

transcript.

Hey there and welcome to episode 72 of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so happy you're joining me today for a brand new episode of Busy Kids Love Music. This episode is brought to you by my Busy Kids Do Music History course, which is an online course for homeschooling families that gives a fun and interactive overview of music from ancient times until today. You can find more information about this affordable course at busykidsdopiano.com/musichistory, and I'll pop that link into the show notes as well.

June in the United States is African American Music Appreciation Month, which means it's a wonderful chance to recognize the contributions of African American musical influences that are part of our nation's rich cultural heritage. In celebration of African American Music Appreciation Month, I thought it would be a fitting time to learn about a song that has offered inspiration and comfort to generations of Black families – a song often referred to as “The Black National Anthem” – “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

The song began as songs often do – as a poem. The poem was written in 1900 by the principal of a segregated school in Jacksonville, Florida, James Weldon Johnson. Johnson wrote the poem in celebration of President Abraham Lincoln's birthday. This was written during an ugly chapter of American history, when Jim Crow laws in the South began to replace slavery. James's brother, John Rosamond Johnson, who taught music at the school, wrote music to accompany the lyrics, and the hymn was sung by a choir of 500 school children at the celebration of Lincoln's birthday.

The lyrics of the hymn talk about the promise of freedom. James said that while he set out to write the poem about President Lincoln since it was to be sung in celebration of Lincoln's birthday, he ended up writing a poem about Black struggle and perseverance. The hymn became the official song of the NAACP –

transcript.

this point in time as an interracial effort to eliminate prejudice and remove racial barriers that exist in the United States. While the Johnson brothers would move to Harlem and bring their song with them, the school children in Jacksonville continued to sing the hymn, teach it to their own children and the children of their schools when they grew up and became teachers. During this time where many Black folks experienced hostility, their communities began to form their own schools, newspapers, music groups and religious organizations. The song became a pillar of Black culture and life, and was sung at church ceremonies, family gatherings, graduations and eventually many of the protests during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout the decades, many legendary Black singers would perform the song, such as Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin and Stevie Wonder. In 2019, singer Beyonce, the first Black woman to headline the Coachella festival, performed the hymn for her audience.

Karen Lowery, the daughter of civil rights icon Joseph Lowery and also director of music and arts at Cascade United Methodist Church says, “Singing to God was an opportunity for African-Americans to share a proud history and hopeful perspective. This song is about love for our country and each other.”

Imani Perry, who wrote a book about the history of this song, writes that singing the hymn was part of the daily or weekly practice of many African Americans, especially those that lived in the South, and was cherished by people even with dramatically different political philosophies.

There are so many powerful performances of this hymn, and I’ve compiled some of my favorites into a special playlist for you on YouTube. You can find the link to that playlist at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/72](https://www.busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/72), as well as the link to one of my family’s favorite picture books about this special song and a transcript of this episode. Again that’s at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/72](https://www.busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/72).

transcript.

Thanks so much for joining me today to learn about “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” I hope you enjoyed listening to and learning about this beautiful and important musical treasure, and I look forward to connecting with you again in two weeks as we kick off a new summer series here on the Busy Kids Love Music podcast. I’ll see you then!

Busy Kids Love
Music
busykidsdopiano
.com