

James Weldon Johnson and the 'Negro' National Anthem

ADRIENNE ISRAEL | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Programs honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. and celebrating African-American History Month often end with the audience singing "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," the Negro or African American National Anthem. James Weldon Johnson wrote its lyrics and his brother, John Rosamond Johnson, wrote the music 107 years ago; but neither man could have known that this song would become their most publicly appreciated work.

Born in 1871 in Jacksonville, Fla., James Weldon Johnson grew up in a family headed by Bahamian immigrants who taught him to speak Spanish and to read the Victorian classics. Since Jacksonville only provided African Americans with eight years of segregated education, James took college preparatory courses at Atlanta University where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1894. He returned to Jacksonville, and between 1895 and 1898, simultaneously served as principal of its "colored" school, published a newspaper for the African American community, worked as an apprentice for a local attorney, passed the state bar exam and practiced law.

In 1900, he and his brother wrote "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" for children to perform during a celebration of Abraham Lincoln's birthday at the school where James Weldon Johnson was principal. The song was soon adopted by area churches.

Diplomat and Essayist

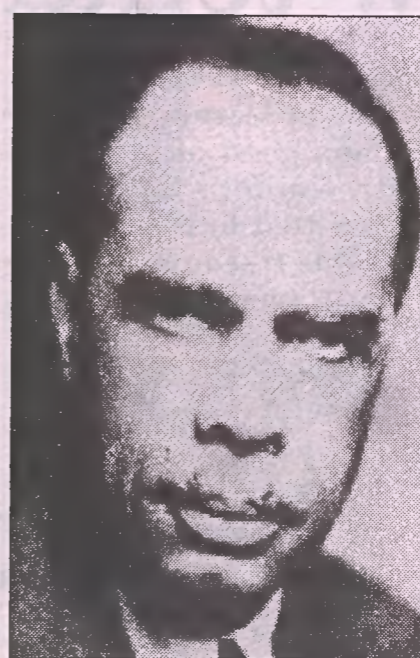
Intending to pursue a career as a songwriter, in 1902, James moved to New York with his brother and decided to study literature at Columbia University. He later joined the Colored Republican Club and, in 1906, was appointed to the U.S. Consulate in Venezuela. While he lived abroad as a diplomat, he wrote most of his first novel, "The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man," first published anonymously in 1912. In 1914, he left government work to become an editor for the African-American-owned newspaper, *The New York Age*, for which he wrote essays protesting against segregation, lynching, and other forms of white-mob violence, and in which he published his poetry and the poetry of other African-Americans.

NAACP Field Secretary

In 1916, the NAACP appointed him as its first field secretary, charging him with organizing branches throughout the country and investigating the alarming increase in brutality, repression, and terror against African Americans.

In 1920, when the NAACP named him its executive secretary, he became the first African American to hold the organization's top executive post, a position he remained in for 10 years. During the 1920s, NAACP adopted "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" as the "Negro National Hymn."

Creative Writer



Johnson quit working for NAACP in 1930 and became Professor of Creative Literature and Writing at Fisk University.

During his long and influential literary career, Johnson edited, wrote, and published poetry, essays, fiction, literary criticism and social history. Besides "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," his poem "The Creation" and other works from his collection "God's Trombones" are still frequently performed and recited. In 1938, he died in a car accident in Maine.

State of the Union '07

... same old song and dance

AMANDA PRESSLEY | STAFF WRITER

Nearly 50 minutes long, the 2007 State of the Union address dealt with several "kitchen table" domestic issues and the ever-present issues of Iran and Iraq.

Initially, President Bush made romanticized, albeit half-hearted, statements of bipartisan love.

"Congress has changed, but not our responsibility. Our citizens don't care what side of the aisle we sit on, as long as we're able to cross that line to get things done," Bush read from the teleprompter.

If the image of a die-hard Democrat and fanatical Republican running in slow-motion towards a bipartisan embrace doesn't make you all warm and fuzzy inside, then you must be heartless.

Years ago, after his first inauguration, Bush claimed to be a "uniter, not a divider." Now, "the Decider" finds himself forced finally to reach across the aisle for something other than chastising Democrats.

After getting the political pleasantries out of the way, George II dove headfirst into domestic issues.

With a statement reminiscent of Daddy's "No new taxes," he promised to balance the federal budget without raising taxes

or cutting spending. But is that possible?

The House of Representatives, within its first 100 hours of office, passed legislation to balance the budget by disallowing new government spending without making cuts or forcing tax hikes. Freshman Congressman Heath Shuler and fellow Democratic congressional representatives forced the pay-as-you-go rules to hold the government directly responsible for balancing the budget.

With his third economic reform, the President also discussed "commitments of conscience" programs. He essentially admitted the stupidity of his "Death to Social Security" plot, where he tried to privatize Social Security. Bush finally stated the government's dedication to Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid.

While also attacking the crooked medical industry, and offering seemingly poorly-planned health insurance tax breaks, Bush brought up his self-proclaimed "great law," the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA).

"Five years ago, we rose above partisan differences to pass the No Child Left Behind Act," said Bush. This much is true; in January 2002,

legislators crossed party lines to pass the bill.

"And because we acted, students are performing better," he added. Of course they are! And states are falsifying their national report cards and lowering their standards to prove it.

Schools made the grade for success lower, while others altered the tests entirely. Annual

standardized testing is becoming so easy that in Georgia, 75 percent of students pass, some with scores of less than 50, reports Fox News. And Bush wants Congress to reauthorize this legislation, thus rewarding this behavior?

Mike Petrilli, former education official with the Bush administration, claims states are doing anything to avoid sanctions. The NCLBA requires that the number of passing students increase every year, with all

students being qualified by 2014.

Of course, George "Warmonger" Bush eventually discussed the Middle East.

According to *The New York Times*, Bush broke repetition records by using "Iraq/Iraqis" a whopping 34 times and "al-Qaida" nearly a dozen times. He offered the same old "solutions" of increasing

troops and "to do our duty, to find these enemies, and to protect the American people."

While the speech overall may have seemed insincere and lackluster, President Bush made one true statement: "Every one of us wishes this war were over and won," he said.

Everyone thinks the same of this presidency.

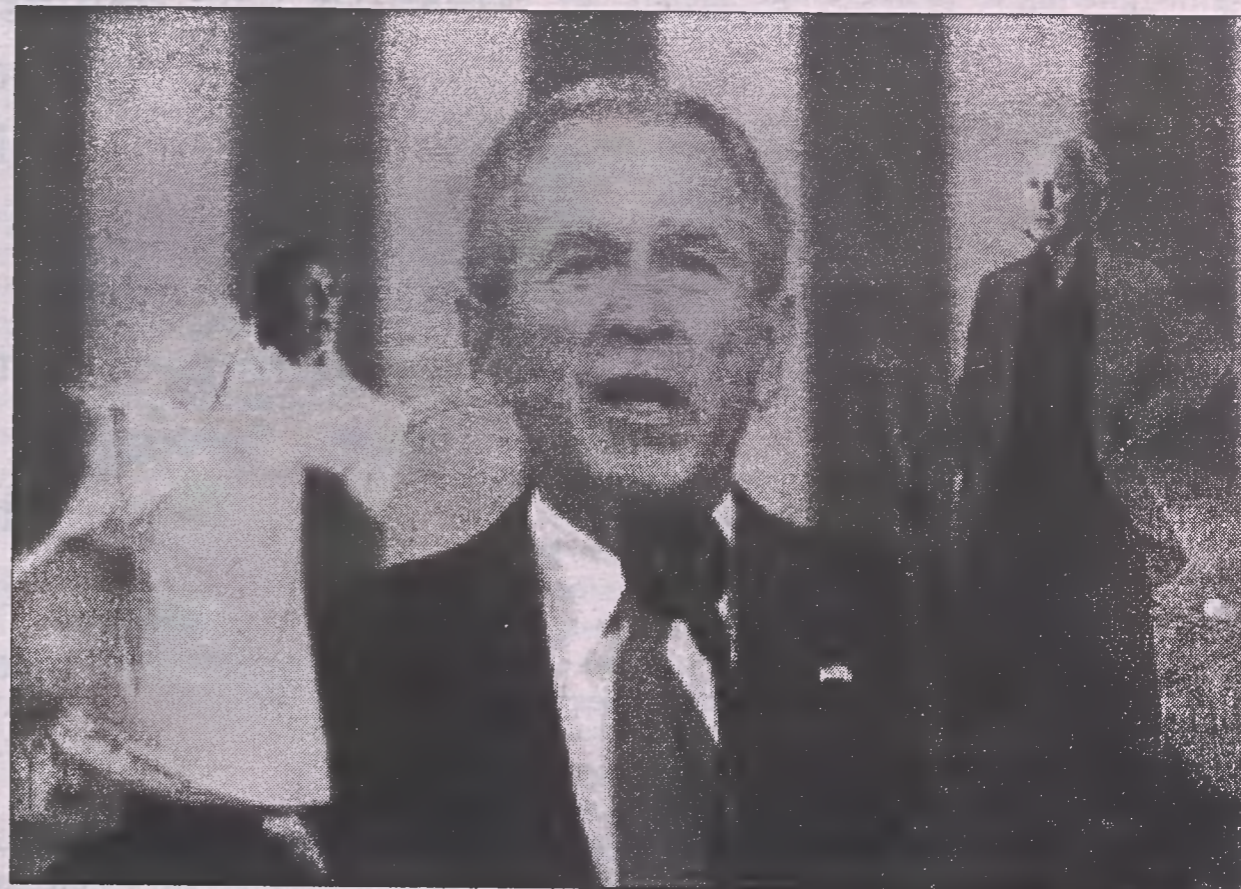


ILLUSTRATION BY KATE SELBY

ON JAN. 23, PRESIDENT BUSH ADDRESSED THE NEWLY ELECTED DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS FOR THE STATE OF THE UNION, BUT OFFERED NOTHING ORIGINAL, ONLY RENEWED DISTASTE.