**Lift Every Voice and Sing**

Lift Every Voice and Sing – often called “The Black National Anthem” – was written as a poem by NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) and then set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954) in 1899. It was first performed in public in the Johnsons’ hometown of Jacksonville, Florida as part of a celebration of Lincoln’s Birthday on February 12, 1900 by a choir of 500 schoolchildren at the segregated Stanton School, where James Weldon Johnson was principal.

It is a protest, a hymn, and a prayer of profound significance for black people. (Scroll for more about Johnson below.)

Lyrics:

Lift ev’ry voice and sing,

‘Til earth and heaven ring,

Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;

Let our rejoicing rise

High as the list’ning skies,

Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,

Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;

Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,

Let us march on ’til 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,

‘Til 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.

**More About James Weldon Johnson**

James Weldon Johnson (June 17, 1871 – June 26, 1938) was an American author, educator, lawyer, diplomat, songwriter, and civil rights activist.

Johnson is widely celebrated for his leadership of the NAACP, where he began working in 1917. In 1920 he was the first African American to be chosen as executive secretary of the organization, effectively the operating officer. He served in that position from 1920 to 1930.

Johnson established his reputation as a writer, and was known during the Harlem Renaissance for his poems, novels, and anthologies collecting both poems and spirituals of black culture.

He was appointed under President Theodore Roosevelt as US consul in Venezuela and Nicaragua for most of the period from 1906 to 1913.

In 1934 he became the first African-American professor to be hired at New York University. Later in life he served as a professor of creative literature and writing at Fisk University, a historically black university.