

Dear members of the Senate State and Local Government Committee,

My name is Elliott Powell. I'm an Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Minnesota. It's my honor to share insight into the importance of Prince and the Revolution's 1984 song "Purple Rain." Importantly, my remarks today are not on behalf of the University of Minnesota; these remarks are instead reflective of my expertise and position as a scholar of American popular music.

"Purple Rain" is arguably Prince's most well-known song, and Prince was arguably one of Minnesota's most well-known cultural figures and ambassadors—when the public saw or heard Prince, they thought of Minnesota; and when the public thinks of notable people from Minnesota, Prince is one of the first to come to mind. But such a pairing in the public imaginary of Prince and Minnesota, and by extension Minnesota/Prince and "Purple Rain," wasn't inevitable, it wasn't a foregone conclusion. Instead, it was the result of a shift in Prince's artistry in the early 1980s where Minnesota was becoming one of his musical muses. During this period, Prince was writing songs like "Uptown" that were inspired by Minnesota locations. And he was also building home studios in Hennepin and Carver counties where he would write and record albums like *Dirty Mind*, *Controversy*, and *1999*.

But it's with the song "Purple Rain" that these connections between his music and Minnesota were fully cemented. For one, its origins as a Prince and the Revolution song can be traced back to St. Louis Park. It's there, in the summer of 1983, that Prince presented musical sketches of the song to the Revolution during rehearsal. That day, the whole band collectively worked on the song and basically shaped it into the "Purple Rain" that we know and love today. Prince and the Revolution soon debuted the song on August 3, 1983, while performing a concert at First Avenue in downtown Minneapolis—it was a benefit concert for the Minnesota Dance Theatre (note the layers of Minnesota connections here). Prince knew he had something special that night. Indeed, the "Purple Rain" that we hear on the album *Purple Rain* is mostly drawn from the audio of the First Avenue live performance. But more than that, it's after this live performance that Prince and director Albert Magnoli decided to change the name of the film that they were working on. It would no longer be called *Dreams*. It would instead be named *Purple Rain*—we don't get this film title change without this performance at First Avenue.

Thus, "Purple Rain" is a Minnesota song because it was first primed, practiced, perfected, and performed in Minnesota. It was, as the Revolution keyboardist Matt Fink once noted, "A Midwestern United States rock and roll" track. Its emotional lyrics and melody as well as power ballad structure made it a perfect song for audiences to sing in a communal and anthemic manner—almost like a state song. And with *Purple Rain*'s meteoric success as a song, album, and film—here I'm thinking about the chart-topping sales and Oscar and Grammy wins—as well as the film's iconic Minnesota shots of First Avenue, the IDS center, and the Minnesota River (not Lake Minnetonka), the pairing of Prince and "Purple Rain" to Minnesota was solidified. From 1984 onward, we would associate Prince, and Minnesota, with "Purple Rain." Ironically,

“Purple Rain” was the last song that Prince publicly performed before his death on April 21, 2016.

To close, I want to note that at the same time in the early 1980s that Prince was developing this artistic connection to Minnesota, he was also developing another hallmark of his artistry: his play with dualities and differences. That is, the now well-known way that he took things that were assumed to be in binary opposition and brought them in close relation to see what they could produce. We don’t get purple without mixing red and blue.