

Fair 'sets record straight' about black history

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Chronicle Staff Writer

Talmadge Willard Fair came home last Sunday evening to "set the record straight" about the history of his people and to enlighten them about what they actually celebrate when they celebrate Black History Month.

Fair, the president and chief executive officer of the Urban League of Greater Miami, said Black History Month celebrations are "against my principles"; but he said he accepted the invitation from Wake Forest University so that he could "set the record straight" about black history.

"It is insulting to me for anyone to suggest that a celebration of my history can be squeezed into 28 days," said Fair, a native of Winston-Salem. "Rather than endorse their celebrations of my history, I refuse to participate."

Fair said that the American public has celebrated Black History Month for 30 years, but the accomplishments of Afro-Americans began as early as 665 years ago. Talmadge, whose appearance was part of WFU's Black History activities, said that the Western world has taught a distorted version of the history of black people in America.

"Like other little colored children in Winston-Salem, I was raised on westernized history," said Fair, a graduate of Johnson C. Smith University. "Tarzan shows made me believe that Africa, from which my ancestors came, was full of jungles and was the last place to show any progress. They made me believe my Africa was hot and steamy and primitive."

Fair said that Afro-Americans "know your history and you don't (know your history). White folks got you all running around putting up signs and saying 'We are celebrating black history.'"

But Fair said that the true history of Afro-Americans had more to do with survival and less to do with popular historical figures such as George Washington Carver and well-known Afro-American inventors. The latter, Fair said, "ain't got nothing to do with black history."

During his presentation, Fair presented a detailed illustration of Afro-American history that he traced to the European slave trade. Fair maintained that whites initially



Photo by Charmane Delaverson
T. Willard Fair, Winston-Salem native and president of the Urban League of Greater Miami, was the keynote speaker at Sunday's Black History Month celebration at Wake Forest University.

began and maintained the slave trade out of greed rather than prejudice. Slavery in America, he said, was not based on color as much as it was on circumstance.

"But a funny thing happened. White folks got lazy and having free labor became the custom. Then some of our neighbors in Virginia got carried away and defined slaves as real estate. We went from being a convenient custom to a public commodity," Fair said.

Fair challenged the traditional belief that slaves passively accepted

their lot in life. He said they staged work slow downs, organized resistance and ran away. He said they set barns on fire and killed overseers and masters in protest of their situations.

Fair said, too, that the truth about the Civil War is that it was fought over economics, not because of any love whites had for enslaved blacks. Holding up a board with wads of cotton attached, Fair told the audience, "This little white stuff did more to keep you in your place than anything else in American his-


tory. It's called cotton."

Fair said that after Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, southern whites imported northern blacks to harvest their cotton. But the importation was causing a shortage of labor in the north, Fair said, so the importation was terminated. Fair said southerners solved the problem by determining that "if they couldn't import us, they would grow us. And they grew us, and grew us and grew us." The resulting economic imbalance between the north and south, he said, forced the country to arms.

"For the first time, white folks killed white folks over us," said Fair. "But don't get confused. Don't think white folks were fighting over you because they had developed some kind of human compassion for you. They were fighting over money."

Fair said that the gains made after slavery were pushed backward when Booker T. Washington "gave his permission for us to be segregated." He said that Frederick Douglass was more on target with his push for progress through the ballot box, the jury box and the cartridge box.

Fair said that Afro-Americans must put their history in the proper perspective and "tell each other the truth about who and what brought us to the situation which we struggle with today."



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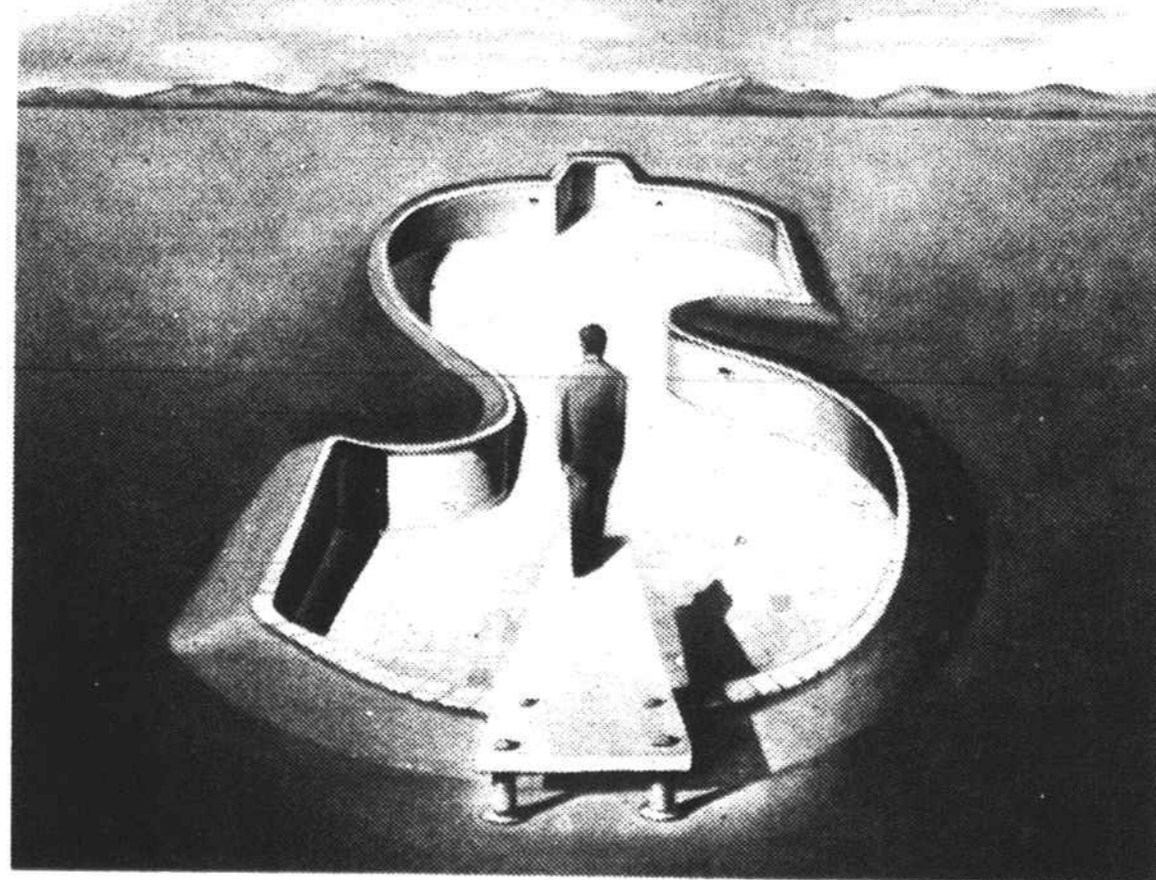
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Lenoir-Rhyne plans student reception

Lenoir-Rhyne College will sponsor a reception for prospective students and their parents Sunday, Feb. 12, at 7:30 p.m.

The reception, or admissions blitz, held at Brookstown Inn, 200 Brookstown Ave., will offer insight into Lenoir-Rhyne's academic programs, as well as a discussion of admissions procedures and financial aid opportunities.

Richard P. Thompson, dean of admission and financial aid, and several members of the college's staff will be on hand to talk with guests.

Located in Hickory, Lenoir-Rhyne is a four-year liberal arts institution affiliated with the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The school offers more than 40 undergraduate majors and five programs of graduate study.

John Jacob

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They serve a valid public purpose in expanding minority business opportunities, and a constitutional purpose in remedying illegal and unconstitutional past discrimination.

The court could have found fault with the Richmond statute and issued a narrow ruling applying only to the case in question. Instead, it issued a sweeping decision that hurts affirmative action and makes it harder for minority business people to survive.

All of this is done under the cloak of racial neutrality and removing race as a consideration -- a position that ignores and distorts the reality of past racism and present-day discrimination. This decision is shameful.

John E. Jacob is president of the National Urban League.