

'Rise' above

Dorchester, Roxbury girls create mural to eclipse street violence

EXCERPT FROM "STILL I RISE,"
BY MAYA ANGELOU

Leaving behind nights of
terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak that's
wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my
ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope
of the slave

I rise

I rise

I rise.

By **TENLEY WOODMAN**

Dorchester and Roxbury teen girls are using art to rise above the fray of neighborhood violence.

Last week, the female members of Roxbury Youth Works on Blue Hill Avenue unveiled a community mural inspired by Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise."

In the past month, parts of Blue Hill Avenue have been plagued by gunfire, adding to the city's most violent year in a decade. Within the first 149 days of 2006, 162 people had been shot.

"I hope that instead of just walking by they pay more attention to it," said mural participant Arlete, who asked that the Herald not use her last name. "It sends a powerful message, whether it's young girls or young men."

The group worked for six weeks with Tova Speter and Anyahlee Suderman of the Art Connection, a nonprofit organization dedicated to making the arts accessible to urban communities. The result is a piece of public art expressing strength, resilience and hope through the fe-



STAFF PHOTO BY MARK GARFINKEL

RIISING TO THE OCCASION: Tova Speter, Arlete, Shatasia Santos and Anyahlee Suderman, clockwise from top left, helped create a mural for Roxbury Youth Works in response to recent local gun violence.

male form as it morphs into the moon, sun and Earth.

"I think it's good because people in the community can see how we express ourselves," said participant Shatasia Santos, 13.

The project gave the participants an opportunity to explore their own feelings on womanhood and

perseverance, which is a strong focus at Roxbury Youth Works.

"Here (they can) leave their mistakes at the door and have a safe place to grow," said Sandra McCroom, executive director of Roxbury Youth Works.

"In this building we partner with (Department of Youth Services)

and (Department of Social Services). We don't want our kids to be stigmatized or institutionalized by the government agencies they are part of," she said. "Adolescence by itself is a difficult challenge," McCroom said. "Poverty . . . just compounds this weird time called adolescence."