

Focus on Leadership turns 10

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Public speaking made Al Austin nervous.

Focus on Leadership changed all that.

Austin, public relations manager for the American Association of Minority Businesses, was unsure of his ability to communicate effectively to audiences when he joined the organization's Class VI. Seminars and exercises that included public speaking helped strengthen his skills.

"They definitely put you out there," he said. "Through the classes, I learned how to be better prepared in speaking before people."

Focus on Leadership is celebrating its 10th year with several events, including a blood drive and Martin Luther King Day parade. The highlight of the academic portion is the graduation of Class X in June.

Bridget Wall, Minority and Women Business Program administrator for Charlotte-

Mecklenburg Schools, said she joined Class X to learn more about the contributions of African Americans in Charlotte as well as the networking and leadership training.

"I wanted to affiliate with an organization that fosters leadership among African Americans," she said.

Founded at Johnson C. Smith University in 1987, Focus has graduated nine previous classes, with 200 individuals successfully completing the course. Some notable alumni include Mecklenburg County commissioner Hoyle Martin, community activist Joyce Waddell and Austin, who is the first African American president of Young Democrats of Mecklenburg. Class X had its orientation last week and will go through five months of classes at Central Piedmont Community College's Freedom Drive location. Wall, one of 20 members in the class, said she is looking forward to learning more about the political process in

Charlotte-Mecklenburg and its relationship to the black community.

"Some of the workshops and seminars are on dynamics of politics in the area," Wall said. "As an African American, I wanted to see what role it plays in our community."

Focus helps develop skills that otherwise could stay submerged, Austin said. As a result, participants learn more about themselves and their ability to lead.

"I felt better prepared to tackle any leadership role," Austin said. "Focus very much prepared me for leadership positions."

FOL doesn't make African American leaders, Austin, a former Focus board member, points out. The skills and knowledge are there, but the classes help "crystalize" those assets.

"There's leaders everywhere," Austin said. "We cover all the leadership bases. We have a pool of leaders."

For more information on Focus on Leadership, call 559-4191.

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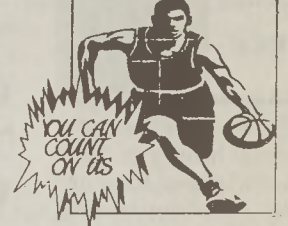
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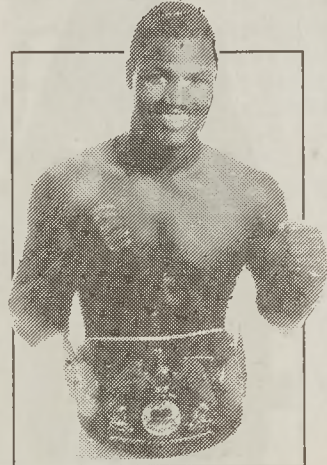
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EITHER ONE
YET

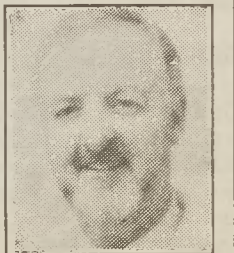


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Martin Luther King calendar

•The Central Piedmont Community College Chapter of the Southern Regional Council on Black American Affairs presents Frances Cress Wesley, author of the Cress Theory of Racism today at 11:30 a.m.

Monday

• McCrorey YMCA presents third annual Martin Luther King Prayer Breakfast at 7 a.m. Tickets are \$15 per person and are on sale at McCrorey YMCA, 3801 Beatties Ford Road.

•The Community Relations Committee will host the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade. The parade starts at 10 a.m. at West Charlotte High School and ends at the Charlotte Convention Center, where an

awards presentation will be held.

•Martin Luther King Luncheon will be held at noon at Renaissance Place, 201 N. Tryon St. Sponsored by Harold La'Mont Grier. The Rev. Mazie B. Ferguson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Siler City and Assistant Legal Counsel at N.C. A&T State University, will be the guest speaker.

Also:

•Former U.S. Rep. Shirley Chisolm, the first African American woman elected to Congress, will keynote the Martin Luther King birthday observance at UNC Greensboro on Jan. 29. Chisolm served 14 years before retiring in 1982.

For more information, call (910) 334-5371.



Martin Luther King Jr.

Take an honest look at King

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Americans have chosen to handle Martin Luther King Jr. with kid gloves and have lost sight of the civil rights leader's real life and legacy, says a black University of North Carolina professor.

Too many Americans have a selective, dishonest memory of King and have created a nostalgic picture of a safe black prophet, UNC-Chapel Hill communications professor Michael Eric Dyson said in a speech Sunday.

The palatable King that people invoke today — the man whom President Lyndon Johnson consulted and who initially thought American society needed only some tinkering — wondered later in his life whether white and black society could change, Dyson said.

That image of King has been forgotten and abused, he said.

"You can't be a black leader today without saying you loved him," Dyson said at the Community Church of Chapel Hill. "You can't meet a white person today who opposed him, you can't find a white politician who ever called him 'nigger.'"

But King had plenty of detractors — both black and

white — in the late 1960s, when he began to criticize the Vietnam War, became more arrogant, and evolved into a "peripheral" and dangerous prophet, Dyson said.

It's the view that King grew into — the idea that government and capitalism have crushed and are crushing blacks and others — that today's leaders forget, according to Dyson.

"Martin Luther King Jr. became a peripheral prophet," Dyson said. "People can't recognize that the man changed his mind."

Americans hold similarly myopic views of John F. Kennedy, whom many revere, and of Johnson, blamed for mirroring the country in the Vietnam War.

Kennedy "did nothing" for black Americans, but Johnson, "that Southern cracker, did more for black folk than any president in this century," Dyson said.

Dyson painted a picture of King, who was assassinated in 1968 at age 39 in Memphis, Tenn., as a man who grew distressed about economic racism in the United States and worried constantly about his death.

"He was constantly thinking of his own death, and in the end was obsessed with it,"

Dyson said. "He spent his life on death row."

The harsh message of King's later life has been lost in public tributes, political rhetoric and even in blind condemnation of young "peripheral prophets" such as slain rapper Tupac Shakur, Dyson said.

The rap music lyrics and King's later speeches tell of pain and near loss of hope for blacks and other oppressed people, Dyson said.

Society dismisses Shakur and his music as filth without gleaning the real message or recognizing the pain it represents, just as society has dismissed the later King, Dyson said.

Dyson criticized white liberalism as a movement that loves victims and hates controversial figures, like King became late in his life.

Dyson, who has written several books on race relations, is an ordained Baptist minister and former welfare father. He recently drew criticism for his speech at UNC-Chapel Hill's December graduation ceremony.

In the commencement speech, Dyson quoted rap lyrics containing profanity and said the American dream had been lost for some and is a nightmare for others.

Some students walked out.

Ft. Bragg soldier admits to assaults

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FAYETTEVILLE — A Fort Bragg soldier pleaded guilty Monday to assault charges in connection with what authorities say were the racially motivated murders of two black Fayetteville residents.

Randy Lee Meadows pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit assault and to being an accessory before the fact to felony

assault in connection with the December 1995 shooting deaths of Jackie Burden and Michael James.

As part of a plea bargain with prosecutors, Meadows agreed to testify against Army Pvts. James Burmeister and Malcom Wright, who are charged with first-degree murder.

Jury selection in Burmeister's trial is scheduled

to begin next week.

Prosecutors claim that Meadows drove the car in which he and the other two defendants rode to downtown Fayetteville in search of blacks and drug dealers to harass.

Prosecutors said that, after Burden and James were shot on Dec. 7, 1995, Meadows drove off, leaving Burmeister and Wright behind.

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