



Police Ahead of *Star* in Hiring

By Dr. Lorne Foster

Consider this question: Who do you suppose has the best record in minority hiring and advancement, the Toronto Police Department or the Toronto Star?

Before the suspense becomes too much to handle, note for the record that there are high ranking Black officials in the Toronto Police Department, up to and including the Superintendent level; but the Toronto Star does not have any Black people in any significant decision-making role within – or with any significant impact on – the structure of the organization.

Now consider this. The Toronto Star's series entitled "*Race and Crime*," featured in November of last year, focusing on the unequal treatment of Black pedestrians by Toronto police, has been nominated for the prestigious Michener Award for meritorious public-service journalism.

Through a Freedom of Information request the Star obtained the police database listing arrests from 1996 to early last year. The database records documented more than 480,000 incidents in which an individual was arrested or ticketed, and almost 800,000 criminal and other charges. The series reporters, who also have been nominated for a 2002 National Newspaper Award in the investigations category, raised the issue of differential treatment in a number of areas - including the fact that Black motorists were ticketed for more traffic offences, and charged with more minor criminal offences such as simple drug possession; Black suspects were held overnight for bail hearings at twice the rate of Whites; and Blacks were represented in 27.1 per cent of violent charges laid by Toronto police while comprising only 8.1 per cent of the city's population.

The Star's Managing Editor, Mary Deanne Shears gushed: "We are very honoured to be selected for a Michener nomination. Our goal in publishing this major and controversial investigative body of work was to put the spotlight on what we believe are matters of critical importance to all who live and work in Toronto."

As well as award nominations, there have been several other repercussions of the series. The former Lieutenant-Governor Lincoln Alexander convened a summit meeting of community and police leaders; the Ontario Human Rights Commission opened an inquiry into racial profiling; Ontario's solicitor-general announced a review of the public complaints system and appointed Sylvia Hudson, a Black woman, as vice-chair of the Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services; and Toronto police Chief Julian Fantino announced a race-relations outreach program.

However, in order to understand the Toronto Star's exposé on race and crime vis-à-vis its own organizational structure, it is important to grasp the concept of "cultural hegemony" – or the discourse on power and privilege.

In the hegemonic order, racial inequality is only acknowledged in the mainstream if accepted as such by the voice of power and privilege. Meanwhile, for the powerful and the

privileged, racial inequality is defined and framed in ways that do not challenge their power or their privilege, and in ways that often silence marginalized experiences and voices. Moreover, not only do the powerful and the privileged get to define racism in ways that they are neither implicated nor impugned, they can get prestigious awards for doing it. Consequently, this not only allows the powerful and the privileged to live in a comfortable oblivion to differentiated conditions in life; it has the “hegemonic” effect of teaching the marginalized themselves, to seek privileged approval or acceptance for their marginalized experience by limiting their equality-seeking endeavors to pedestrian exercises in due process and legal equivalence.

The newsworthy-and-potentially-award-winning public service performed by the Toronto Star is precisely to frame the topic of racism for mass consumption as a problem in the administration and regularity of the law, and therefore, primarily devoid of questions about proportional representation and power-sharing.

So while the Black community in Toronto and the Region might begin to look forward to an improvement in police-community relations, it also continues to be structurally annihilated.

This, as the McGill University study of the 1996 census data disclosed, is “*The Shaping of Toronto's Black Identity*” – 56 percent of Black children under the age of 15 now live in poverty, more than double the city's overall youth rate of 23 percent; and unemployment rates are twice as high for Blacks in Toronto when compared with other non-Blacks; and Black university graduates have the same rate of unemployment as a non-Blacks who have not complete high school; and lastly, Blacks are under-represented across the workplace spectrum in such higher paying occupations as upper and middle-management, particularly in self-congratulatory and back-slapping organizations like the Toronto Star.