Archiving history

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WHEN CIVIL RIGHTS leader James Forman died in 2005, he left behind a legacy of activism, writing and leadership that spanned decades.

He also left behind an eclectic personal collection of thousands of books, political pamphlets and audio and videotapes, as well as his own foot-high FBI file.

Forman’s family recently donated that library to Queens College, making it available to scholars and the public as part of its Civil Rights Archive.

Former NAACP Chairman Julian Bond will travel to Queens College tomorrow to celebrate that acquisition and talk about the future of the civil rights movement.

Bond, who worked with Forman at the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s, attributed much of the group’s success to his colleague.

“He was a superb organizer,” Bond said in an interview with the Daily News. “He took this group of fractious young people and molded us into a terrific fighting force, and we contributed so much to the movement for civil rights.”

Bond called Forman “a force of nature” committed to justice.

Benjamin Alexander, a professor and director of Special Collections and Archives at Queens College, said Forman’s library was remarkable in many ways.

“This is a new window into history,” said Alexander. “We have all his textbooks with his notes in the margins. We have his spectacularly thick FBI file. That’s a tremendous artifact.”

It also includes hundreds of rare political pamphlets from student groups and other organizations.

Forman’s family donated the collection to Queens College because of its Civil Rights Archive, hoping placement in the large City University of New York library would ensure it is available to a wide audience.

This [collection] only matters if it’s in the hands of students, the community and scholars,” said Alexander. “It’s our responsibility to make that happen.”

Bond said that because Forman isn’t a household name, the public may not be aware of all his accomplishments.

“He ought not be forgotten, and this gift of his books and his papers will go a long way to making sure that doesn’t happen,” Bond said.

Julian Bond will be speaking tomorrow from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Rosenthal Library Auditorium Room 230. The talk is free and open to the public.

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