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It's time for lawmakers to adopt new state song

Let me just apologize upfront for what I'm about to do to many native Mississippians.

"M-I-S - S-I-S - S-I-P - P-I ... Go Mississippi, you cannot go wrong"

"Go Mississippi" is a real brain-worm of a song, especially for those of us who were forced to sing the official state anthem in grade school.

It has a terrible, segregationist origin, but beyond that, the song just stinks.

I'm not alone in this view. Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have attempted to change the official state song for many years. But despite widespread bipartisan agreement on its rancidness, "Go Mississippi," as its lyrics advise, "keeps rolling along" in a state not known for embracing change.

"It's just a terrible song," said former state Sen. Billy Hewes, a Republican from Gulfport who introduced a bill in 2000 calling for a competition to come up with a better tune.

"It could be like Mississippi Idol," said Hewes, himself a longtime rock-and-roll drummer. "I mean, we can do better. We have done better. We have such a musical heritage ... Get people from the Arts Commission involved. We've got world-recognized talent. Get Faith Hill, B.B. King, Rosco Bandana - heck, get 3 Doors Down or Super Chikan - we can come up with something better."

For the second year in a row, Sen. Robert L. Jackson, D-Marks, will be introducing two state-song bills. One would change the state song, the other would provide the option of adopting a second song. Jackson's bills are pushing for "My Home Mississippi," a tune penned by former Sen. Delma Furniss, to become the, or at least a, state anthem. Jackson said he's open to other suggestions.

Listen

"My Home Mississippi" by Sen. Delma Furniss

Mississippi native country singer Charlie Pride's "Roll on Mississippi" has long been promoted as a good replacement. He even performed it for the Senate in 1994, but the legislation died. Others, including former senator and current U.S. Rep. Alan Nunnelee have pushed for "Mississippi Song" by Jim Weatherly. Often the hangup has been over the offered substitutes.

The Legislature adopted "Go Mississippi" as the state song in 1962, at the behest of a business group that had been casting about for a new state anthem. They took the melody from the 1959 campaign tune of Gov. Ross Barnett, "Roll with Ross," which included the endearing lyrics: "Roll with Ross/He's for segregation 100 percent/He's not a mod-rate like some other gent."

Sadly, this was apparently considered a progressive replacement for "Way Down South In Mississippi" - designated the state song in the 1940s - which included lyrics about "Darkies" picking cotton on plantations.

"My father, Harry Haas, was on the committee to change the song from 'Way Down South in Mississippi' to the current one," said Nancy Haas Brown, wife of Rep. Cecil Brown, D-Jackson. "He told me there was a contest and only a few songs were submitted. He said all of them were terrible, but 'Go Mississippi' was the least horrible."

So what prompted this state song screed?

I attended the annual MEC Hobnob last week, and at one point, for just a few seconds, the band struck up the tune. The crowd emitted an "uugh," most likely from those forced to sing it in school.

When I returned to the newspaper offices, I mentioned aloud that I had the song stuck in my head. This prompted a visceral reaction from many of my colleagues, and discussion, debate and jokes over a replacement that ran the rest of the week.

We have an online poll on whether to change the state song, and audio and video of various suggested replacements. Feel free to chime in at clarionledger.com. We also have posted the lyrics to "Go Mississippi." But after much searching, we found no recorded version of the current state song to post.

That speaks volumes. "Go M-I-S - S-I-S - S-I-P - P-I," I think it's time for you to G-O.

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