



Ritz Theatre and Museum Presents

**"STONY THE ROAD WE  
TROD"**

**A LOOK BACK AT**

**AX HANDLE  
SATURDAY**

2010

# ***Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing***

by James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson

Lift ev'ry voice and sing,  
Till 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 till victory is won.

*Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chast'ning 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,  
Till 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 hast brought us thus far  
on the way;  
Thou who hast 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

In February 1917 James Weldon Johnson, as Field Secretary to the national NAACP, prompted the establishment of Jacksonville's first chapter of the NAACP. This song was often sung at mass meetings and demonstrations.

## **“Stony the Road We Trod: A Look Back at Ax Handle Saturday”**

1960 was a flashpoint year for the Civil Rights Movement. Across the nation, increasingly aggressive tactics, such as protest marches and sit-in demonstrations, were brought into play to break down the barriers of segregation and racism.

On February 1, in Greensboro, North Carolina, four black college students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University began a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter. The event triggered many similar non-violent protests throughout the Southern United States.

On March 15, 1960 in St. Augustine, Florida, six students from Florida Memorial College staged a sit-in at Woolworth's. On the third day students were hit with clubs, fists and chains. The door had been locked so that the police could not enter.

In April of that year, the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina to coordinate southern black college students in non-violent protests against lunch counter segregation.

Internationally, Wilma Rudolph won three gold medals in track at the Summer Olympics in Rome, Italy and more than a dozen African nations gained their independence from European colonization.

On August 13, 1960, protest demonstrations began taking place in Jacksonville, Florida. Continuing the legacies of early activists such as James Weldon Johnson and A. Philip Randolph, the NAACP Youth Council, under the leadership of Rutledge Pearson, became the vanguard of the local civil rights movement. Pearson was a middle school history teacher and the advisor to the NAACP Youth Council. An outstanding baseball player, Pearson had been denied the opportunity to play professionally because he was black. As a teacher in Jacksonville's

segregated schools, Pearson openly encouraged his students to challenge racial injustice.

The incident now known as **Ax Handle Saturday**, the monumental and violent civil rights confrontation between the NAACP Youth Council sit-in demonstrators and members of the Ku Klux Klan, took place on **August 27, 1960** in downtown Jacksonville, Florida. In this premeditated attack, a mob of ax handle-wielding whites assaulted bystanders at the scene of a peaceful demonstration against the segregationist policy of denying lunch counter service to “colored” customers at Woolworth’s, Grants and other businesses. The ensuing “race riot” erupted into the surrounding streets and nearby neighborhoods, bringing to a climax the NAACP’s organized campaign of resistance aimed at dismantling racial barriers. Following several more years of turmoil, legal actions and mediation, Jacksonville was finally forced to integrate public facilities. August 27, 2010 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ax Handle Saturday.

This exhibit gives a snapshot of how the print media recorded events surrounding that day and the events that followed.

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### **Ritz Theatre and Museum**

Carol J. Alexander, Executive Director  
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