



Franklin G. Scott, Jr. photo

ECSU students, faculty and staff participated in the annual march down Southern Avenue to attend the program honoring Martin Luther King, Jr., in front of the Pasquotank County Courthouse. Several speakers at the Jan. 18 event praised the slain civil rights leader for his efforts on behalf of humankind.

Harris urges students to 'reinvest' talent, money, in black community

"It's up to each of us to control our own destiny, but we have to believe we can make a difference."

Ms. Andrea Harris used these words to sum up her message of hope and empowerment during the Martin Luther King Jr. Assembly, held Jan. 15 in Moore Hall Auditorium.

Harris, President of the N.C. Institute of Minority Economic Development, focused on "empowerment through entrepreneurship" for African-Americans.

"There is a real challenge for us in the South," said Harris, keynote speaker for the event. "While we talk about all the health of the economy and growth, the South still has not changed, particularly for black people. We like to talk about progress but if you pull the sheets back and look underneath you see a different story."

In Northeastern North Carolina, for example, Harris said that four out of five black children under the age of five live in poverty. And the average per capita income is less than \$5,000.

To change these conditions, Harris

said African-Americans need to build a skill base, and accumulate land and capital. She also urged her listeners to reinvest their resources into the community.

"Once you reach a certain income level, you're supposed to get up and move to another side of town," said Harris. "It's OK to leave, but remember to reinvest."

Harris said that African-Americans need to examine their consumer choices and spending habits.

"How many of you spent some money in the past two days with somebody black? How many of you own something by Tommy Hillfiger? It was Tommy who said, 'young black people would rather own a Rolex than own a home.'"

Often drawing laughter with her comments, Harris criticized the consumer culture today's young people are caught up in. As an example she described a relative "who had three credit cards and a summer job. Everything she bought had a life span of about twelve months. I had to take her

to consumer credit counseling. I don't understand how banks give folks all these credit cards."

Harris said a "change in values" is necessary in order for African-Americans to become empowered economically.

Money comes into the black community in a "leakage and drought cycle," declared Harris. "It comes right in and goes right out. It's not being reinvested in the community."

Harris said "Drugs and crime and poverty are the negative consequences of diminished economic opportunities in African-American communities."

Crime in Durham, N.C., said Harris is "all about the American Tobacco Company," she added that when the tobacco company closed down, many jobs for African-Americans disappeared.

To illustrate the power of black entrepreneurship, Harris cited several businesses launched and made successful by black people, including North Carolina Mutual Life, "the largest black-owned insurance company in the country."

Harris urged her listeners to take advantage of economic opportunities now. "Look at the opportunities you have on this campus. While you're here, make some money."

Opportunities are wide open for people who understand the value of "land, labor and capital," said Harris. "We must build a skill base so we can have a labor force. This requires education beyond high school."

"We need to know where our values are," she added. "The issue is values. That is the challenge."

According to Harris during the last months of his life Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was focusing more on the issue of "economic empowerment" for African-Americans.

"Today we have the same challenge—to make sure 1998 does not look like 1888. We have to figure out what our role will be."

The program included performances by the University Gospel Choir, Essence of Praise Choir and remarks by Dr. Mickey Burnim, Chancellor of ECSU.

Senior Latona Wilson presided.