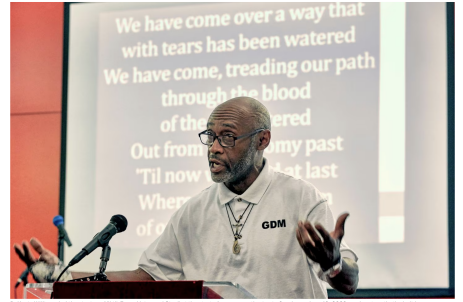




LETTERS

## Not every voice is rising to Black national anthem

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© Kevin Williams for the singing of 'Lift Every Voice and Sing' at the start of a prayer gathering in Omaha on June 30, 2021, on Juneteenth, the holiday celebrating the day in 1865 that all enslaved Black people learned they had been freed from bondage. NATHANIRN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

### For creator of 'Lift Every Voice and Sing,' the intention was to create a hymn

I appreciated Jeff Jacoby's column on the singing of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" ("[Conservatives should embrace 'Lift Every Voice,'](#)" Opinion, Sept. 13).

I am pleased that Jacoby used the term "hymn" to describe the song. James Weldon Johnson, who wrote [the lyrics](#) for "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which [was presented](#) in 1900, did not refer to it as an anthem. He called it a hymn in his autobiography, "Along This Way," and it was popularized as "Lift Every Voice and Sing" because that was the first line.

In fact, Johnson's original handwritten title for the song in 1900 was "[National Hymn.](#)" The [Library of Congress](#) received two copies of the song on Oct. 19, 1900, and "National Hymn" appears on the title page.

Representative James Clyburn of South Carolina introduced a [bill in the 117th Congress to establish "Lift Every Voice and Sing"](#) as the official "national hymn" of the United States.

If, by "conservatives," Jacoby meant Republicans, then his column is especially appropriate. Though it may not be well known today, Johnson (like many Black citizens in the 19th century) was active in Republican politics. He played a role in the [Colored Republican Club](#) of New York and worked to elect President Theodore Roosevelt with his networking and organizational skills. Johnson later was named US consul to Venezuela by Roosevelt.

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" is part of the nation's treasured cultural legacy, and I am glad it was spotlighted in the Globe.

Rufus E. Jones Jr.  
President  
James Weldon Johnson Foundation  
Great Barrington

### Whatever universality is found, this piece is written to speak to Black listeners

While I'm pleased with Jeff Jacoby's critique of the right-wing putdown of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," I think he may have missed the point of some of the lyrics if he believes that they were not intended especially for Black listeners or had "no hint of racial animus."

Consider, for example a line from the second verse: “Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, felt in the days when hope unborn had died.”

Clearly, the “we” is Black people and the abuse they’d endured up to that time.

Or: “We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.”

Black tears.

Or: “We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered.”

For what it’s worth, I’m a white man who learned this song through my Unitarian Universalist Church’s Juneteenth celebrations.

Steven Brooks  
Whitman

### **Diversity or division? ‘Star-Spangled Banner’ gets shoved aside.**

I’ve been attending men’s soccer games at Clark University since 2021. It is unnerving to be asked to stand for the “Black national anthem” prior to the national anthem of the United States. I think this is an attempt to be inclusive, but it’s misguided.

As a patriot, whose grandfathers, father, uncles, brothers, and husband all served proudly in various branches of the armed forces, I stand, as asked, for both.

As a musician, I think “Lift Every Voice And Sing” is a pretty song, but it is not this country’s anthem. America is one nation with one national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Come together, lift every voice, and sing *that* one.

Barbara Merriman  
Danvers