

Good morning, Committee Members,

My name is Melanie Edwards. The song that you are considering today for National Hymn status was composed by my grandfather J. Rosamond Johnson. The lyrics were written by his brother James Weldon Johnson. When people have asked before this occasion how do I feel about the song I have answered honestly, much to their disappointment and dismay. This melody is one of many, some 200 according to ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) that my grandfather created while the lyrics, that began life as a poem, was just one of many others that my grand uncle wrote. This is a small part of both men's artistic output, so I have no sense of it being an unusually remarkable achievement. I am, however, always humbled and impressed by the staying power it has had. Few things over one hundred years old are referenced for their relevance or timeliness. This quality is what I hope you, making your decision today, keep in mind. Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing still speaks to many people in this time and this place while it speaks also to people of many races, faiths and conditions around the world. Like the Black men who created it, Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing comments eloquently and accurately about history, hope, vision and perseverance.

In 1913, my grandfather was working in London when he married my grandmother Nora, and conceived my mother Mildred. Although Rosamond experienced the wrenching social changes of the Post Reconstruction and burgeoning Jim Crow era, he chose to return to his home, his country, so that his daughter was born in America in Jacksonville. His brother also had opportunities to see other countries, but he too chose to stand by his native land even when it didn't always stand by him.

So, I ask for your support of bill H.R.301 not for me. I get no benefit personally or financially; the song is in Public Domain. I do appeal to your sense of History and Legacy. I have pride in the legacy that is Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing. By your designating it the National Hymn, which is what James Weldon himself called it, you add another piece to America's already great cultural legacy and heft. Greatness is not just defined by strength or use of force, great nations like great people are additionally: magnanimous, self-aware and self-correcting. By approving this bill your legacy will be acknowledging the "dark and gloomy past" of American history yet assuring others that grace and continued effort are rewarded by change: Social, Economic and Spiritual. This song penned by my forebearers to America for America, I invite you to claim it as your legacy and your gift from America to the World.

Thank you for your time.