

Speakers Give Historical Perspective Of Civil Rights At Symposium

By STEPHEN W. HOUGHTON II

As **Black History Month** comes to a close, a symposium held Thursday entitled "Civil Rights: Then and Now" was called both "timely" and "enlightening" by those in attendance.

About 25 people gathered at the Robert H. Jackson Center to hear talks given by Justice Joseph Gerace and Rolland E. Kidder. The community forum was sponsored by the YWCA of Jamestown and the Racial Justice Committee.

Gerace spoke on the progress that has been made in civil rights and the law over the last 200 years.

As an example, he pointed to a

case in 1852 when a woman was sent to jail in Virginia for teaching free black children to read. Gerace contrasted this with the current situation in which people would be put in jail if they tried to stop black children from learning to read.

Kidder spoke on his own experiences with race relations and the civil rights movement. He told how he had been involved in inter-racial church visitations at Tougaloo College in Mississippi in 1964 while he was in seminary in Chicago.

He recalled how he had nearly been involved in one of the most notorious incidents in the civil rights movement in the south.

"At Tougaloo, I met a young man called Mickey Schwerner,"

Kidder said. "He recruited me to come back that summer for a voter registration drive among black voters in Mississippi.

"As things worked out, I had to stay in Chicago that summer to help out at the church. That summer, Schwerner and two other white guys involved in the voter registration project were killed by Klansmen outside of Philadelphia, Mississippi."

He also told of a speech by Martin Luther King at Soldier's Field in Chicago which he said was "the most meaningful, most powerful event I had ever experienced."

Those in attendance at Thursday's event expressed a positive reaction to the talks.

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Justice Joseph Gerace addresses a symposium on civil rights at the Robert H. Jackson Center For Justice on Thursday.

P-J photo by S.W. Houghton II

Symposium: Those Attending Describe Presentation As Timely And Enlightening

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"It was an interesting presentation," said Dr. Benjamin Okwumabua. "It was interesting to hear the judge compare and contrast between then and now. We have come a long way but

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This is a long way to go.

"This is a very timely presentation," Okwumabua said.

Jamestown resident Bennie Mitchell said the presentation was "excellent. It was very enlightening."

"I am sorry that more people didn't show up," Mitchell said.