

Brighton youth trying to ease racial tension

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

BRIGHTON — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life was cut short by an assassin's bullet 25 years ago this Monday, April 4.

Today, a Brighton High School senior is concerned that his fellow blacks are allowing those messages exhorted by Dr. King and slain activist Malcolm X in the 1960s to die out.

"Martin Luther King broke down doors, but (black) people have set back since they got their new freedom. They've kind of relaxed," asserted 17-year-old Martin Dixon. "We still have another door to go through, to open."

"I think we (blacks are) regressing. For example, the cities — horrible, horrible," said Dixon, shaking his head. "We need to stop crime but we need to not just talk about it, but do something about it."

Dixon is heavily in favor of laws discouraging violence, such as stricter gun-control standards.

"Fifteen years ago people had stuff against you, but they weren't killing you off. (Students) would say, 'I'm going home and get my big brother.' Now the first thing they say is, 'I'm going home and get my gun,'" observed Dixon, a parishioner at Corpus Christi Church, 864 Main St. E., Rochester.

Addressing the rate of violent crimes in Rochester, Dixon remarked that "Rochester isn't a very big city, so we shouldn't be having these murder rates. But the reality is that a gun is so accessible."

Another concern of Dixon's is that these types of violent acts are sensationalized in newspaper and TV reports, while positive accomplishments

by blacks are ignored.

"You never see the good things on the news. All you see is bad, bad, bad," Dixon said. "We're portrayed very poorly by the media, so people can't see young black men as up-and-coming Christians. They just see hoodlums who want to hurt someone for fun, or rob them."

A great deal of racism, he maintains, "is ingrained. Parents put it into their children, and the children bring it out and they don't even know it."

Racial tension, he said, works directly against the messages Jesus Christ taught.

"Jesus called all people to his temple," Dixon noted.

To try and counter racism, Dixon is an active member in a local multicultural club as well as his high school's Black Student Union.

"We talk openly about racism, diversity and sex," Dixon said of his multicultural group. He added that although Brighton High's 50-member Black Student Union comprises mostly blacks, it includes youths from various ethnic groups as well.

Not surprisingly, the Jamaica-born Dixon is thinking about a career in a law-related field.

"My mother wants me to be a politician. I think I'd like to be some sort of activist," he said.

One of Dixon's leading choices for college is Howard University, where his sister, Heather, an Our Lady of Mercy High School graduate, also attended.

Wherever he goes for his collegiate studies, Dixon guarantees that it will be somewhere far south of Rochester.

"I want a warm climate," he said with a smile. "I never liked the snow."



S. John Wilkin/Photo intern
Brighton High School senior Martin Dixon is an active member in an area multicultural club and his school's Black Student Union.

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