

James Farmer Celebrated

Tribute Continues Farmer's Legacy

By Mark H. Redetter and Laura Williams
Staff Writers

"He came through back doors so that I could walk through the front door," Brenda Sloan, special collections librarian, said of James Farmer at last night's tribute to the late civil rights leader.

Approximately 350 students, faculty and community members came through the front doors of Dodd Auditorium to pay their respects to Farmer, former distinguished professor of history and American studies and hear new plans by the college to honor his life.

Board of Visitors member and 1990 Mary Washington graduate Richard Cooper announced that the BOV will establish a new faculty position, the James Farmer visiting professor in human rights, and a scholarship named after Farmer.

"These are two steps in the journey we must make as a college and country if we are ever to realize the vision of James Farmer," Cooper, once a student in Farmer's civil rights class, said.

State Sen. Edd Houck, (D-Fredericksburg) announced the construction of a monument to Farmer across from Trinkle Hall on Campus Walk.

Houck remembered a speech Farmer gave to the Virginia General Assembly in 1998, in the same chamber in which legislators had once voted to close public schools in Virginia



Photo courtesy of College Relations

James Farmer protests racist hiring practices at the 1964 World's Fair. Below: Speakers at Farmer's tribute sing "We Shall Overcome."

rather than integrate them.

"In his thunderous voice, he brought the house down," Houck said.

College President William Anderson said that Farmer will remain on the minds of students.

"We will never forget everything he brought to campus. His spirit will forever live on this campus," Anderson said.

Phil Hall, vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty, said that the tribute was not designed to mourn the loss of Farmer, but rather to celebrate his life.

"Our hearts are still heavy with grief over the passing of Dr. James Farmer. But our purpose today is not to grieve but to celebrate," Hall said. "Our purpose is to keep the promises we made to Jim to rise above our differences and come together as one people."



Saffire: The Uppity Blues Women, a blues band of which Farmer was a fan, played at the tribute.

"Our music is about freedom, it's about liberation. But I think [Farmer] just liked our music and had a sense of humor," said Gaye Adegbatol, a member of the band.

After the tribute, those interviewed said they enjoyed the gathering.

"I liked the music, and I thought it was a good time to make the announcements about the new professorship, the scholarship, and the monument," said junior Cyrus Grady.

Lillian Bullock, a retired schoolteacher living in Fredericksburg attended some of Farmer's rallies during the civil rights movement.

"We all honor him as the last of the Great Four," she said.

Life Of A Civil Rights Visionary

By Teresa Joergler
Assistant News Editor

James Farmer, an influential civil rights activist and retired distinguished professor of history and American studies at Mary Washington College, died unexpectedly after suffering a mild heart attack on July 9 at Mary Washington Hospital, at the age of 79.

Farmer was the last surviving member of the "Big Four" civil rights leaders comprised of Martin Luther King, Jr. of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Whitney Young of the National Urban League.

"Dr. Farmer was blind and had diabetes, which led to all kinds of health problems. His physical difficulty never seemed to get him down, which shows a great deal of perseverance and courage," said Porter Blakemore, associate professor of history and American studies.

Born in Texas in 1920, Farmer entered a world of inequality and discrimination. At a young age, he decided to devote his life to achieve equal rights for all Americans.

In 1942, Farmer became a co-founder and first leader of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The group gained notoriety by initiating