Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing

Words by JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

Music by J. ROSAMOND JOHNSON

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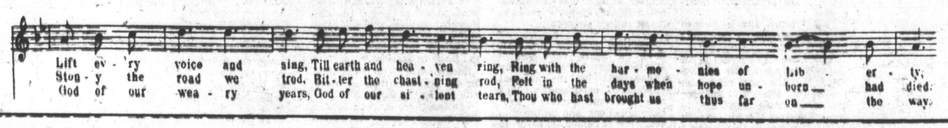


SPEAKING OF BLACK HISTORY

Here is the real James Weldon Johnson story and how our National Anthem was born

By Elizabeth M. Oliver, City Editor

(Clip and Save)

"Lift Every Voice and Sing," our national anthem, (sometimes called the "National Negro Anthem") has been at the top of the music list for over 60 years.

Today it is sung everywhere in the U.S. and abroad.

Sadly, it is frequently listed on programs without the author's names. Thus an important part of the history of the soulful song is lost.

James Weldon Johnson wrote the words and his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, the music. The story is one of the most fascinating of all music history.

Also, few persons know that "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was intended by the brothers to be sung LAST since it contains a prayer in the last verse. "God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, etc." Usually, heads are bowed.

[illegible] University in Nashville, TN when James Weldon Johnson taught Creative Literature. I shall never forget his revelation that words with a Southern accent are like music and he inspired our respect as he said, "Listen to the black woman in the marketplace when she says 'Good mawnin'" . . . the sound of music.

Among others who sat at his feet were Dr. John Hope Franklin, the noted historian and Judge L. Howard Bennett.

Both men sang on the Fisk University Choir which also rose to fame as it exalted the Negro Spiritual to world acclaim . . . accenting the musical words of the slave.

IMMORTAL STORY

You can hardly recall James Weldon Johnson or sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" without knowing the story of the song.

The music was first [illegible] Marks Music Co. of New York. The composition of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," came later quite by accident.

FOR LINCOLN CELEBRATION

James was a teacher in the Jacksonville (FL.) schools, and wanted something extra for a Lincoln Day celebration on Feb. 12. He tried a verse on Lincoln, but could not make it go.

The brothers talked it over and agreed to write a song for the exercises and to have it sung by a chorus of 500 school children.

James got his first line, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and then worked along grinding out the next five lines.

When near the end of his first stanza there came to him 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 . . ."

The spirit of the poem possessed him then. He finished the stanza and turned it over to Rosamond.

In composing the two other stanzas, he didn't use pen and paper.

While Rosamond worked out the music, James paced back and forth on the front porch repeating the lines over and over to himself, going over all the agony and ecstasy of creating.

COULDN'T CONTROL TEARS

As he worked through the opening and middle lines of the last stanza,

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

James said he could not keep back the tears and made no effort to do so.

When Rosamond finished the music, the manuscript was sent to Marks in NY, requesting mimeographing a sufficient number of copies for use by the chorus.

The song was taught to the children and sung very effectively at the celebration and the Johnson Brothers went on with their work.

KEPT ALIVE BY CHILDREN

After they had moved away from Jacksonville permanently, both the song and the occasion passed out of their minds. But, the school children of Jacksonville kept singing the song.

Some of them went to other schools and kept singing it. Some even became school teachers and taught it to their pupils.

Within twenty years, the song was being sung in schools and churches and on special occasions throughout the country.

Later it was adopted by the NAACP.

The Johnson brothers in traveling around the country, regularly found printed and typewritten copies of the words pasted in the back of hymnals and song books, used in Sunday schools and YMCA's. That is the method by which it gets its widest circulation.

James spoke before a summer labor school at Bryn Mawr (PA) College some years ago and was surprised to hear it fervently sung by white students there and to see it mimeographed in their folio of songs.

In later years, the Johnson brothers marveled at the results that followed what was considered an incidental effort originally made with no intention other than to meet the needs of a particular moment.

From 1900 - 1906, the Johnson brothers were the top - ranking U.S. song writers. Along with Bob Cole, they wrote "The Maiden With the Dreamy Eyes," for Anna Held.

For Lillian Russell, they composed, "The Maid of Timbucto"; for Marie Cahill, "Congo Love Song"; for Bert Williams, "My Castle On the River Nile." Most popular of all their songs was "Didn't We Ramble?"

LIBERTY SHIP

The seventh Liberty Ship named for an outstanding black American, the S. S. James Weldon Johnson was launched at the Wilmington yards of the California Shipbuilding Corp. in December, 1943.

The vessel paid tribute to the noted poet, essayist, lawyer and diplomat who was killed in an automobile - train collision near his summer home at Dark Harbor, ME., on June 26, 1938.

Mr. Johnson also achieved note as a song - writer and a professor of literature of Fisk and New York Universities, received B.A. and M.A. degrees from Atlanta University and graduate study at Columbia University.

APPOINTED CONSUL

His career began as a teacher in the Jacksonville public school. In 1901 he went to NYC and with his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, and Bob Cole, collaborated in the successful writing of popular songs and light operas.

Later he was appointed U.S. Consul, first to Venezuela and later to Nicaragua.

In 1910, he married Grace Nail and two years later his first book, the fictional "Autobiography of an Ex - Colored Man," appeared anonymously.

He edited a book of American poetry and two spirituals; and also wrote the English libretto for the opera "Goyescas."

OTHER SHIPS

Other Liberty ships named: the Harriett Tubman, the S.S. Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Frederick Douglass, John Merrick and Robert L. Vann.

He wrote the song the whole world sings

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

The Navy named a Naval vessel, the Destroyer Escort Leonard Roy Harmon, in honor of a seaman who received the Navy Cross posthumously for heroic conduct at Guadalcanal.

The John H. Murphy Sr. Liberty Vessel was named for the AFRO founder who established the newspaper in Baltimore 90 years ago.

Here is Black History worth remembering clip and save

Black History Month begins February 1

NAT TURNER born a slave in 1800 became the great Virginia revolutionist

A Baltimore church whose history reaches back to famed freedom fighter Nat Turner

Ebenezer Baptist Church at 23rd and Guilford in East Baltimore has a small but ever-growing congregation of citizens who have just cause to be mighty proud.

Many of them not only boast that their roots are deep in Old Virginia but they also claim a heritage which comes from one of Virginia's most famous heroes.

Their famous ancestor is the immortal Nat Turner, a slave born Oct. 2, 1800 in Southampton County, Va. who struck a blow at the vicious system of slavery and upset the complacent attitude of slave masters in a period prior to the Civil War.

TURNER'S DESCENDANT

How does this come about?

Ebenezer's illustrious founder, the Rev. John W. Jones, also born in Southhampton County, Va. was the great grandson of Nat Turner who ranks along with Frderick Douglass and Dr. Martin Luther King as a freedom fighter.

The Rev. Mr. Jones attended the public schools of Virginia and at an early age came to Baltimore.

His parents were Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Jones who settled in Northeast Baltimore in the Waverly Section.

Later in his youth, young Jones became concerned with the lack of churches in that section.

He prayed over the matter and became convinced that God wanted him to organize a church in his neighborhood.

He began with a Sunday school of 10 children in the livingroom of Mrs. Susan Frazier who lived at 21st and a half Street.

The Sunday school grew so fast the Rev. Mr. Jones had to seek larger quarters. He was successful in locating an old house in the 400 block 23rd Street.

He later converted this building into a church and it was named Ebenezer Baptist Church.

In 1918, the Rev. Mr. Jones purchased the present site at Guilford Avenue and 23rd Street.

The congregation was soon organized into many groups including:

The Willing Workers, and The Missionary Circle and several choirs.

The Rev. Mr. Jones died in December, 1961.

REV. POOLE

Rev. Clarence Poole, the present pastor of Ebenezer Baptist was called to the pulpit in 1973.

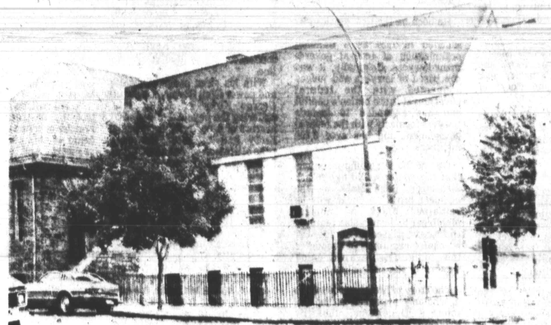
Rev. Poole was not ordained at the time he was called but the church immediately set up Ordination Services so that he might perform all the ministerial duties.

A few months later installation services were held and Rev. Poole took leadership in his first church, historic Ebenezer Baptist.

The congregation has tripled since Rev. Poole's arrival. It takes two services each Sunday (8 a.m. and 11 a.m.) to accommodate the members.

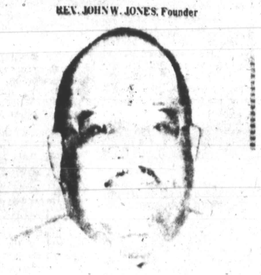
Ebenezer is noted for its outreach program in its East Baltimore community.

Former pastors were Rev. Edward T. Jordan, Rev. I. Lagan Kearse and Rev. Maxwell Johnson.



EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH at 23rd Street and Guilford Avenue in East Baltimore is one of the city's most famous churches.

REV. JOHN W. JONES, Founder



REV. CLARENCE POOLE pastor

Stargell's stage debut marks end of King birthday celebration

Retired major league baseball star, Willie Stargell made his dramatic stage debut last weekend reading the works of Dr. Martin Luther King.

As a part of the week-long celebration of the slain civil rights leader's 54th birthday, Stargell appeared at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall with Eastman Philharmonia Orchestra.

The event marked the premiere of the new production "New Morning for the World" which featured not only the works of King but music composed in his memory.

The Kennedy Center premiere was the first of a five day tour that concluded Wednesday at the Eastman Theatre in Rochester, New York. Stargell and the Eastman Orchestra, which is a student group from the [illegible] in Rochester, plan to record the production for RCA.

Although his performance at the Kennedy Center was his debut, Stargell who retired at the end of the 1982 season, did some performing on the ball field, initiating the song "We Are Family" into the team's repertoire during [illegible]

The LIVING CHURCH

Researcher says

Shaping image of God may be painful but positive

By Ann Smith

Parents who try to shield their children from every experience of anxiety and pain may be hurting them more than they're helping them, says Paul J. Philibert, a religious education professor at the Catholic University of America who is researching children's images of God.

"Growth characteristically follows crisis," he adds, explaining that children's movement toward more adequate understanding of themselves, God and society requires them to pull away from familiar ways of thinking.

"What happens is that people can't make sense out of an event while thinking about it in the old terms. In order to move positively ahead, they have to step back from the familiar structure that once gave them security and reconstruct it in a new way."

People's image of God, for example, correlates to their image of themselves and society. This goes through many stages. Going from one stage to another is frequently painful, he says.

"At various stages, our imagery about God is based upon the influences and feelings for life our parents and teachers gave us. A school-age child might think of God as a demanding tyrant with unrealistic expectations of perfection.

Or, a child's negative image of God may reflect disillusionment over a move from one neighborhood to another of the death of parent, Philibert says. "It is an adult task to reconstruct negative images. Between 18 and 25, young people undergo the shock of discovering that parents are imperfect or mentor figures such as clergy or teachers can have clay feet. We don't know what to do with our idea of God, when our ideas of other authorities are shaken by realism."

The story of God imagery, he adds, is one of a ceaseless series of ironies. "Some challenge to our conventional ways of thinking will lead us to look closely at life. When we do, we discover there are more dimensions than were appreciated before."

Philibert believes that most people in our society today are up becoming theologians. "Not in the sense of knowing the language, theological theories, he says. The the sense of being able to make sense out of the [illegible] of God, despite the challenges presented by technology, materialism and human toil and trouble."

People come up with their own images of God and with their own theological theories, he says. The image most people come up with is much more demanding than the Biblical image.

"It is a sort of supernatural entrepreneur who will reward us when we do favors and will be our pharmacist when we come up with the right prescriptions," he says.

What leads people to this view, he believes, is competition and consumerism in the world.

"It is a God who belongs to the person's characteristic world of secular work and day to day existence."

Philibert, who has been studying moral development for a decade, has also learned that through religious experience and loving unconditional acceptance by friends, people are often led to [illegible] who loves me not because of what I can do, but one who loves me because he knows how to love."

Philibert's motivation for this research is to bring a scientific dimension to theological work, he says, and to show that a person's adequate understanding of God is gradual, crisis ridden and comes through surrender to reality. "This surrender to reality is often called religious experience."

Young adults sponsor revival services at Central Baptist

The Rev. C. Dexter Wise 111, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio will be the speaker at Central Baptist Church, 2035 Baltimore St., for the Youth and Young Adult revival services.

Services will be held nightly 7 p.m. Jan. 24-28. Various choirs will be singing. Among choirs scheduled to sing are the Young Adult Choirs of Perkins Square, Mt. Pleasant, Joppa Tabernacle, Morning Star Baptist, Mt. Hope, New Christian Memorial, Ebenezer Baptist and Temple Baptist.

Rev. Wise grew up in Baltimore and is the son of C. Dexter Wise Jr., and the Rev. Virginia Anderson Wise, who is a Baptist minister.

He is a graduate of Lincoln College, University of Pennsylvania. He received his master's of divinity degree from Harvard University and has pursued doctoral studies at Harvard.

He preached his trial sermon at Central Baptist Church in 1971. He has served as associate pastor at churches in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Maryland.

Black Caucus prayer breakfast to be held at New Shiloh Baptist

The Maryland Legislative Black Caucus will have its annual prayer breakfast Jan. 22, 7:30 a.m. at New Shiloh Baptist Church. The Rev. Dr. Harold A. Carter, pastor of New Shiloh will be the speaker.

State Senator Clarence Blount and Del. Larry Young are coordinating the breakfast arrangements. "The prayer breakfast is open to the public with request for a $5 donation," said Del. Young. Reservations for tickets can be made by calling 727 - 6212.

Del. Young said, "This annual event will show the spiritual unification that black legislators maintain in pursuing the interests of our communities."

New Christian Memorial honors Rev. Walter Bronson Jr. Jan. 24

Members and friends of New Christian Memorial Church, 615 Mount Holly St., will honor their pastor, the Rev. Walter Bronson Jr., at a banquet on Monday, Jan. 24.

Rev. Bronson will be celebrating his 26th anniversary and the affair will be held at LaFontaine Bleu on Erdman Ave. Rev. Bronson said he became convinced after attending a pastor's conference in Chicago in November 1982, that the church must broaden its ministry in order to meet the need of the total man.

"We have now come to the point in our ministry where we feel we have not put enough trust in God. In the past, we have tried to do it our way. Now we must stand on God's word. In Philippians 4:19 we read "But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

"This being a critical time for black America, and especially the black family, we at New Christian Memorial Church intend to use all our spiritual and earthly resources to help upgrade the black family and especially the black male," said Rev. Bronson.

Rev. Bronson plans to have seminars and programs at his church that will be held involving the entire family with intention of bringing them closer together and in a right relationship with God.

He said, "It is my sincere desire that all members of our church and their families will be active participants in these endeavors that Christ Jesus might be glorified."

Rev. Walter Bronson

Metro church briefs

The Women's Christian Service Council of Shiloh Christian Community Church, 2800 Lombard St., will observe their anniversary on Jan. 23, 3:30 p.m. Evangelist Roslyn Dabney of Strawbridge United Methodist Church will be the guest speaker.

The Laymen's Organization of Waters AME Church, 417 Aisquith St., will celebrate their annual day on Sunday, Jan. 23, 3 p.m.

Dr. Joseph C. McKinney, treasurer of the AME Church president emeritus of the Second Episcopal District Laymen's Organization will be the speaker. Estelle Marshall is president and Evelyn Foster is secretary.

Friend's Day will be observed on Jan. 30, 3 p.m. at Faith Baptist Church. Mrs. Mary Brown of City Temple Baptist will be the speaker. Services are being sponsored by the Senior Missionary Society. Mrs. Inez Young is president and the Rev. Dr. Walter E. Paige is pastor.

State's Attorney Kurt Schmoke will be the guest speaker at Ray of Hope Baptist Church, Harford Road and Parkside Drive on Sunday, Jan. 23, 4 p.m. The Rev. Charles M. Franklin is pastor.

The Deacons and Deaconesses of Mt. Sinai Baptist Church, 922 East Preston St., celebrated their annual day on Jan. 16. The Rev. Mark Biddix was the guest speaker. Sarah Prioleau is secretary; Edward Mayfield is chairman, Cephus Prioleau, chairman of the Trustee Board and the Rev. William Brown is pastor.

The Rev. Carroll W. Jones Sr., and the Jones Family will be singing at Beacon Baptist Church on Jan. 23. The Rev. John R. Nelson is assistant pastor and the Rev. B. B. Hughes is pastor.

The Rev. Neil J. O'Donnell, director, Division of Health Care Ministry, Archdiocese of Baltimore, was elected chairman, Conference of Diocesan Coordinators of Health Affairs for 1983.

The mission with no mission site

By Pattie Rodgers

The brothers and Sisters in Christ is an organization of charity in these times, a group of men and women who have formed a mission with one purpose in mind to help others.

The idea for this mission was the brainchild of Ms. Doris Williams, proprietress of The Rocoe, Reisterstown Road. The group, first organized in March 1982, first held meetings at Ms. William's home at first just to sing and pray together and study the Bible, and then, to do missionary work for the Park Heights Community.

The idea of reaching out came from seeing so many problems around them and the fact that so many people are unaware of the help that is available to them.

Since its inception, the Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Incorporated in July 1982 has given Thanksgiving dinners to the sick and shut in, give 100 Christmas baskets, held rummage sales to help the needy, given money to help burned out victims, evicted people, victims of job lay off, given money for funeral expenses, provided fuel for those who were cold and have visited hospitals and homes to sing and pray for the sick and shut-in.

The mission members learn of needy people through the news media, word of mouth and through their various church bulletins.

They raise money through bake sales, dinner sales and appeals to the public for help. People who believe in the mission give donations.

The group intends to make a monthly project of what they call "Project Love", gathering on a continuing basis, canned goods, clothing and anything else usable to be distributed to those who need them.

The key that makes their assistance so viable is that there is no red tape. If someone goes to the group with a set-out notice they get help right away. Their main focus is to help on the spot.

Sounds beautiful, doesn't it? People helping others, with no strings attached. But there is a hitch.

Although the Brothers and Sisters in Christ have already done wonders with raising funds, gathering food and clothing and helping others they have no place to officially operate out of. They are virtually the mission with no mission site.

The group rented a house at 4004 Hayward Ave., when in very poor condition, painted, repaired and decorated it. They had it in mind as a possible community center for activities and as an outlet for help.

The problem is that the area zoned by (R-6) strictly residential, and the zoning board has turned down their request to use the facility for the purpose they intended, though their organization is much needed and strictly non-profit.

The Brothers and Sisters have no intention of giving up, however. They intend to reapply for zoning for their chosen site. They would like to stay in the Hayward Avenue building, help the community and have the residents take a part in the activities of the mission.

MEMBERS of the Brothers and Sisters in Christ shown from left are John Clark, Mary Hargraves, Buttie Baskins, Doris Williams, John Highsmith, Vivian Clark, Bobby L. Moses and Rev. Nathaniel Love.

According to Bobby L. Moses, secretary for the group, "If everyone in the community would bake a cake and then send his brother down to buy a piece we could all help each other."

Vivian Clark, director and organist for the group (which also sings) states, "With the situation being what it is in the world, if we would combine our prayer forces, we wouldn't have to worry about Reagan. We could all help each other to keep from being cold, hungry or set out.

Doris Williams, from whose eatery Reisterstown Road (featuring lake trout) the group often operates, says "If the community would get involved, we might get zoning. For '83 we want to reach out and help many more people.

All of the organization's members agree with John Highsmith, "It's a joyful thing to see the reactions when you help somebody."

Here's hoping that a group with an excellent beginning track record will have the good fortune to get a site from which to operate, full steam ahead.

Officers of the Brothers and Sisters include the Rev. Nathaniel Love, President; Bobby F. Moses, secretary, Sarah Reed, assistant secretary; John Clark, treasurer; Vivian Clark, director and organist; John Highsmith, a gifted baritone singer and Big Brother for Youth and Doris Williams, business manager.

Other members include Mary Hargraves, the Rev. Harod McFadden and affiliated members Charles Brani, Aretha Bullock and Naomi Moore.

How to get church news in the AFRO

For coverage of any church events, mail your announcements to Ms. Pam Widgeon, religious editor, 628 N. Eutaw St., Baltimore, Md. 21201 or call 728-8200 Monday through Friday afternoon.

There is no charge for news of photographic coverage. Publications of any church news is contigent upon factors of time and news is contigent upon factors of time and news space available and organizations from all religious denominations as space permits.

Send me a copy of your church bulletin, and newspaper.

JAN