



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? Making an impact: Civil Rights Trail

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Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Under 50,000

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

The ultimate goal of an editorial page is to advocate for an improved quality of life in its community. This editorial illustrates that fact.

The editorial lamenting Florida and Jacksonville's exclusion from a civil rights trail led to the creation of a special city task force, the creation of a 6,000-word report on Jacksonville's civil rights history and a movement to join the civil rights trail. Acknowledging an important missing part of this city's history is important to Jacksonville's sense of identity.

Jacksonville belongs on U.S. civil rights trail

By Times-Union Editorial Board

Posted Mar 9, 2018 at 2:01 AM

We can't tell the story of civil rights in America without including Florida.

Where would we be without "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James and Rosamond Johnson of Jacksonville?

Where would we be without Bethune Cookman and its predecessor, Jacksonville's Cookman Institute?

Where would we be without A. Philip Randolph, the organizer of the 1941 and 1963 marches on Washington and other prominent leaders who attended Jacksonville's Stanton school?

Where would we be without Fort Mose, the first legally sanctioned free African settlement in what would become the United States?

Where would we be without the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic experiences in St. Augustine?

Without these historic figures and incidents, there would be a gaping hole in America's dramatic civil rights story.

In fact, the national Civil Rights Museum in Washington has asked for a number of items from our own Ritz Theatre and Museum.

So it is beyond belief that Florida was skipped when a national Civil Rights Trail was established.

Fourteen states, more than 100 historic locations were included — and nothing in Jacksonville, nothing in Florida.

Why was Florida missed? We're unlikely to get a straight answer on that one.

But part of the fault is ours. Florida and Jacksonville have done a poor job of celebrating and marketing our proud history, a history that includes important events involving our African-American leaders.

In response to an editorial on the subject, City Council President Anna Lopez Brosche has created a task force of 25 outstanding local people led by Warren Jones — a former City Council president and current Duval School Board member — and Ju'Coby Pittman, who heads the historic Clara White Mission.

Florida has a state-sponsored Black Heritage Trail. And this state has a number of state and national parks that include African-American history.

In fact, of the 18 people inducted in the Florida Civil Rights Hall of Fame, six are from Jacksonville: Arnett Girardeau, Earl Johnson, Rutledge Pearson, Sallye Mathis, James Weldon Johnson and A. Philip Randolph.

In a recent discussion on the topic with several members of City Council, there was a consensus that action is needed. Brosche expects the task force to finish its work by June 30.

One clear need is for more funding and support. Though the Ritz offers wonderful exhibits, especially its animatronic feature on James and Rosamond Johnson, it could use more space and more funding.

Council Member Katrina Brown noted that there are eight abandoned African-American cemeteries in her Northwest Jacksonville district.

Council Member Garrett Dennis correctly observed that Jacksonville's African-American history needs to be placed in the forefront of the city's history.

In fact, in its early history, Jacksonville's population was mostly African-American.

Council Member Reggie Brown said many other cities have capitalized on their African-American history for tourism.

"It's just amazing the people who have come from Jacksonville," Brown said.

Yet in Jacksonville, Old Stanton High School — a historic African-American site — now sits forlorn and largely ignored on a Downtown block.

Recently in *The Economist* magazine, Paul Chaat Smith — a Comanche scholar at the Smithsonian — eloquently summed up the impact of American Indians in the United States:

"Without you," he said, "there is no us.'

We could say the same in Jacksonville about African-Americans.