

Guilty Until Proven PC



This Duke University lacrosse story stinks to high heaven—and the *New York Times* coverage of it even more so. Frontier justice is what comes to

mind. Here's Jill Abramson, the managing editor of the *Old Bag*, on the paper's future: "We believe in a journalism of verification rather than assertion."

Really? If Abramson believes in a journalism of verification, what is she doing running the columns of Selena Roberts, the *Times* sports columnist? I first noticed this woman's rantings a couple of years ago during the Athens Olympics. Her coverage was so biased and so anti-Greek that I wrote a column in a Greek magazine explaining how American woman journalists tend to see everything through a feminist prism, and to hell with what is really taking place.

Let's take it from the top. According to contemporary liberal mores, only worthy victims are entitled to civil liberties. Unworthy victims, on the other hand, deserve nothing more than rough justice. The most recent unworthy victims, deserving of vilification, are the white members of the Duke lacrosse team, three of whom are accused of raping, beating, and insulting a black stripper they had hired for the night. That no DNA evidence has been found so far to link any of the athletes to the alleged victim means that the hunt must intensify. That one of the men the stripper identified as her assailant had already left the party when the alleged rape occurred is also of no importance. That his account is confirmed by the taxi driver who picked him up as well as by an ATM receipt does nothing to mitigate guilt. That the alleged victim's friend who was also at the party has changed her story to gain favorable treatment in

a previous criminal case against her, and that she e-mailed a New York public-relations firm asking "how to spin this to my advantage" are irrelevant matters, scarcely worth considering.

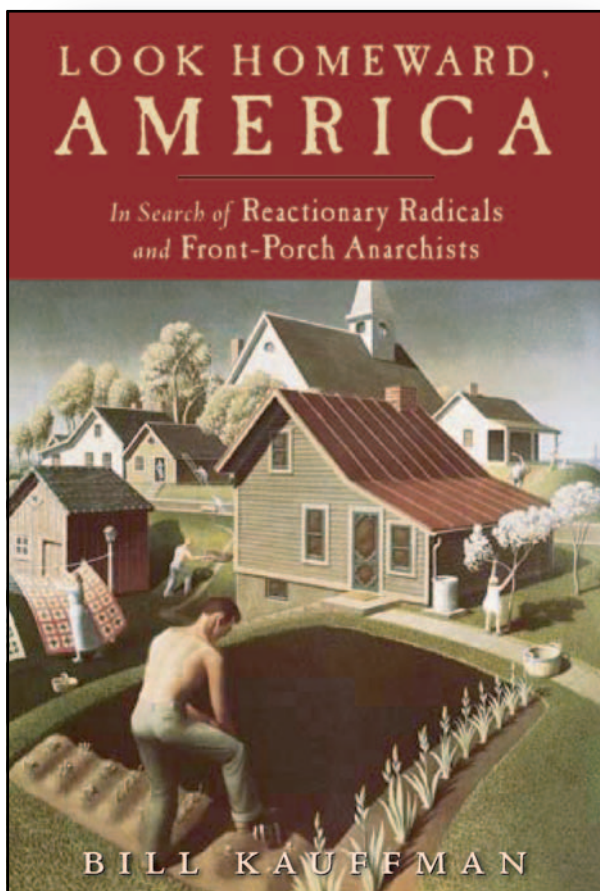
Selena Roberts must not have believed her luck when the story first broke. On March 31, she spluttered, "At the intersection of entitlement and enablement, there is Duke University, virtuous on the outside, debauched on the inside. ...The paradox lives on in Duke's lacrosse team, a group of privileged players of fine pedigree entangled in a night that threatens to belie their social standing as human beings." Wow! No one's been found guilty, there's been no trial, and as of today, no evidence has been unearthed except for the allegations of the accuser. And when Roberts penned these words no one had even been indicted. What ever happened to presumed innocence?

And it gets better. Only in last week's Sunday *Times*, the so-called public editor, the ombudsman, one Byron Calame, went to bat for his employer, whitewashing the paper for failing to report the accuser's criminal record: "Senior editors have decided it isn't 'germane' to the pending sexual assault case..." They would, wouldn't they? Why spoil a great story by publishing all the news that's fit to print? Then Mr. Calame throws us a bone: "The *Times* didn't tell readers about [the possible impact of the political pressures on the prosecutor] until the middle of the March 31 article, which noted only that the district attorney was 'in a heated race for reelection.'"

But back to Roberts. She wrote that the accuser "was raped, robbed, strangled and was the victim of a hate crime." What was it that her managing editor said about verification versus assertion? According to Roberts, it doesn't matter whether the rape allegations are true or not. The issue is the despicable male atmosphere at Duke: "Why is it so hard to gather the facts? Why is any whisper of a detail akin to snitching?" she cries. In other words, she assumes guilt and expects university officials and students to purge the guilty and start "a fresh discussion on race, gender and respect"—even if the lacrosse players didn't commit rape and didn't assault anyone, and didn't use foul threats. They as good as did, what with their being white male athletes and all.

But let's turn the thing around for the sake of race relations. What, I wonder, would the *Times* coverage have been like had a team of black basketball players been accused by two white trailer-park gals of the same crime? Would the *Times* have run 20 or more stories, as their ombudsman bragged it had, and on its front page to boot? Something tells me no way, Jose. Mind you, the *Times* was not alone in putting the boot in. There were so many liberal pundits who cried wolf, I have no space in this column to list them. If this turns out to be another Tawana Brawley case, pity the poor prosecutor. He gets to squander unlimited public funds destroying the careers of young men, forcing them and their relatives to spend vast sums on legal fees, driving their families into debt, and, because he's a government official, he is happily immune from civil suits for malicious prosecution and defamation. Here's my advice to young men out there: Forget lacrosse. Become prosecutors. ■

Are You a Reactionary Radical?



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Bill Kauffman is the author of five books, most recently the localist manifesto *Dispatches from the Muckdog Gazette*, which won the 2003 national “Sense of Place” award from *Writers & Books*. His other books include a novel, a travel book, and works about American isolationists and critics of progress. He writes for the *Wall Street Journal*, the *American Enterprise*, *Counterpunch*, and the *American Conservative*.

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