



LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

Dear Coach,

Sports have a unique ability to unite. No matter our differences or divisions, sports bring us together in ways few other cultural phenomena can.

For over a century, the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing" has served as an anthem for Black communities. Its lyrics both recognize our nation's troubled past with race relations and celebrate the hope of a brighter future. Today, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is commonly presented as a complement to "The Star Spangled Banner," and for years has been a staple in pregame ceremonies at HBCU sporting events.

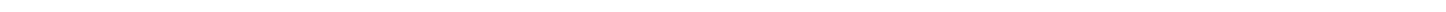
As a show of unity and education, the NABC and our Committee on Racial Reconciliation encourage basketball programs to play both "The Star Spangled Banner" and "Lift Every Voice and Sing" prior to games this season - acknowledging the tradition of historically-Black institutions. The NABC has developed this handbook that outlines the history of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and offers practical guidance on its integration into pregame activities.

Our hope is that games played across the country – from large Division I programs to small town high schools – will adopt this protocol. As teams stand in recognition of both songs, they will powerfully reinforce sports' unifying message.

Please join us!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig Robinson".

Craig Robinson
NABC Executive Director



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WHAT IS “LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING”?

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” is one of the most cherished songs of the African-American civil rights movement and is often referred to as the Black national anthem. Written originally as a poem and later set to music, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was first performed on February 12, 1900 by 500 children at a segregated Florida school in celebration of President Abraham Lincoln’s birthday.¹

WHAT IS THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SONG?

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” was written at a time in American history when Jim Crow was replacing slavery. The song became a rallying cry for Black communities thanks to its recognition of both the past and present difficulties faced by African-Americans and its hopeful vision for the future. Today, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” remains a staple of the Black community and is often performed at concerts, worship services and graduation ceremonies.² It is a staple at HBCU sporting events.

WHAT MESSAGE DOES THE SONG CONVEY?

Various themes and imagery are presented through the lyrics of “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” including messages of suffering, lament, praise, freedom, courage, perseverance, inclusion, faith and hope.²

HOW SHOULD THE SONG BE PRESENTED?

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” should be considered a complement to “The Star Spangled Banner.” The origins of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” being coined the Black national anthem are rooted in concerns about racism. Today, however, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” commonly accompanies the traditional national anthem rather than being presented as a replacement. When played alongside the anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” delivers a powerful, unifying message that together acknowledges America’s struggle with equality, celebrates progress, and lays a vision for the future.

“LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING” LYRICS

Lift ev’ry voice and sing,
 ‘Til earth and heaven ring,
 Ring with the harmonies of Liberty,
 Let our rejoicing rise,
 High as the list’ning skies,
 Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
 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,
 Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
 Let us march on ‘til victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
 Bitter the chastening rod,
 Felt in the days when hope unborn had died,
 Yet with a steady beat,
 Have not our weary feet,
 Come to the place for which our fathers sighed,
 We have come over a way that with tears has been
 watered,
 We have come, treading our path through the
 blood of the slaughtered,
 Out from the gloomy past,
 ‘Til now we stand at last,
 Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
 God of our silent tears,
 Thou who has brought us thus far on the way,
 Thou who has by Thy might,
 Led us into the light,
 Keep us forever in the path, we pray,
 Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where
 we met Thee,
 Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world,
 we forget Thee;
 Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
 May we forever stand,
 True to our God,
 True to our native land

¹ PBS Black Culture Connection - Lift Every Voice and Sing (<https://www.pbs.org/black-culture/explore/black-authors-spoken-word-poetry/lift-every-voice-and-sing/>)

² NPR - Till Victory Is Won: The Staying Power Of ‘Lift Every Voice And Sing’ (<https://www.npr.org/2018/08/16/638324920/american-anthem-lift-every-voice-and-sing-black-national-anthem>)

³ Washington Post - The history of ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing,’ the Black anthem being played at NFL games (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/09/10/nfl-lift-every-voice-black-national-anthem/>)



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PREGAME PROTOCOL - TEAM

Student-athletes and coaching staff members from each program should separately line up facing the American flag or color guard in accordance with conference and/or institutional policy. Student-athletes and coaching staff members should remain standing throughout the playing of the “Star Spangled Banner” followed by “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (first verse only).

It is recommended that the home team or neutral-site event operator inform and coordinate in advance the plan to play both songs with the opposing team(s).

The estimated length of the first verse of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is 1:40-2:30, depending on the recording.

PREGAME PROTOCOL - GAME OFFICIALS

Officials are encouraged to join the show of unity by standing for the playing of both songs.

SAMPLE PUBLIC ADDRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

[Following completion of “The Star Spangled Banner”] - And now, please remain standing as we celebrate unity and inclusion with the playing of “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

“LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING” RECORDINGS

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” performed by Alicia Keys: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS60luWpBe0>

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” performed by Jarrett Johnson (feat. Alvin Chea): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsGupJJySio>

If a pep band is available to perform, programs are encouraged to discuss the concept with the band director.
