Defines black power

Forman cites cause for racism

By WILLIAM HANEY

Thrasher Reporter

Racism will end only when white people realize that its roots lie in their own deep-seated attitudes, in their homes, families and institutions, said James Forman in Wiess Commons Tuesday.

He urged the people in the audience to re-examine their own attitudes, and then to form a freedom school in their own white community. "We don't belong in your territory," he said; "Whites have got to take that message."

Forman opened his talk by defining black power as simply power for black people. Citing Hobbes, Forman said the use of power has always been understood, and that whites are shocked at the term only because it connects power with a people who have always been prevented from exercising it.

Cites Historian

Their professed horror at the "racism" involved in black power is a consequence of their own guilt feelings about their own racism and the exploitation that Negroes have suffered for centuries at the hands of their ancestors.

Drawing heavily on the works of Southern historian C. Vann Woodward, Forman recounted the history of the Negro's oppression in this country, including his disfranchisement by the Southern states after Reconstruction while the rest of the nation looked on, down to 1960, when he said a Negro was branded, castrated, killed, and hanged on a tree in Houston.

Whites Can't Feel It

"Power for black people means ending our oppression," he said, "and we have no obligation to explain anything to you."

Because whites have not shared in the Negro's experience, he said, "you are unable by definition to understand what I'm talking about." He decried guilt-induced, hypocritical efforts by whites to satisfy their consciences with token gestures.

Speaking to the few Negroes in the audience, he said, "You should be ashamed of yourselves, five Negroes sitting here in college... with all those people outside wanting to go to school. You should resign tomorrow."

Forman met with considerable disagreement from the audience because of what one speaker called his "induced guilt and bitterness," but he responded that rationalism in these matters is a "phony concept," that "it is impossible for me to speak honestly without being passionate."

Sympathy

Violence, he said, does not come from the black man; rather, it comes from whites surprised at seeing the Negro stand up for his manhood.

When asked how any progress could be made toward the end of racism if whites are unable "by definition" to comprehend the problem, as he had alleged, Forman answered that it is possible for the white man to have a certain sympathy for the Negro in his struggle, even if he is not fully able to share it.

Forman's talk was sponsored jointly by Wiess College and the Forum Committee. Forman also spoke last spring at Will Rice College.