

# Major myths behind mayor's race remarks

by Karen Carter

During her election bid last year, Toronto Mayor June Rowlands made a statement which indicated that "a disproportionate number of Blacks commit crimes" in the Metro Toronto area. It was a shock to hear such a slanderous statement come out of the mouth of the woman who was to be elected mayor.

Rowlands' statement contributes to the negative images many Toronto citizens already have of Blacks and reinforces stereotypical myths harboured by the media toward Black youth. The view that all-Black-males-are-thieves, or that black-children-in-a-group-of-four-or-more-in-a-shopping-centre-are-all-gang-members — is denigrating to the young men and women essential to the future of Toronto's Black community.

I recently visited a Scarborough high school with a high proportion of Black students. I was interested in hearing what the young Black people of West Hill Collegiate had to say about the negative images by which they are represented in the public eye.

According to the stereotypical belief of what a high school with a large Black population should be like, West Hill should at least have poor academic standing and a drug problem. On the contrary, this Scarborough high school has maintained a high academic standing for years and it has no drug problem.

A staff member who has watched West Hill's student population change from a predominantly White population to one that is predominantly Black told me that "there is no real difference between the kids. Black students don't cause any more disruptions here than the White students do. They are all kids."

Adolescence is a time of growing pains, and young people of every



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race, colour, and culture experience these changes in different ways. One child may choose to use drugs as a way of expressing his or her particular experience, while another may

choose petty theft.

I don't condone either activity; however, I have never been able to understand why certain White youths can be involved in petty theft or the

use of drugs and yet their peers do not have to worry about being characterized negatively as a whole because of this. On the other hand, if certain Black youths are involved in the same

criminal activities, their actions will reflect directly on every young person within the Black community.

However, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. If the students at West Hill represent the attitudes of most of Toronto's Black youth, then the future is looking bright for the Black leaders of tomorrow.

When asked what they felt could be done about the negative stereotypes present in society, all the students answered that the changes should begin in the Black community. They all realized that they have to stick together and make changes in their attitudes and their actions. They recognize that the youth who is gunned down while running from a police officer after committing a crime has to take some responsibility for even putting himself/herself in that situation.

These young men and women of West Hill know that police officers are no longer shooting to maim; they are shooting to kill. And these students are doing their best to stay out of the line of fire.

When I hear such destructive statements coming from Toronto's mayor, I can't help but think of other members of Toronto's elite who harbour the same ignorant thoughts about our community. It frightens me when I think that I will probably have to go to one of these educated fools in a powerful position for a job one day. The stars I am reaching for seem abysmally distant as I realize how much is stacked up against a young hard-working Black person.

Young Black people like the ones I talked to at West Hill have to face the reality that stereotypical ideas are ever-present in the minds of employers, teachers and law enforcers. These same ideas create obstacles for young people and such obstacles should not exist in today's educated society.

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