

Immorality Play

At Duke University, white male athletes are guilty until proven innocent.

By Bill English

AMONG THE INTELLECTUAL fashions in higher education today, few are as pervasive as the belief that all human behavior is reducible to predictable, material causes. As much as I am inclined to reject this view, the unfolding of the Duke lacrosse scandal in recent weeks has given me reasons to reconsider.

As a doctoral student in Duke's Department of Political Science, I drew a front-row seat for a drama that could not have been more perfectly crafted for a made-for-TV movie. The particulars are now familiar: three white Duke Lacrosse players allegedly gang-raped, sodomized, and choked a single black mother, hired as a stripper for a private team party. Add to the mix the hypocritical rhetoric of the academic Left, the suspense of DNA testing, and a local election season and you have a truly volatile environment. Before the first report hit the papers in late March, the stage was set. Since then, the events have unfolded with such impeccable logic that it is hard to imagine any free agency involved in the chain of reactions—hard even to imagine that the accused students could not be guilty.

The first of many e-mails arrived on Saturday, March 25 from a progressive campus listserv. It linked to a local paper's breaking coverage and announced a vigil that evening to be held outside the party house. The feeling I had upon reading that e-mail was much like the sensation of the first tremor before an earthquake. There was no question that a seismic episode was about to com-

mence, only a question as to how long it would take to run its course. Coincidentally, that Monday inaugurated the previously scheduled "sexual assault awareness week" on Duke's campus. Various "women's issues" listservs were immediately abuzz with commentary about the lacrosse team, periodically interspersed with advertisements for the week's events, like "breast-casting," a workshop in which women could make plaster casts of their bosoms to boost their self confidence.

By Tuesday, professors began to compose their personal declarations of outrage, e-mailing them to Duke's president and copying everyone they knew. Exuding an air of self-righteous indignation, more than one professor was aghast at the possibility of there being a "culture of privilege" or "underage drinking" associated with the Duke campus, let alone gang rape. Faculty demanded that the lacrosse coach be fired and suggested that players on scholarship have their funding suspended because they hadn't been able to finger the rapist. A professor of law explained that participants of "helmet" sports are statistically more violent to women. Other commentators used this as an opportunity to illustrate how the lacrosse allegation was but one instance of a pervasive climate of racism and sexism. As the news crews flocked to campus, anyone who would speak was given a podium to do so. The rest of the campus joined the nation in doing what anyone would in the face of an impending train wreck: sit back and watch.

A week after the story broke, I ran into a friend from the History Department at a housewarming party. "So," he asked, "has the scandal ravaged your department as well?" My department, as it turned out, was among the more mature. My friend began to recount the litany of indictments that emanated from the cognoscenti of his department—those who saw this coming and were happy to revel in its confirmation of their disdain for Duke undergraduates. None were happy about the allegations, but finally they had the hard evidence that confirmed their theories of aggressive, white, male, heterosexual domination.

This reaction, which included active protests at the players' residence and calls for an end to their future, was notable in part for the double standard on display. The same ACLU members horrified by the thought of enemy combatants being denied full legal proceedings had little faith in the legal process that would deal with the Duke accused. They certainly did not embrace the presumption of innocence. One astute professor challenged their attitude with an oblique reference to McCarthyism: how interesting that those leftists so appalled by attempts in the '50s to have people fired for refusing to testify now demanded that lacrosse players lose their scholarships for failing to produce the guilty.

In contrast, the reaction of undergraduate students was, by and large, judicious and restrained. Living the actual realities of campus life, they quickly came not to believe the hype when they

saw how Duke appeared in the national media. Yet at the height of the scandal, ordinary campus events were recast in terms of their relationship to lacrosse. Someone just moved in a few doors down. Was it a lacrosse player? One night there was shooting near the lacrosse house. Were people out for revenge? Would students be safe? Publicity was turning into paranoia.

Along the way, a number of students drew attention to the incongruity of letting these accusations dominate all other real news on campus. In the national media the disproportion was even more pronounced. Day after day the leading story was "Duke Rape" next to some minor event like Iran's enrichment of nuclear fuel. Duke's name increasingly became muck by association. Palm Sunday I visited my parents some 300 miles away. A local Catholic priest asked me what I do. "Well, I study politics." He was uninterested and asked me "where?" out of courtesy as he turned away. "Duke," I began, and suddenly he became interested again. A live Duke student had all the allure of a tabloid magazine.

Despite the hysteria that has surrounded the allegations, there are reasons they have stuck. Lacrosse players are, to put it delicately, not known for being good people. The stomach-turning e-mail sent by one team member the night of the party, in which he joked about hiring more strippers, killing and skinning them in the midst of sexual pleasure, provides some insight into the depraved humor that plays well with the lacrosse crowd. We likewise know that shameful racial epithets were, in fact, part of whatever went on that night.

The team had become a center of campus social life in the last few years, as the Duke administration systematically dismantled many of the traditional fraternities and selective living groups for fear of legal liabilities. In the social vacuum

that ensued, cohesive groups like the lacrosse team filled the void by organizing tailgate events and parties, racking up numerous police citations along the way. Commentators have noted that, as a university sport for which there is little audience or prospect for professional advancement, it is hard to not to view lacrosse as affirmative action for wealthy, academically underachieving students from the Maryland and New Jersey suburbs. That is to say, the players as a group do not exactly command sympathy. Nonetheless, as more evidence comes to light it increasingly appears that the players are simply jerks and not rapists—much to the chagrin of those who initially called for their heads.

Arrests have been made and charges filed. The district attorney will head into his tough primary waving this visible victory. One of the accused has an alibi. Someone is lying and not giving in. It seems that a full trial will proceed. In the

THE CAMPUS WILL BE CURSED TO ENDURE FORUM AFTER FORUM ON RACISM AND SEXISM, WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT REALLY WENT ON AT THAT TERRIBLE PARTY.

meantime, the Duke campus has endured a lot of aggravating soul searching. For the foreseeable future, the campus will be cursed to endure forum after forum on racism and sexism, without knowing what really went on at that terrible party.

There is, however, a more profound problem at Duke, which this scandal has served to highlight and for which there exists no easy, therapeutic resolution or form of judicial review. Having abandoned any basic claim to moral formation, higher education does not know how to deal with wayward individuals, which many late adolescents are to some degree. And in most of their coursework, students are unlikely to encounter the intellectual resources with which to reflect on and transcend

the challenges of becoming a decent human being. Although not everyone turns to strippers and beer for consolation, the mediocrity of campus social life is worth sociological note.

When the accusations of rape first surfaced, the story accorded so well with the intellectual conceits of the Left and the tabloid tastes of the public that it was hard for many to imagine that the lacrosse players would not have acted out this drama for which they were supposedly destined. But, after some investigation, various resources have surfaced to contest this account. A distinguished professor at Duke noted in the days following the accusations that the best student he ever had at Duke was, in fact, a lacrosse player. Moreover, this former student had been killed in the World Trade Center, apparently delayed after phoning his family because he stopped to help others escape the building.

Perhaps, then, those who play helmet sports are capable of good. Perhaps, too, the accused still deserve fair trials because our expectations about character do not have the determined rigor of science. And perhaps these students are indeed guilty. In the final analysis, although the Duke scandal has all the sound, fury, and logic of a natural disaster, it also signifies that the modern academy has not yet rid us of the traditional problems of being human. More likely, the academy has simply rendered us less intellectually equipped to deal with them. ■

Bill English is a second-year doctoral student in Political Science at Duke University.

It's Not Just the Economy, Stupid

Illegal immigration is about more than jobs — it's about national identity.

By W. James Antle III

GEORGE TAPLIN sometimes gets out of bed before dawn to keep watch at the local day-laborer site. The *Washington Post Magazine* once described him as having “the look of a man who has spent an adulthood rising while most of the world sleeps.” Yet the founder of the Herndon chapter of the Minutemen isn't just an early riser—he has become the public face of opposition to illegal immigration in northern Virginia.

It is the kind of dedication one might expect from a person whose livelihood is endangered by competition from low-wage illegal workers. Except Taplin's activism was sparked less by economic uncertainty—if anything, the publicity he has generated as a critic of Herndon's day-laborer site is a bigger source of workplace anxiety—than his feeling that working to curb illegal immigration was a patriotic thing to do. He seems as worried about the immigrants being unassimilated as undocumented.

The willingness to rise early to snap pictures of illegal-seeking contractors in 7-Eleven parking lots may be uncommon, but the underlying concerns about the consequences of porous borders are not. Many Americans don't see illegal immigration solely as an issue of who gets jobs. To these voters, it is primarily about fairness to people who obey the law, foreign and native-born alike, and the social fabric of the communities in which they live. Treating people who enter illegally the same as legal immigrants offends their sense of fairness, while the failure of newcomers to assimilate offends their sense of community.

Even when the issue appears to be economics, these patriotic impulses emerge. In April, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) gave a speech to a hostile crowd at the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades Department. While the union's leadership has reconciled itself to the cheap-labor lobby's demands, many of the rank-and-file have not, and the senator was booed for his guest-worker advocacy.

The thin-skinned McCain laid down a challenge to his audience—he sarcastically offered to provide anyone present a \$50-an-hour job picking lettuce in Arizona. “I'll take it!” one man shouted. McCain shot back that he wouldn't be able to handle the work for the entire season. He didn't stay long enough to take applications, but one immigration-restrictionist group rectified the oversight.

Project USA posted on its website over 3,000 applications from people who said they would be willing to take McCain's offer and why. There were many messages from people who said they needed the money or were unemployed, as well as some facetious posts. (“I'll take it. It must be government money, or you wouldn't be offering it.”) The bulk of the responses, however, came from people who were offended by the implication that illegal aliens work harder than Americans.

“Senator McCain should hire me to pick his lettuce because I am an American first and a lettuce picker second,” read one reply. A second respondent said McCain should choose him “because I am a U.S. citizen and I have

always worked for a living.” Another quipped that at \$50 per hour, “I can become one of the country's fat cats... and buy the Senate's votes on immigration.” Beneath the levity one can see that many Americans fear that illegal immigration is taking more than their jobs.

This shouldn't be very surprising. While illegal immigration benefits many employers and imperils the employment and wages of a large number of working-class Americans, its overall effect on the country's gross domestic product is believed to be relatively small. But the cultural impact of 11 to 20 million illegal aliens—on top of more than 40 years of uninterrupted legal mass immigration—can be huge, especially in the areas where they are concentrated. Without assimilation and with the constant reinforcement from new arrivals from their home countries, these immigrants can often separate themselves culturally, ethnically, and linguistically from the rest of society.

Such national-identity issues seldom play a major role in the Beltway immigration debate, however. The business lobby downplays the possibility that their willing workers might not be assimilating while professional immigration reformers often prefer to concentrate on economic or national-security arguments against open borders. But politicians know better than to ignore assimilation completely. Even amnesty proposals often contain sections that are supposed to encourage English skills and participation in American civic life.