

Ax Handle Saturday (Jacksonville riot of 1960)

On August 27, 1960, a racially motivated attack in Jacksonville against Blacks who were engaging in sit-in protests opposing racial segregation occurred. A group of 200, mostly middle aged White men, armed themselves with baseball bats and ax handles and attacked the protesters. The mob then ran down the streets attacking any Blacks they could find. 50 people were injured, 3 seriously, and there were 62 arrests. In an attempt to protect the protesters a Black street gang called the "Boomerangs" became involved in the riot. The police then intervened and arrested some members of Boomerangs. One of the main issues of the protesters were segregated lunch counters. In 1961, lunch counters in Jacksonville were desegregated.



"The situation should have been nipped in the bud. It wasn't. The result was the brutal beatings," said the Rev. J. T. McMillan, secretary of the Negro Ministerial Alliance.

Police Chief Luther Reynolds defended his force.

"Under the circumstances, my men did the best they could."

However, he admitted that if any white ruffians show up downtown Monday looking for

Chief Reynolds said he expected criticism from both white and colored.

"We were criticized last week for not dispersing the Negro demonstrators."

"But **Saturday**, when the men showed up with **ax handles**, we didn't know what they were planning. We thought they were bluffing," he said.

Negro leaders said they were

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trouble, they'll be thrown in jail.

"We'll find a charge," he declared.

Police Sunday arrested five white youths carrying clubs at Hemming Park in the downtown section. They were held for investigation.

Nearly 200 law enforcement officers went on emergency duty Sunday to prevent any further racial violence or bloodshed in the city.

Police broke up small groups of Negroes on street corners, but it was quiet compared with **Saturday** when 50 persons were injured, three seriously, and 62 were arrested in the race fight which erupted when angry mobs of club-swinging whites clashed with Negroes.

Negro leaders met and voted

Jax Shaken By Violent Race Clash

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goers gathered around a policeman.

"This violence isn't the answer," a man said. "All of our trouble started with that Communist Supreme Court decision. The trouble is with the lawmakers. That's where

the ballot box, not in the streets with ax handles and sticks and guns.

As he talked, he waved his arm and slapped the Bible in his hand for emphasis.

"I'm ashamed of what they did to those Negroes," said a blonde woman. "It's terrible . . . and it's frightening."

The burly policeman just nodded his head.

A man in a neat brown suit, carrying a briefcase, stopped.

"What's the best kind of gun to get," he asked the policeman. "I want it for . . ." He hesitated. "For general use, you know, protection at home."

"Get a .32 or a .38" said a man standing nearby.

"Either does the job," the

officer said.

"That's foolish," said another man. "Too many men get hurt with guns. They get into the wrong hands."

A late-model station wagon pulled up to the curb. A pale woman called the officer over.

"They threw rocks at us," she said. "We came off the expressway and they threw rocks at us. They are just standing in crowds on the street corners."

There was a jagged crack in the windshield where one stone had found its mark.

The church service had started and the officer sent one man inside to tell the minister. The minister instructed his congregation to stay out of the Negro district on the way home. Then he prayed.