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“A Black National Anthem: Time for Change”

Should Black Americans have a “National Anthem”—“Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing?” Given an Obama presidency and a Cain campaign, many Black Americans feel completely integrated into the American milieu. Others, on the other hand, especially the poor and dispossessed, cannot yet identify with this land. So there is a question of whether we should cling to an anthem.

If we conclude that an anthem is warranted, then is the current anthem appropriate? Is it yet sung at large mainly Black attended events? At HBCU football games? Hardly. It is a thing of the past. The lyrics written in 1900 and then set to music in 1905, “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” expresses the sentiments of a people who were being born from slavery and who retained great fears of a White America. That hardly represents Black Americans today.

The current anthem does not convey the words of a people who are willing to fight for liberation; rather it says that through faith and hope that God will guide us there. It is too passive, and it does not portray Black Americans as the people of action that we are. The very thought of questioning the efficacy of the current anthem is, in and of itself, emblematic of the questioning, searching, pursuing, and moving minds that Black Americans embody, and that we use on our way to finding true (economic) freedom.

Unlike the “Star Spangled Banner” which says “Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,” “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” does not claim our righteousness in the battle for justice nor our guaranteed victory. Shouldn’t our anthem be more explicit about such conditions?

Today, do Black youth know the “Black National Anthem?” It is not a required curriculum component in most schools. Is it sung in Black churches anymore? Maybe the reason for this agnosticism about the anthem is that it represents too many words on paper. It is steeped in the Black American Christian tradition of calling on God to do for us what God has given us the power to do for ourselves.

God shouldn't magically cause us to emphasize intelligence over style, thriftiness and investment over conspicuous consumption, nor long-term planning over immediate gratification. However, we should marshal our own senses to adopt the better and wiser approaches.

Isn't it time for some brilliant Black mind to pen a new anthem for Black America. Some Black institution should commission such work and promulgate the result. The very existence of Black institutions is a testament to the continuation of separate Americas and the need for such an anthem.

It is hard to find centenarian companies. It stands to reason, then, that a centenarian song cannot adequately reflect the needs, hopes, and aspirations of a people who are as dynamic as Black Americans.

Let's write a new song that we can sing in Zion, Shabazzland, or whatever we call the land that Black Americans will ultimately establish where we shall enjoy true social, political, and economic freedoms.

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