

THE DAILY TARGUM

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CRUNCH TIME

The Rutgers football team travels to Cincinnati this weekend to take on the Bearcats in a game that is vital to the Scarlet Knights' postseason hopes.



JOVELLE ABBEY TAMAYO / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

Former Black Panther Billy Jennings talks to a crowded room last night at Brower Commons on the College Avenue campus about his experiences with the Black Panther Party. Jennings joined the party at age 17, a week after he graduated from high school.

Former Black Panthers share stories with U.

BY COLLEEN ROACHE
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

Say the word “panther” and some may think of a large cat, others may think of the Carolina football team and for others, the word may evoke the memory of Bobby Seale, Huey P. Newton and a revolutionary movement that changed America’s history in the 1960s.

Hundreds of people attended “Original Black Panthers Speak,” a discussion with former Black Panthers Emory Douglas and Billy Jennings, and learned more about the latter definition last night in the crowded conference rooms of Brower Commons on the College Avenue campus.

Douglas, revolutionary artist of the Black Panther Party and later its Minister of Culture, designed many aspects of the party’s newspaper. Jennings, who worked with both co-founders, Newton and Seale, created publications for the It’s About Time Committee, which aims to preserve the party’s legacy and offer information about social justice issues.

The event was sponsored by the Center for Historical Analysis and the Department of History at the University.

“To become a Panther is to really work hard,” Jennings said. “Besides having to deal with the police department and different agencies of the government trying to shut us down, trying to raid our office, trying to

belittle us, the Black Panther Party, to me, is one of the greatest organizations in American history during that time.”

Jennings, who joined the party at age 17 just a week after graduating from high school, said he was inspired to get involved with the party because of its ideals and sense of camaraderie.

“What really got me interested in the party was the 10-point program,” he said. “It wasn’t the guns or anything, because I was born in the South. When you’re born in the South, you grow up with guns.”

After reading “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” and hearing the messages of

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STORIES: Jennings says members train for six weeks

continued from front

Seale and Eldridge Cleaver when he moved to Oakland, Calif., Jennings wanted to become a Panther himself, a process he said took dedication.

"You just couldn't walk into the organization and say, 'I want to be a Panther,'" he said. "There was a six-week training period."

While training to become a part of the party, Jennings learned much about political issues and the party's viewpoint on them.

"I had never heard the word 'imperialism' before I joined the Black Panther Party," he said. "That was one of the words the Black Panther Party introduced to the community."

The party ran schools, organized programs to distribute free meals and ran clinics — two of which still exist — to help the sick, regardless of their ability to fund care, factors Jennings said drew him to the organization.

"We merged nutrition and education together," he said. "No one had done that before."

Jennings said while the country was at war in Vietnam, there were issues of injustice that needed to be addressed right at home.

"There certainly wasn't any freedom here," he said. "We [didn't believe] that we should go fight for this country and there wasn't any freedom here. You could wear the uniform in Vietnam, but when you came back to America, bad things might happen to you."

Following Jennings' talk, Douglas presented a slide show of artwork he drew in the '60s and '70s, as well as pieces he did more recently.

"This artwork is not 'me' art, it's 'we' art. It came out of the struggle and the politics at that time," Douglas said. "It just happened that I was the one who interpreted a lot of it during that period."

Drawings of the party's symbol, a black panther, helped mobilize illiterate black voters, he said.

"The panther became the symbol when blacks in the rural south went to the place to vote, they knew to vote for the black panther," Douglas said.

Many of Douglas' pieces portrayed policemen and other agents who oppressed blacks as pigs, an expression of blacks' animosity toward authority at the time.

"This is how we began to define the police at that particular time," Douglas said. "There were a lot of rebellions, a lot of riots in the '60s. Black people [were] being abused by the police when they came into the community, particularly young black men [were] shot."

Like Jennings, Douglas expressed the idea that the battles at the time should have been fought domestically, not overseas.

"The Vietnamese weren't calling us a cause of unemployment. The Vietnamese weren't a cause of inferior education. ... The Vietnamese weren't calling us 'nigger,'" he said. "So our fight was not in Vietnam."

Panthers continue to influence today's world, Douglas said.

"A lot of people don't know that the only race [President] Barack Obama ever lost was against a Black Panther," he said. "[U.S. Rep.] Bobby Rush was a Black Panther."

There are several issues the Panthers fought against that continue to afflict the black community, Douglas said.

"If you've been convicted of a crime, you can be subjected to slavery," he said. "That's on the books."

Black Men's Collective President Quadeer Porter said he, as a black leader on campus, was inspired by the party's perseverance in the face of adversity and enjoyed the event overall.

"Huey Newton talked about how the capitalistic society was pretty much taking over America, and things need to happen," said Porter, a School of Arts and Sciences junior. "This pretty much solidified his ideologies, and everything that I've read and studied about pretty much came alive today — from the artwork to the depth and intellect these men have in their '60s. They're still sharp."

Porter said he would like to see more events of this nature at the University and hopes that next time there will be a larger venue.

Rob DiMatteo, a School of Arts and Sciences senior, had seen the event advertised, heard his professor talking about it and wanted to feed his interest in political terrorism and international law.

"I'm a senior now. I'm about to graduate. I just feel like these kind of lectures and events are important," he said. "I skipped class to come today."

School of Arts and Sciences senior Courtney Sample had studied the Black Panthers in class and came out to see what she had read about in person.

"It's so important, and it's so pivotal in our society," she said. "A lot of the programs that we know today, like the free lunch program the government supports now, originated in the Black Panther Party. It was seen as a militant organization, but that militancy only lasted seven months. The rest was based on community-service-oriented programs."



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