

In the article, "The strange story of York University", outgoing *Excalibur* Editor-in-Chief, Michael Sholars, claims that "I wanted to offer you all a newspaper with personality, that covered the things that mattered to all of you." In that spirit, he begins a recent editorial on campus safety by stating "I don't care what the statistics are brought up to argue that the York campus is just as safe as any other city; the problems are coming from the area immediately surrounding our campus, one of the most infamous high-crime areas in the country."

Without any evidence to support his claims, Sholars unequivocally blames the surrounding neighborhoods (Jane-Finch and Black Creek communities) for York's campus safety woes. As a senior member of a major student paper, the Editor-in-chief should demand of himself, as well as of his colleagues, a commitment to meeting basic academic and journalistic standards; articles like "The strange story of York University" require a commitment to rigour. Instead, the Editor-in-Chief seems to have chosen to perpetuate controversy and racist and classist stereotypes over well-researched professional journalism as his departing gift to the York "Community".

Within the last few years, various high profile incidents have raised safety concerns on campus. These incidents include female students being sexually assaulted in residences and elsewhere on campus, students being robbed, an international student being sexually assaulted and murdered, a shotgun fired in one of the graduate student residences, amongst others. Reports on these incidents indicate that majority of these crimes were carried out by students and former students, not members of the Jane Finch neighborhood, as Sholars suggests.

Sholars is not alone in his opinion, however. Former Assistant News Editor Jacqueline Peril, in an Op Ed dated January 18th 2012 (<http://www.excal.on.ca/edop/safer-community-safer-campus/>), also makes the tenuous link between campus violence and York's geographical proximity to Jane and Finch, noting:

Many times I have heard that York's safety issues are merely a result of where the campus is situated. Jane and Finch has grabbed attention as a community plagued with violence, including a rather famous 2005 drive-by shooting that resulted in the death of four people, including a four-year-old boy.

While Peril goes on to note the many challenges facing this community, she offers no evidence as to whether any of the 20 robbers or 1 peeping tom mentioned in the article lived or worked in the area of Jane and Finch. Instead, she allows the reader to do the work of association for her, nudging them along with the not so subtle reference to "drive-bys", the crime most frequently associated in the mainstream media with particular communities of color. In other words, if Sholars offers the overtly racist, conservative version of the story, Peril supplements this vantage point with a more liberal version, both of which commit the same crime: implicitly naming Jane and Finch as the problem without offering any evidence to support these claims.

Unfortunately, the perpetuation of racist stereotypes is not limited to *Excalibur* staff. In a recent informal discussion with an on-campus police officer, members of CUPE 3903's Executive were told what a "treat" it was to be working on campus rather than "down there". What is

more, this same officer replied to our counterarguments with the assertion that while some students might take issue with police presence on campus he wasn't there to deal with "us" anyways, but rather with those few "bad apples" who "ruin the campus experience" for everyone else. Indeed, the officer said he was more than happy to discuss these matters with "us" [i.e., three white members of the York "community"] given that most people "down there hate his guts".

Our point here, then, is neither to vilify this officer – who, to be fair, when questioned, at least acknowledged the limitations of his position – nor Peril or Scholars. On the contrary, we would like to point out that this "barbarians at the gate"-style fantasy circulates widely across campus in student discussions around housing, safety, and even transit. Members of the York "community", including the administration, need to stop perpetuating this discourse, which is imbued with racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes that are unsubstantiated and destructive. Instead, we must be critical of such responses, which perpetuate marginalization and exclusion. Indeed, the University as well as student groups on campus, would do better to work to build relationships with the larger community of which we are a part. We should be engaging with the Jane Finch community in a meaningful and constructive manner that seeks to learn from and with community members. Though racism is a structural problem, Sholar and the *Excalibur* more generally must be held responsible for the lack of journalistic (and academic) integrity evident from articles such as "The strange story of York University".

For these reasons, and many others, CUPE 3903 supports JFAAP's demand for a formal apology from the Excalibur's Editorial Board. We also believe that York University bears a particular responsibility to ensure all forms of racism and discrimination on campus are officially recognized and openly challenged. We urge the University to adequately address the concerns and demands raised by JFAAP's open letter. CUPE 3903 looks forward to working in solidarity with JFAAP in whatever ways we can. We believe York University, as an institution of higher learning, bears a particular responsibility to engage in substantive work of this kind as well. Indeed, we believe this is long overdue.

In solidarity,

CUPE 3903