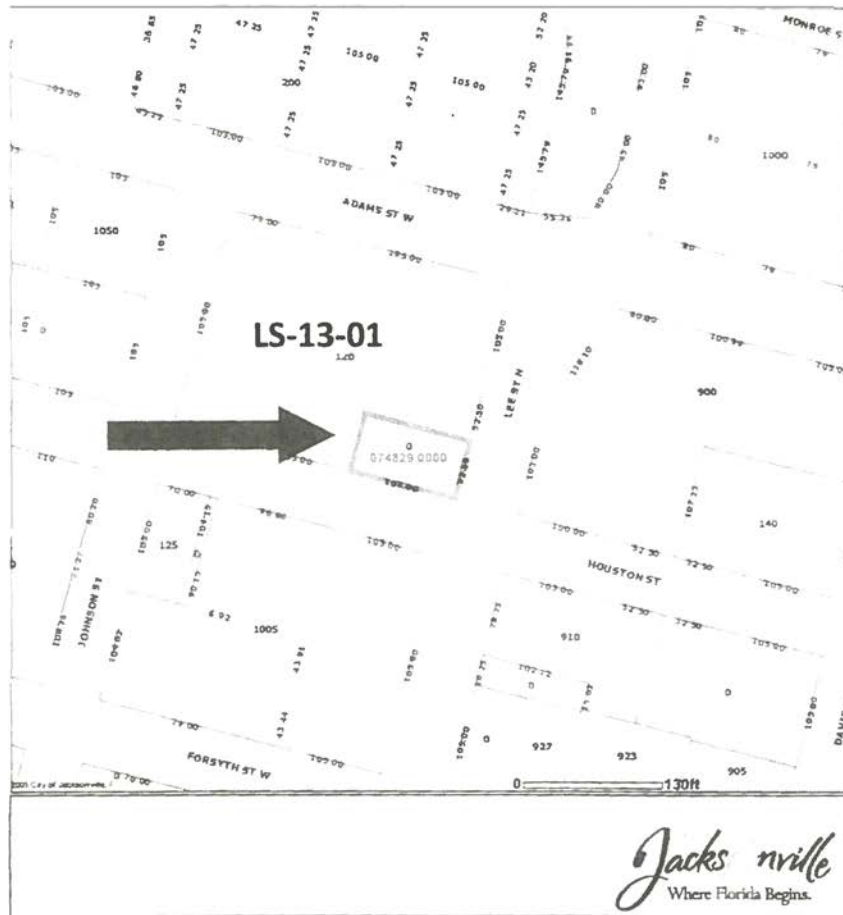
As Mayor, I am truly honored to sponsor this landmark site designation to ensure that the location of his residence (originally Block 1c, Lot 6, Division C -*LaVilla*) be preserved and eventually become an Historic Landmark honoring this great American. I also want to thank you and other members of the Commission for your valuable service in the preservation of Jacksonville's significant and irreplaceable historic resources. Your kind consideration of my request is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,  
  
 Alvin Brown  
 Mayor

**Designation Application for LS-13-01**

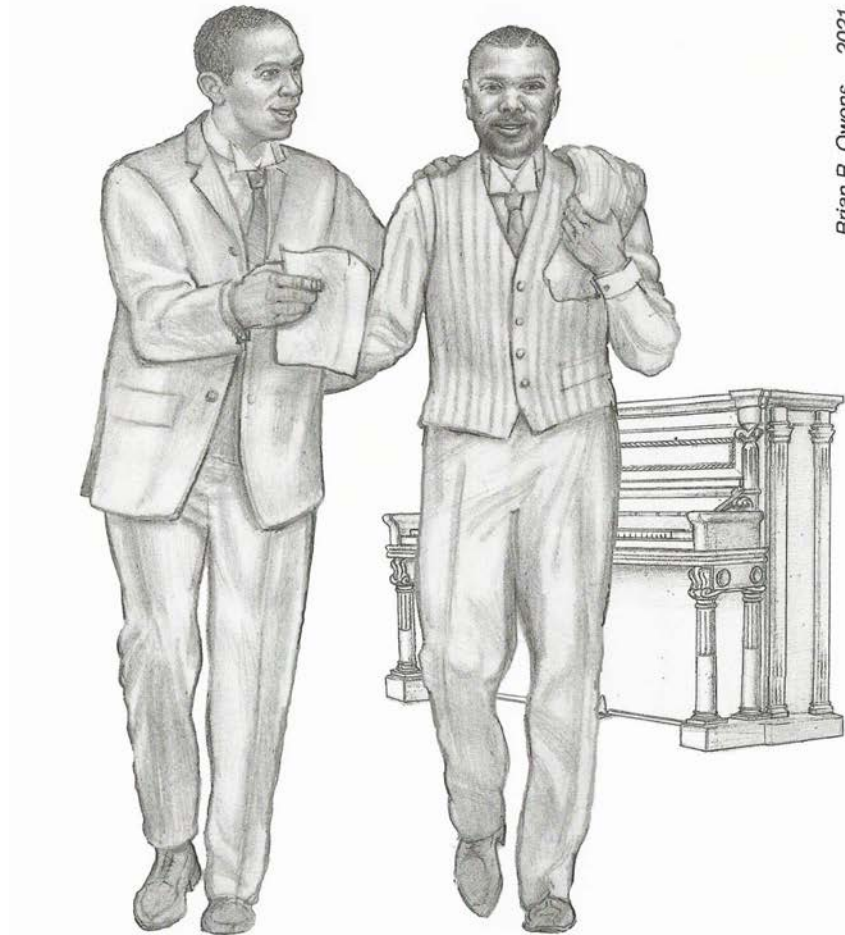
James Weldon Johnson &amp; J. Rosamond Johnson Birth Site

Northwest corner of Lee and Houston

**LOCATION MAP**



## Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park



Brian R. Owens 2021

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Washington. I appreciate your testimony and I appreciate your clarifying national hymn.

Our last Witness before we break is Ms. Melanie Edwards. Ms. Edwards has worked for the Office of Government—works in the Office of Government and Community Affairs at Columbia, granddaughter of the distinguished Johnson—J. Rosamond Johnson, and grandniece of James Weldon Johnson, and is their last known surviving family member.

She's currently working to have an autobiography written by her grandfather published. In addition, she's worked in education for 40 years for the Modern School, Fordham, Schomburg Library, and the East Harlem Council for Community Improvement.

Ms. Edwards, you are recognized for five minutes.

#### STATEMENT OF MELANIE EDWARDS

Ms. EDWARDS. Thank you.

Good morning, Committee Members. My name is Melanie Edwards. The song that you are considering today for national hymn status was composed by my grandfather, J. Rosamond Johnson. Not John, not John Johnson, not John Rosamond. Simply, J. Rosamond Johnson. Thank you.

The lyrics were written by his brother, James Weldon Johnson. When people have asked before this occasion, how do I feel about the song, I've answered honestly, much to their disappointment and dismay.

This melody is one of many, some 200, according to ASCAP—American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers—that my grandfather created while the lyrics began "Life is a Poem" was just one of many others that my granduncle wrote.

This song is a small part of both men's artistic output, so I have no sense of it being an unusually remarkable achievement. I am, however, always humbled and impressed by the staying power it has had. Few things over 100 years old are referenced for their relevance or timeliness.

This quality is what I hope you, making your decision today, keep in mind. "Lift Every Voice and Sing" still speaks to many people in this time and this place, while it speaks also to people of many races, faiths, and conditions around the world.

Like the Black man who created it, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" comments eloquently and accurately about history, hope, vision, and perseverance.

In 1913, my grandfather was working in London when he met my grandmother, Nora, and they conceived my mother, Mildred. Although Rosamond experienced the wrenching social changes of the post-Reconstruction and burgeoning Jim Crow era, he chose to return to his home, his country, so that his daughter would be born in America in Jacksonville.

His brother also had opportunities to see other countries, but he, too, chose to stand by his native land, even when it didn't always stand by him.

So, I ask for your support of bill H.R. 301, not for me—I get no benefit personally or financially. The song is in public domain. I do appeal, however, to your sense of history and legacy.

I have pride in the legacy that is “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” By your designating it the national hymn, which is what James Weldon himself called it, you add another piece to America’s already great cultural legacy and heft.

Greatness is not just defined by strength or use of force. Great nations, like great people, are additionally magnanimous, self-aware, and self-correcting.

By approving this bill, your legacy will be acknowledging the dark and gloomy past of American history yet, assuring others that grace and continued effort are rewarded by change—social, economic, and spiritual.

This song penned by my forbearers to America, for America, I invite you to claim it as your legacy and your gift from America to the world.

Thank you for your time.

[The statement of Ms. Edwards follows:]

Good morning, Committee Members.

My name is Melanie Edwards. The song that you are considering today for National Hymn status was composed by my grandfather J. Rosamond Johnson. The lyrics were written by his brother James Weldon Johnson. When people have asked before this occasion how do I feel about the song I have answered honestly, much to their disappointment and dismay. This melody is one of many, some 200 according to ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) that my grandfather created while the lyrics, that began life as a poem, was just one of many others that my grand uncle wrote. This is a small part of both men's artistic output, so I have no sense of it being an unusually remarkable achievement. I am, however, always humbled and impressed by the staying power it has had. Few things over one hundred years old are referenced for their relevance or timeliness. This quality is what I hope you, making your decision today, keep in mind. Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing still speaks to many people in this time and this place while it speaks also to people of many races, faiths and conditions around the world. Like the Black men who created it, Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing comments eloquently and accurately about history, hope, vision and perseverance.

In 1913, my grandfather was working in London when he married my grandmother Nora, and conceived my mother Mildred. Although Rosamond experienced the wrenching social changes of the Post Re - construction and burgeoning Jim Crow era, he chose to return to his home, his country, so that his daughter was born in America in Jacksonville. His brother also had opportunities to see other countries, but he too chose to stand by his native land even when it didn't always stand by him.

So, I ask for your support of bill H.R.301 not for me, I get no benefit personally or financially; the song is in Public Domain. I do appeal to your sense of History and Legacy. I have pride in the legacy that is Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing. By your designating it the National Hymn, which is what James Weldon himself called it, you add another piece to America's already great cultural legacy and heft. Greatness is not just defined by strength or use of force, great nations like great people are additionally: magnanimous, self-aware and self-correcting. By approving this bill your legacy will be acknowledging the "dark and gloomy past" of American history yet assuring others that grace and continued effort are rewarded by change: Social, Economic and Spiritual. This song penned by my forebearers to America for America, I invite you to claim it as your legacy and your gift from America to the World. Thank you for your time.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Ms. Edwards. I appreciate your testimony and everybody else's testimony.

I think—Mr. Clyburn, if you could help me with this—I'm guessing 20 minutes for the second vote, 20 minutes between the second and 20 between the second and third, 20 between the third and fourth.

People can get their votes done before—First, I guess we should adjourn for safety. Thirty minutes should get us back. Everybody gets up there and votes immediately on the last one. We could probably get back in 30 minutes.

So, with that, we're going to take a recess unless Mr. Clyburn thinks we should make it a little longer. You okay with 30 minutes?

Mr. CLYBURN. Yes. There'll still be votes left if we did that. I don't know how many questions you might ask. I think you've got time for about 12 minutes of questions if you'd like to take it now, and I'll make sure you get to vote.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you. We'll go ahead with questions.

Mr. CLYBURN. I would like—

Mr. COHEN. I think it's—

Mr. CLYBURN. Yeah.

Mr. COHEN. It might be tight, but we'll go ahead and start.

Mr. CLYBURN. Yeah, because I don't want to keep the Witnesses here too long.

Mr. COHEN. All right. Normally, I'd recognize myself, but I'm going to yield to other Members because of the time, and I'll recognize Mr. Nadler first.

Chair NADLER. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. André, can you discuss how the feelings of community and connectivity that this song engenders applies for all people that listen to it, not just African Americans?

Dr. ANDRE. Absolutely. Thank you very much for your question.

I think that the issue of community is born in a history of where the hymn—what it means, and it seems to just match so nicely on here, and it's wonderful to have it clarified that this was called a hymn from the beginning, although—and to get this history correct, because so many times people want to call it an anthem.

Yet, I really appreciate what this bill—excuse me, what this House resolution is doing to say that it's a hymn. I think the hymn has enough sort of a history that makes it do many things but, basically, a song of praise that goes back to antiquity that includes areas around the world that has a very strong part in Christian and Byzantine liturgies.

So, that sort of roots it in a religious setting. It's something that everybody is meant to sing, especially after the Protestant Reformation when communal singing became a thing.

It then also becomes an issue for the civil rights era and what we're seeing right now as it keeps being used in political situations as well as just for fun.

In my written statement, I included a link to a video of the U.S. Navy in Jacksonville, Florida, with a multiracial group of people dressed in uniform performing, "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

So, please let me know if I can clarify that more. This idea of belonging for lots of people, there's—calling it a hymn really just hits it right on the nose and, I feel, gets it right.

Chair NADLER. Thank you. Dr. Reece, can you please describe the significance of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” as it relates to the history of this country?

Dr. REECE. Yes. Thank you for the question.

I think that the significance rests in, really, how it captures the story of this nation, the struggles that we have endured as a nation, and the struggles that African Americans have endured.

Part of that history is a way of remembering—for the country, a way of remembering where we have been and a continual reminder that history is a part of us, but also the sense of possibility and be able to move beyond that history—when the enslaved were free, when they moved into the 20th century and pursued elements in pursuit of self-determination, equality for all.

So, it is a message to African Americans but is a message to all of us, and I think that's why it's embraced across the world. It is poetic, it is musical, and it is something that we can all embody and remember.

Chair NADLER. Thank you.

Mr. Washington, how does the city of Jacksonville continue to honor the legacy of “Lift Every Voice and Sing?”

Mr. WASHINGTON. What we're currently doing we're actually building a park—the “Lift Every Voice and Sing” Park. It's scheduled to be started in the end of this month, and it shows that—fortunately for us, we found the exact first site. It's going to build on the birth site and the place where the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was written. So, we bring Jacksonville, we bring everybody to the place, and to get Jacksonville involved we had some—a non-traditional hall—what am I looking—a non-traditional meeting. We had 350 people onsite with a marching band of the Ed Wallace University, a 150-member choir, and we all sung “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

So, does that answer your question?

Chair NADLER. Yeah, I think it does.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you.

Mr. Johnson, you're recognized for as much time as you can get through with.

You need your mic. You need to turn your mute off.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Sorry. Sorry. I'll be very brief. I had a number of questions, but I'll just ask one that I'm just curious about.

I used to be a religious liberty defense litigator, and I'm anticipating some resistance that because this is a hymn, which is what we all love about it, clearly, includes religious language.

Do any of you anticipate that some activist groups might oppose its use and rendition in public schools or venues? They will falsely claim, of course, that it's some sort of establishment of religion or it's offensive to someone. Is that—have you all thought that through?

Maybe Mr. Clyburn, or maybe I'd direct it to my senior colleague.

Mr. CLYBURN. Well, thank you very much. I'll respond to that this way. I was born and raised in a parsonage, and my church was Fundamentalist Christian Church—Protestant. We were right across the street from St. Jude Catholic Church.

I learned how to box from a Catholic priest. I'll never forget Father Hagerty because what he taught me saved me a lot of pain growing up.

So, there's always going to be differences of religious opinion when it comes to things like this. So, I did not say that you will not get that kind of a reaction from some people.

I do say, however, that the universality of this song cuts across race, gender, religious grounds, and though the song will not be imposed on anybody, it's just that when you want to recognize the unity that flows from the song that you may put it on your programs to be sung.

What we would love to establish and all the people with whom I've had this discussion, including my long-time friend, Leon Russell, this is all about having a national hymn as opposed to what could very well be divisive as a Black national anthem.

We have one national anthem, and we are saying let's have one national hymn as a gesture of bringing us together.

You don't impose the singing of the national anthem on anybody at a school or any church. This is not an imposition.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. That's well said. Anybody can opt out. I think you're exactly right.

Chair NADLER. Mr. Chair, could I just add that the fourth verse of the "Star-Spangled Banner," our national anthem, is chock full of references to God, to in God we trusts.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. That's exactly right, Mr. Chair.

Chair NADLER. So, I believe, actually, on those grounds it's already done.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. They don't let anybody sing the fourth passage. That's right. That's why. Look, I'll just say, I could defend it in court if it was ever challenged and I would suggest to those who will that you would reference the Supreme Court in 1952, *Zorach v. Clauston*. It said we are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being, and you would suggest that this is something that recognizes our deep heritage and tradition in this country, and it's not an imposition of religion on anybody.

So, I offer that for the good of the order. I yield back for the interests of time.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Johnson, and we'll recognize—

Mr. CLYBURN. Would the gentleman—

Mr. COHEN. Yes?

Mr. CLYBURN. My best advice is now to one more question, then we should go to the floor, and I think we'll have time for one more answer.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you.

Mr. Raskin, you're recognized and then we put on our track shoes. Mr. Raskin, are you with us?

[No response.]

Mr. COHEN. He's already got his track shoes on, I guess.

Mr. CLYBURN. Yeah. It looks like he's already gone to the floor.

Mr. COHEN. Ms. Ross, you're going to take over for Mr. Raskin.

[No response.]

Mr. COHEN. Ms. Ross has taken off as well, I think.

Mr. CLYBURN. Yeah. Well, let's just move to the floor.

Mr. COHEN. All right. Thank you. We're going to—an hour—we'll be in recess for an hour until 11:13 Eastern Time. Thank you, everybody.

[Whereupon, a recess was taken.]

Mr. COHEN. I'm going to declare us back in order, back in session and recess over. No more milk and cookies.

Next, I guess, in our hearing—I guess the last Witness was going to be Mr. Raskin. Are you back with us yet, Jamie? Jamie's not with us. Ms. Ross, are you with us?

All right, team, this is not good. Hank Johnson, you're not there. Ms. Garcia, you're there, aren't you? Sylvia? Well, she was. Her chair's there, it's empty.

Ms. Bush? Ms. Jackson Lee? Well, we'll continue the colloquy between me and Mr. Russell on ancient Tennessee political history. There's Congressman Johnson making his way back.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Mr. Chair, I think Burgess Owens, Mr. Owens would have some questions if that's in order. I don't know how you want to go with the timing.

Mr. COHEN. You're doing a great job, Mr. Johnson. You were right about the four votes, and you're right about Mr. Owens. The Chair will now recognize Mr. Burgess Owens for five minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Great.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Owens? You're recognized for five minutes, Mr. Owens. Unmute your—somebody unmute Mr. Owens. Mr. Johnson, can you unmute Mr. Owens?

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. I wish. I'm at the airport.

Mr. COHEN. Oh. Mr. Owens, are you with us? Mr. Johnson, I think he's still muted.

Mr. OWENS. One second—okay, how's that?

Mr. COHEN. That's good.

Mr. OWENS. I apologize.

Mr. COHEN. You're recognized for five minutes, Mr. Owens. Blow, hurricane, blow.

Mr. OWENS. Am I okay now to speak really quick?

Mr. COHEN. You're on five minutes to question our Witnesses or speak—it's your five minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Okay, thank you so much. Thank you so much, Congressman Cohen. I won't take but a few minutes. I just want to say first, thank you to all the Witnesses for your comments. I've enjoyed it.

I grew up in the Deep South, and I can say to Mr. Henderson, you're so correct, this country is all about becoming a more perfect union. I'm just excited about the fact about—I kind of reflect real quickly. I grew up in Tallahassee in the shadow of the Florida A&M campus.

At 12 years old I was demonstrating in front of the Florida State Theater with a group of college people that really believed in our nation, they believed in our nonviolent demonstration. The effort's really showing up to be a really, really good [inaudible] for us.



With that being said, I remember also in high school, those days where this song was actually the marching for graduating seniors, the marching song, the hymn for that.

I just want to say, to fast forward, to go from there to where we are today, when we have this remarkable panel of success, of diversity, all races, creeds, and colors. We do need to have something that's going to bring us together.

I tell you, and I won't take too long on this, but that last stanza of the song says it all to me. "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, true to our native land."

That speaks it all, to not only what's happening today, but what happened to that great generation that came before us, that believed in our nation, that succeeded. Just think what the author of this song, he was—he was faithful, he's writing about the family, free market, and about education.

That was that great generation that gave us this stanza of this song that we can come together with and bring our country back together. This has to be something—again, it's a hymn. It's not to take the place of our national anthem.

I love that part of it, too, we can agree on it, that this represents all Americans. The strength, the fight, the overcoming, the coming together is what this hymn really stands for.

So, I want to thank you guys for the opportunity to speak a little real quickly. I'm thankful to have seen the growth we've had and where we've come from and where we are today.

So, with that being said, I don't have very many—don't have any questions, just want to thank you for presence. Congressman Cohen, thank you for leading this, and of course Congressman Johnson, thanks for leading this process for sure. I yield back.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Owens, appreciate your remarks and your brevity. Ms. Ross, you're recognized for five minutes, or as much time if you need to take less than five minutes.

Ms. ROSS. Well, thank you very much, Chair Cohen. I don't see Whip Clyburn, but thanks to him for his initiative here.

I am from North Carolina and long participating in religious services, NAACP events, and all sorts of events where we sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing." I will just say that the way that it sets the tone for whatever occasion we're participating in, it brings people together.

It's an honor to be here and learn even more about the history of this hymn, and to recognize and say out loud that Black Americans have experienced trauma, abuse, and inequity because of slavery, segregation, and racism. We have always have found a way to rise up. We need to celebrate that, and we need to do that across party lines, across race, and across areas of the country.

I want to just ask a few questions of some of our distinguished panel Members. Dr. André, to you first. I really love how you talked about what a hymn is and what it has meant in every culture.

So, why is it important for our country in particular, the United States, to have a hymn, and even more than one hymn, that are representative of our diversity and our people?

Dr. ANDRÉ. Thank you for your question. I'm glad that the background of what a hymn is, it just felt like it would be a really relevant conversation here. Because the hymn has all, it goes back far and it has religious and nonreligious, and even in the Oxford English Dictionary talking about sort of praise for one's country, it feels like this is an important way to come together.

When you designate—we have a wide repertory of songs that a lot of Americans know and songs that people that vary with different times. This one has shown a staying power. To elevate it to the space of a national hymn allows us to feel that we can come together.

It's something where you don't need an instrument, you sing your song. It helps people have more access to the words to get to know the song if it has the standing.

Just bringing every voice together, and the words seem to connect to experiences of being here in the U.S., of having its association with African Americans. With being human and having good times as well as having a tough history.

Having a hymn is something that everybody can do. You don't need elaborate things. If it's brought to that position, it says that we have a lot of songs that are important to many people, but here is a song that has a particular importance.

Our singing it, it's a song that is—the national anthem is a terrific work, but it's in the 18th century. Here's a song right on the dawn of the 19th, 20th century, and it feels a little more connected. We have relatives, with Melanie Edwards, who is here, who spoke so beautifully about her connection to these really august folks.

It's nice to be able to have that connection when so many African Americans don't know sort of what their background is. So, it brings in a beautiful way the non-too-distant past right up to the present, and we can sing it together.

So, I think there's a collectivity you have. You can stand in silence, but there's even more when voices come together.

Ms. ROSS. Great. Dr. Reece, how important would it be to have "Lift Every Voice and Sing" be our national hymn to your work at the National Museum of African American History and Culture? What would that mean?

Dr. REECE. Well, I can't—it's hard to predict the meaning. I would frame a response about what the hymn represents in the terms of the power of music. It crossed my mind that music, American music, is one of the most visible examples that we have of America's pluralistic society.

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" encapsulates that. I would find few people to argue about the power that music has as something that's universal to all human beings to bind people together in the spirit of creating music, singing songs, and just representing and binding people together and serving as a beacon, as guidance and moving forward.

So, when you think about the historical and cultural significance of—just think about that alone, the meaning, I believe, speaks for itself.

Ms. ROSS. Thank you very much, and I yield back.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, thank you, Representative Ross. Next, I'll recognize Representative Fischbach, are you still with us? Representative Fischbach is not with us.

Is Representative Jackson Lee with us? There she is. Representative Jackson Lee from Houston, Texas. As I always say, where they not only sing, but they dance.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. There's a great history in Houston, Texas. Obviously, we're in right now studying an Emancipation Trail that starts from the announcement of the freed slaves by General Granger. So, thank you, Mr. Chair, for this hearing. Let me cite you.

All should know that Chair Cohen has been at the forefront of the voting rights trial and tribulation and advocacy, and out of his Committee and its fine work came H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop—Study Slavery and Develop Reparations.

Now, this couldn't be more appropriate, the leadership, under the leadership of James Clyburn, his legislation, for it to come under Chair Cohen's Committee. I'm glad to be a member of it, as he knows. I just want to thank him very much.

Let me quickly submit to the record, it may have already been, the "Lift Every Voice and Sing" lyrics, I'd like to submit it the record. Ask unanimous consent.

Mr. COHEN. Without objection.

[The information follows:]



**MS. JACKSON LEE FOR THE RECORD**

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## **Lift Every Voice and Sing**

Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening 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 has brought us thus far on the way  
Thou who has 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  
Our native land

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. I'd like to read these four lines; I think it's four lines. "Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of liberty; let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies."

What a patriotic group of words. "Ring with the harmonies of liberty. Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies."

I only have a short time, and so Witnesses, I'm going to go very quickly on this question. All you need to do is say yes or no.

Is this an attempt to replace the Star-Spangled Banner, the national anthem? Chair Russell, yes or no?

Mr. RUSSELL. No.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Professor Reece, Director Reece? Professor Reece?

Dr. REECE. I don't see it in that way, no.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Shana Redmond. Naomi André.

Dr. ANDRÉ. No.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Lloyd Washington.

Mr. WASHINGTON. No.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Melanie Edwards.

Ms. EDWARDS. No.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Henderson.

Mr. HENDERSON. No.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. I think that's an important affirmation of what and how important this message would be.

We have a Star-Spangled Banner, we honor it. Now, we have the opportunity to ensure that we have a hymn. Hymn by its very nature, I'm not a musician but I've had them in my family, is a healing and gathering piece.

So, Chair Russell, my time is short. I am a witness to the scenes of the wonderful "Lift Every Voice" and the NAACP for all the decades I've gone as a life member. Can you just say again how powerful the beginning of your conference and what you see happening in the people's faces when you sing "Lift Every Voice"?

Mr. RUSSELL. I think, Congressman Jackson Lee, that whenever we perform, wherever we are, it sets the tone for the kind of meeting that we are going to hold. As you well know, we never have a meeting that we don't begin or end with "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

I wanted to bring up just one thought across the board here, and that is this song has a majesty. It has a majesty that lifts it above many other songs. I've heard it song by the Cookman College Choir and so many others. I've heard it sung for the first time by the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. RUSSELL. Thousands of voices.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. Let me ask Associate Director Reece and Professor André, if I could get an answer from all the Witnesses. Hymns I view as healing, and I think the question that we need to present to America is that fact that no matter who you are, you would find a comfort of standing, sitting, or hearing this song.

Because a hymn—we've voting on not the Black hymn, we're voting on the national hymn. I think we have to make it very clear

what—no matter who we are, feel a healing sense or unifying sense in this time.

So, if you all would go to answering that so that I get that on the record, what makes it more potent that this would be an appropriate national anthem.

I'll start with Reece, please. Chair's indulgence. I'd appreciate it if you all would go quickly in your answers.

Dr. REECE. Sure, Congresswoman Lee. I believe that is the sole purpose of the hymn. "Lift Every Voice and Sing" functions in that way in religious settings and outside religious settings.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you, Redmond. I'm sorry I'm calling you by your last name if you're there.

Dr. REDMOND. That's fine, thank you. My apologies, I lost sound and had to log back on.

There are already precedents for this song being taken up in communities, various communities in the United States, various faith traditions from Jewish to various Christian, Protestant as well as Catholic denominations.

Also, being translated internationally, right. Having been used in Angola and being translated into Mbundu. Having been requested for use in Japan and being published in Japan in 1936. So, there's already precedents for this song being used across cultures, across national boundaries even.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. Professor André, then Washington—

Dr. ANDRÉ. "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is a national hymn for all American peoples, absolutely. It's being used this way, and it's wonderful to give it this recognition.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Professor—President Washington.

Mr. WASHINGTON. I agree with that. As a song it speaks to all people, not just [inaudible].

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Melanie Edwards.

Ms. EDWARDS. The song reflects the men who wrote it. They were African Americans in America, but they saw themselves as citizens of the country, and so the lyrics invite others to face reality, but move forward and be hopeful.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. We thank you for your family's legacy, by the way. We thank you for being here, and we believe this is a tribute for the rainbow of Americans. Isn't wonderful we've sung it, and not divisively, but in a unifying manner.

I want to thank all the Witnesses that are here. Mr. Henderson, thank you so very much for your service to this nation and your civil rights legacy.

Thanks to all those who now made an excellent record that no matter who you are in America, you could stand and sing this song and feel comforted and feel approved and affirmed and not divided.

Mr. Chair, I thank you for allowing the extra for these Witnesses to place that on the record, and I yield back. Thank you so very much.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Ms. Jackson Lee. Now, I'd like to recognize Mr. Jamie Raskin for five minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chair, thank you very much. I'm sorry it's been such a choppy day with all the voting, and it was especially tough



for me because I was carrying proxies for, I think eight or nine colleagues. So, forgive me for being late, everybody.

I was able to check out some of the earlier testimony, I want to thank the Witnesses for their excellent testimony.

I wonder if anyone would be prepared to address the question of where “Lift Every Voice and Sing” fits into American music generally. How it would serve to enrich our musical lexicon if we were to formally embrace it and adopt it in this way. I don’t know, perhaps Ms. André or—could you address that?

Dr. ANDRÉ. Sure, I’ll jump—thank for that, and I’ll jump in very quickly and others can add their voices.

In American music history we have hymns, we have protest songs, we have songs of praise, and they overlap with different categories. The fact that we have this song, which started very connected with the Black community, and then within its first 50 years it became very associated with other different American, and as Professor Redmond has shown us, even outside of America.

This is a song that has already risen in music historiography as having a particularly important place. Our recognition of it as a national hymn I really feel is almost giving it a title that it has already fulfilled.

Mr. RASKIN. Very next then, Professor Redmond, can I come to you?

Dr. REDMOND. Yes, I would agree with especially that last sentiment. I think sonically the song actually fits very, very comfortably inside of many of the singing traditions that we already have established through our kind of civic duties as citizens.

Is one that has a kind of melodic line that is in some respects more accessible than something like the Star-Spangled Banner, right. That there are levels of difficulty to all these songs, but that “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” especially because it was written for children, right, is already keeping in mind the kinds of capacities of its singers.

So, it is accessible to people in that, even if the language is sometimes a little bit different, right. We’re inheriting the kinds of linguistic traditions of the late 19th century in all these songs.

So, there is some learning curve, but it fits sonically very beautifully inside of what our national songs are already accomplishing.

Mr. RASKIN. Yeah, I know a song about the late Chilean singer Victor Jara which goes, “You can kill a singer, but you can’t kill a song.” I wonder what this song represents to you, Professor Redmond, let me just stick with you for a second.

I know everybody projects different meanings and different interpretations onto all forms of art and all forms of music, so it doesn’t have one single meaning. You’ve studied it so deeply and understand it in a very rich way.

What would you say the thematic resonance is of the song for you?

Dr. REDMOND. I think that one of the most significant through-lines in the song are two-fold. One is a “we-ness,” that there is something about collectivity that is urgent and necessary for our best successes moving forward. That there’s always a “we” in mind.

That stems both from its four-part composition from J. Rosamond Johnson, all the way through the lyrics of the song that it is always meant to be sung together.

Then secondly, I think the messaging of the song really is about perseverance and transcendence, right. That there's a struggle that is in front of us, but it is worthy of taking up. That will be fruitful, it will be successful in the final result.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, I love that. The point of the "we-ness" of it, the universality of it of course comes through in the very first line, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." I remember as a kid the first time I sang it, and a lot of kids didn't want to sing it.

I remember very clearly the teacher saying this song tells you we need every person's voice; we need everybody singing. It's not just for the kids who love to sing, it's for everybody even if you're a little shy about singing. That's beautiful.

Of course, the theme of perseverance, which has been so much the hallmark of the African American struggle in America is something that speaks also universally to everybody. Because everybody has been experiencing struggle.

So, I'm thrilled about this legislation, Mr. Clyburn. I thank you so much for bringing this forward. It's beautiful legislation that I hope will be unifying across every line in America. I thank all these Witnesses for this great testimony.

I yield back to you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Representative Raskin. I think Representative Johnson had a question or two. Since he's at the airport with a plane about to leave, I'm going to recognize him ahead of Ms. Fischbach.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. I thank you for that, Mr. Chair, your indulgence.

Just, I'll be brief, but is Mr. Henderson still available? I'm on my phone so I can't see all streams.

Mr. COHEN. Yes, he is.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Let me just ask Mr. Henderson, it's sort of an open-ended question, but we've all—everyone has been very articulate this morning about what I would view the greatness of America. We are an exceptional nation.

We all acknowledge, of course, that we're still in this—in this sometimes difficult, long process of becoming a more perfect union.

So, I give you an open mic, an open platform to just share with us your view, I would love to hear on what are some of the most important things that we can and should be doing right now in that regard, making it a more perfect union?

Mr. HENDERSON. Well, for me, it ties into the words of Dr. King that we should continue to live together as brothers lest we perish together as fools. We need as much unification as possible at this particular point in time in the history of America because of all the various things that are happening. First, a communication system that is ongoing, continual, 24/7. So, as long as we understand this song actually stands for what it says, its place in history cannot be taken. We need to use it as a message for unifying and not to be divisive.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. That's a good answer. I think everyone in the hearing today has acknowledged the importance of keep-

ing the national anthem and making it a national hymn and not confusing the two. I just wonder if, and maybe this is a rhetorical question, but is there some risk that this effort will create confusion?

In other words, that you know, the average constituent average, everyday American will see Congress pass something like this and they'll confuse it? Because there has been a lot of—maybe it's misleading headlines over the last year or so about things like this.

So, is there going to—is there a risk that we stir up controversy with everyone's good faith effort here to do something noble, that somehow we create more confusion or division by this misunderstanding of this as a competing national anthem? Does that make sense? What would you say about that, Mr. Henderson?

Mr. HENDERSON. In all things, we freedom of speech, we have risk, and we have reward. We need to be able to explain to whomsoever that might be adverse "Lift Every Voice and Sing," what it really means.

That's one of the challenges we have in this country right now, is that far too many people in this country do not know the history of this country. Therefore, they speak on opinion rather than fact.

So, I'm so grateful that we've had a number of people on here giving the history of it so that we understand that it is a unifying hymn and not a divisive hymn. Even if you do hear someone that thinks it should not be, then to be able to explain to them what it really means.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. I think that's well said. Look, one thing I'm sure we all agree on is that there's a—we have a problem in this country with cultural illiteracy, civic illiteracy, right. It transcends every socioeconomic line and every State and every place.

So, maybe something like this can help in that regard to help educate all of us, all America again. So, with that regard, it could be a noble pursuit. So, I appreciate all the Witnesses again for the time.

Sorry for the confusion. As Mr. Raskin said, it's been a crazy day on the Hill. I'm sorry for the background noise at the airport, and I yield back.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Johnson. I now recognize Ms. Garcia. Five minutes.

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank the sponsor of this proposal. I think it's very important that we move forward.

Coming from Houston and coming from Texas, I've grown with this hymn, and I've grown with Juneteenth celebrations. I've grown with a lot of rich cultural history that adds to the diversity of our great city. I think this is a fitting way to kick-start, if you will, National Black History Month.

Today's hearing reaffirms the unwavering commitment of this Committee and this congress to advance in equity, racial justice, and opportunity. Recognizing our African American history of struggles and resilience is a step in the right direction towards a path of healing, reconciliation, and reunion.

Music does bring people together. I don't know how the church that doesn't at some point try to bring their congregation together

with good music. So, I think that it's important that we recognize this hymn.

So, my questions are for the historians in the group, and I wanted to begin with Ms. Reece. Ms. Reece, apparently, and I've learned today from reading all this, that a song is not a song, and is a song. They are hymns, they are anthems.

Could you tell us the difference between a hymn and an anthem?

Dr. REECE. Thank you for that question. In fact, the term hymn and anthem, they are frequently if not often used interchangeably. A hymn is particularly designed in a religious setting, in a worship setting. Anthems, people rally around for a particular cause.

I think what's also interesting to note that in society, we can adopt anything, any piece of music, and declare that it serves a purpose that may not be its original intent.

So, any piece could become an anthem, maybe not necessarily any piece can be a hymn. It is coalescing around the idea of what piece of music is supposed to symbolize.

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you for that. Ms. André, you've studied this area also. Has there ever been any other hymns that have been made national hymns, there's ever been a thought before to make a hymn a national hymn?

Dr. ANDRÉ. I actually don't know that history in terms of the United States or other countries with—recognizing national hymns. I would like to support what my colleague Dwandalyn Reece has mentioned about hymns and anthems are the meaning we give them.

My history before where we're going back to antiquity and up through the liturgy is that hymns particularly have a very malleable and flexible meaning. So, they can symbolize devotion and God, and country is one. So, I just, I'm sorry, I don't know the other national hymns.

I think you don't really hear about them. Going back to an earlier question, would this be confusing for the American public. I think we all have our national anthem, and we love the national anthem, even if it is a little hard to sing.

We have the complexity and the sophistication to realize that you can have more than one important national music, national song. This not being the anthem but being elevated as a hymn adds the sense of belonging and so many, I can think of any other song besides the national anthem, that people know so well.

So, in terms of making—we're setting a really wonderful precedent to have music speak in this way.

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you. I'll then defer to Ms. Reece, do you happen to know the answer to my question?

Dr. REECE. Actually, I have learned, and I can't speak to the specifics, but there have been several instances where hymns have been put forward in this country as designated national hymns. I don't believe they have passed, but within the last day or two I was informed of that very fact. I wouldn't like—

Ms. GARCIA. Since many of you have already testified, this is not meant to supplant or replace. It's a hymn, not an anthem. As Mr. Henderson said, we would not let this symbolic gesture, device—it's about division.

Because as Mr. Clyburn has said from the beginning, if you hear the song, and I've heard it so many times and sung it on many occasions in Houston, at a swearing-in a mayor and funerals. I graduated from TSU, a historically Black college, from their law school, at the graduation.

It is part of the culture, it's part—and not just really, frankly, that African American culture, but it's part of Houston's culture. Because it reflects the diversity of our city.

So, I'm really excited about this, and I wanted to just say thank you to Ms. Edwards for being here and sharing your story. Because obviously what you have inherited and the legacy that you carry is so important to not only your community, but to the entire country. So, thank you for being here, and thank you to all the Witnesses.

Mr. Chairman, I see my time has expired, so I'll have to yield back.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Ms. Garcia, I appreciate it. Ms. Fischbach, are you present and waiting, and I think you're still with us, I hope? No, Ms. Fischbach. I guess she must have needed to go catch an airplane or something.

Well, with that I want to thank all of Witnesses for their testimony and their time. It was educational. Thank Mr. Clyburn, he's back. He was subbing for Mr. Hoyer and doing the—

Mr. CLYBURN. Colloquy.

Mr. COHEN. With Mr. Scalise. In your absence, Ms. Ross questioned and testified how she appreciated your bringing this bill for us, and so did Ms. Garcia and Mr. Raskin. We appreciate it, it's being a very enlightening and inspiring committee. I'm proud to chair it. Thank you for bringing it.

With that, this will conclude today's hearing, unless Mr. Clyburn has anything to close with.

Mr. CLYBURN. I just want to thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank all our Witnesses here today for the very enlightened discussion here. I assure all you, as I said in my opening remarks. I get a bit uncomfortable. I grew up in a little town in South Carolina. Mary McLeod Bethune was from Mayesville.

I remember on one occasion her expressing a little bit of discomfort with the reference to "Lift Every Voice and Sing" being the "Negro National Anthem." We are one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. We should have one national anthem for all.

I think it would elevate the human spirit, it will help bring us together, and God knows we need to come together, by naming, making "Lift Every Voice and Sing," such an iconic song, our national hymn. That will bring us together in a very significant way.

I am hopeful that the Committee, Subcommittee and Full Committee, will see their way clear to report this out. I think the votes are in the House to pass it.

Ms. EDWARDS. Could I leave you this?

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Clyburn. Yes, ma'am, Ms. Edwards?

Ms. EDWARDS. Could I leave this comment quickly? I think you have a wonderful opportunity to remind people that the composers saw it as a hymn, not as an anthem.

Mr. CLYBURN. Absolutely.

Ms. EDWARDS. To beat that little drum in public, that we never separate ourselves from the country.

Mr. CLYBURN. Absolutely. Thank you so much—absolutely.

Ms. EDWARDS. Use that as a teaching point. I'm an old teacher. Use that as a teaching point, a learning moment.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Ms. Edwards, and thank you, Mr. Whip, and thank you all the Witnesses and the Members of the Committee who participated today.

So, that will conclude our hearing. Without objection—our Witnesses, you might have somebody submit questions in writing which people could do up to five—I think we have five days to submit questions. There may be questions that are sent to you for a request that you answer them. Five legislative days just for Members to submit written questions.

With that, the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon the Subcommittee was adjourned at 12:06 p.m.]

