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Turbulent times for Duke and Durham



By **Greg Garber**
ESPN.com

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DURHAM, N.C. -- Robins are singing in the nearby bushes and early morning sun streams down through the leafless oak trees; but for now, nature's beauty is wasted on the shabby, off-white house at 610 N. Buchanan Blvd. It's abandoned and unnaturally quiet.

The black shutters are battered, the shades in the windows are broken and a section of the gutter is twisted away from the house at an awkward angle. Across the street stands the waist-high gray stone wall that surrounds the periphery of Duke University's East Campus. A distance of only 50 feet separates the house from the campus; but in a metaphorical sense, it could be miles.

For this house, set in a modest, residential neighborhood, is a symbol of everything that is perceived to be wrong with the men's lacrosse team at Duke. The school's athletic programs, men's basketball in particular, generally are seen as standards of excellence, striking the right balance between spirited top-level competition and the pursuit of academic enlightenment. An alcohol-fueled party here involving most of the team's 47 players on March 13 has blighted that reputation.

A stripper who was paid \$400 to perform that night has alleged that she was gang-raped, sodomized and choked by three lacrosse players at the party. The district attorney said the incident is being investigated by officials as first-degree forcible rape, common law robbery, first-degree kidnapping, first-degree sexual assault and felonious strangulation. A conviction on those charges could result in a minimum prison sentence of 16 to 20 years.



AP Photo/Karen Tam

The house on Buchanan Street is vacant now, but was the site of the alleged assault on March 13.

No players have been charged, pending the results of DNA testing. But in national headlines, members of the lacrosse team have been painted with the same brush of athletic entitlement and privilege gone bad as boxer Mike Tyson and Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant. The lacrosse team's season, pending resolution of the case, has been suspended.

The players have denied the accusations in a four-paragraph statement from the three captains, which so far is the only public acknowledgement offered by the team itself beyond standard declarations of innocence from several players' newly retained defense attorneys.

On Thursday, the house, which has been a rallying point for angry demonstrators, carried a different message.

Five signs taped together to the wrought-iron work on the front landing read, "Innocent Until Proven Guilty."

Another read, "**ALLEDGED:** Represented as existing or as being as described, but not so proved; supposed."

The source for the definition was listed as www.dictionary.com, and that online source presumably wasn't responsible for the first "D." Apparently at Duke, where the average SAT verbal scores fall between 690 and 770, not everyone has a command of spelling.

That the stripper making the allegations is black while 46 of the lacrosse

LACROSSE SCANDAL AT DUKE

An alleged sexual assault involving the Duke University men's lacrosse team has sparked controversy among students, the school's administration and the Durham community.



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team's members are white has exacerbated what already was a volatile situation. The intersection of so many hot-button issues -- race, class, gender, alleged sexual abuse -- has ignited the passions of many typically disenfranchised groups. For a week now, the charged atmosphere on the campus here at Duke has been like a radical postcard from the late 1960s. There have been demonstrations nearly every day, and student groups have pressed the cautious administration for answers and action.

"The issues here," said Chandra Y. Guinn, director of the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture, "go far deeper than a single incident. There are pockets of white privilege on this campus, pockets of class privilege.

"Our students are focusing on the feelings of hurt and shame of the negative portrayal of Duke students."

The students themselves, not surprisingly, are less circumspect. Their anger is palpable. On Thursday, the Concerned Citizens group sponsored an open-mic demonstration on the central quad next to the library.

"They're angry because there's been a horrible alleged crime committed by our students," said Nick Shungu, a Duke senior. "The racial aspect only magnifies things."

"There's an embedded white supremacy here," said Travis Simons, a Duke divinity student.

The alleged victim claims that she was the target of racial slurs, and a 911 tape released by the city

features a black woman claiming that a man who came out of the house called her and a black friend "n-----" as they walked past. Neighbors also reported that they heard racial slurs.

"North Carolina is the Bible Belt, and a fair amount of folks in the black community feel the sexual attack was something the young woman brought on herself," said Mark Anthony Neal, a Duke associate professor who teaches black pop culture in the African-American Studies Department. "On a certain level, they're most concerned with the racial epithets.

"For me, this is not simply a case of sexual violence or just a case of racism. It's a case of racialized sexual violence, meaning if it had been a white woman in that room, it would not have gone down the same way. It's difficult for many folks to understand how race and gender came together in this case. You just can't pull them apart."

The horrible question floating around in people's minds here: Did the lacrosse players make a special request for a black dancer that night? ESPN.com contacted several escort services like the one that provided the lacrosse players with two dancers. Representatives of two of the services said they typically send white dancers unless a special request is made. Were the players' actions premeditated in that respect? One of the views circulating in the community is stereotypical in its own way -- that white college frat boys, conditioned by hours of watching rap videos on television, see black women largely as objects of sexual desire.

"It's a valid point," Neal said. "The image that corporate America is selling through hip-hop is that these women aren't just sex objects, but available, too. These are women that can't say no. There is an historical discourse in this country that suggests black women can't be raped."

"People around here are passing it [off] because it was a rape," Shungu said. "People are passing it [off] because it was a black woman that was raped.

"It's disappointing it took something like this to mobilize the students. The incident is incredibly sad, but it's been uplifting to see the students rally together like this the last five or six days."

Town versus gown

Durham, a small, sleepy depot for the North Carolina Railroad in the 1850s, exploded after the Civil War. Soldiers raved about the local "Brightleaf" tobacco that, owing to the sandy soil of the region, was said to be exceptionally mild. Tobacco was a burgeoning industry.

While the cultivation and processing of tobacco in the mid-19th century is closely associated with slave labor, Durham also produced some of the most prosperous black-owned businesses in the country during the early 20th century.

Trinity College, established in 1892, became Duke University in 1924 thanks to an endowment from James B. Duke, who built his father's tobacco farm into a hugely successful business. The existing buildings, moored firmly in the town, became the East Campus. The West campus was carved out of forest land and essentially grew into a city of its own.

Today, Duke, where 85 percent of the undergraduate population of 6,259 is from out of state, is still viewed by some as a community of carpetbaggers.

"Duke has a reputation for town versus gown issues," said Lillian Spiller, the administrative coordinator of the Women's Studies Program at Duke, who



AP Photo/Karen Tam

Duke's East Campus doesn't have much in common with many parts of Durham.

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said she was speaking merely as an individual. "It's a difficult climate here. There are historic patterns that continue, unfortunately."

Many colleges have issues with the cities they occupy, but the demographics of the two entities in this case -- Duke and Durham -- seem to have heightened the conflict.

While recent studies show that females make up a decided majority at many colleges, 52 percent of Duke's students are male. According to statistics furnished by the Princeton Review, Duke's Caucasian population is 56 percent, compared to 11 percent for African Americans.

Durham, by contrast, is a city of 200,000; and the 2000 Census placed the black population at 43.8 percent, narrowly behind the 45.5 percent that is white.

"Of the four major cities in the Research Triangle, Durham is probably the most diverse," Mayor William Bell said in a telephone interview Friday. "People are very outspoken and find ways to voice their concerns."

Bell said the media have magnified the incident, creating even more tension.

"We had a cross-burning about a year ago, and the community was outraged," Bell said. "There wasn't much national media attention, though. Today, ESPN is down here, CBS, the New York Times and Washington Post. All of that attention sort of magnifies the issue."



AP Photo/Karen Tam

Durham resident Flannery Hysjulien scans a poster of members of the lacrosse team on campus.

"I daresay if this incident had been reversed, if an alleged crime was committed by black athletes at North Carolina Central University, I doubt it would have made these kind of headlines."

The house on Buchanan Street leased by three lacrosse players, technically off campus, can be seen as a microcosm of Duke in Durham. Neighbors have complained for years about Duke students living in similar houses, and 610 N. Buchanan apparently has been a constant source of tension. According to reports, there have been at least five formal complaints to police since September.

On Wednesday night this week, a caller to WUNC's public radio program, "The State of Things," said that Duke treats the town like a plantation.

"That captures it," said Neal, who was a guest on the show. "Durham residents have been looking for a moment like this to address their concerns. This was sort of the last straw. The fact that the university responded at all, I think, was due to that push-back."

Betty Greene, a Durham resident for 10 years, lived in New Haven, Conn., for more than a decade. She said she believes the relationship between Durham and Duke is far more fractured than that of Yale University and its Connecticut city.

"Last weekend was Duke's minority recruitment," Greene said. "What a welcome for minority students to walk into this story. I'm trying not to call it racial terrorism, but that's really what it is."

That the alleged victim, a mother of two children, is a student at North Carolina Central University, is emblematic of the rift, too.

Central is about three miles southeast of Duke, in a neighborhood that doesn't resemble Duke's pristine campus. The student population is 79 percent black and 3 percent white. While 90 percent of Duke's students come from the top 10 percent of their high school classes, only 5 percent of NCCU's students can make that claim.

Central is undertaking a \$1 million fundraising effort to refurbish its McLendon-McDougald gym. Giving is noted in modest increments of \$1,000. Between 1996 and 2003, Duke raised \$2.36 billion in its Campaign for Duke, the fifth-largest effort in the history of higher education; and Duke spent \$2 million to refurbish its Cameron Indoor basketball arena ... 20 years ago.

“ Last weekend was Duke's minority recruitment. What a welcome for minority students to walk into this story. I'm not trying to call it racial terrorism, but that's what it really is. ”

— Betty Greene, a Durham resident for 10 years

One Central student, who asked not to be named, wondered Thursday what would have happened if Central's basketball team -- of which 16 of 17 players are black -- had been accused of a similar crime against a white woman.

"Somebody," the student said, "would be in jail."

At Thursday's open forum, a Duke student, who declined to be named, said she worked at a local soup kitchen.

"You know what the soup kitchen folks think of Duke?" she asked with emotion. " 'Duke s---- on Durham! We hate Duke! "

Durham County District Attorney Mike Nifong is aware of the political dynamic. He has said, despite the players' denials, that he believes a rape took place. He also has been a constant presence in the media and has vigorously pursued the case. Cynics note that there might be a connection to his race for re-election in May against three other announced candidates.

Many people in the community feel Duke's administration has been slow to act in this case. This past week, however, President Richard Brodhead was more visible. On Thursday, he sent letters to students, parents and alumni in an attempt to calm campus-wide tension. He also met with prominent black leaders, including Bell and N.C. Central Chancellor James Ammons.

Bell has worked with the last four Duke presidents over the years.

"I've seen a steady improvement in town-gown relations," Bell said. "The president understands the seriousness of this issue and he understands the implications, not just for Duke but for the City of Durham itself. We all agreed that right now these are allegations, that we need to let it work its way through the legal process. At the same time, there are moral and ethical issues we need to look at."

"What has been alleged," Ammons said, "these kinds of acts, have no place in civilized society."

That meeting took place on the Duke campus. At Ammons' suggestion, a follow-up meeting will occur on the North Carolina Central campus.

Carte blanche?

Tom Wolfe saw all of this coming. Or a lot of it, anyway.

Wolfe wrote "The Right Stuff" in 1979 about the Apollo astronauts, and tackled the subject of 1980s greed in "The Bonfire of the Vanities." In 2004, "I am Charlotte Simmons" was his take on the modern college experience.

The setting is fictional Dupont University -- some would say the first two letters are instructive -- an oasis of academia set in the middle of the black slums somewhere in a city in the south. Two groups of students, athletes and fraternity members, come under Wolfe's harsh scrutiny.

One character, Hoyt Thorpe, a senior who says his favorite movie is "Animal House," is a member of the exclusive Saint Ray fraternity.

"A fraternity like Saint Ray, if you really understood it, forged you into a man who stood apart from the ordinary run of passive, compliant American college boys," Wolfe writes. "Saint Ray was a MasterCard that gave you the carte blanche to assert yourself. One of the things you learned as a Saint Ray was how rattled and baffled people were when confronted by *those who took no s---*."

Drinking, watching rap videos and having sex are the primary recreational occupations of the male students in the book. Lacrosse players, for what it's worth, are not portrayed flatteringly. Ultimately, Thorpe seduces Charlotte Simmons, the innocent freshman, at an overnight formal after a night of heavy drinking.

Wolfe will be on campus in late April at Duke's 2006 North Carolina Festival of the Book. Wolfe's topic: "What's Southern Today?" It's hard to imagine a discussion of the parallels between the two narratives not arising.

If Duke is a bastion of the elite, the men's lacrosse team represents an even more densely concentrated pool of privilege. Most of the players attended prep schools. Twenty-six of the 47 players come from Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, which annually are among the highest-income-per-capita states.

On Tuesday, the Raleigh News & Observer broke the story that 15 of the players -- nearly a third of the team -- had been charged in recent months with misdemeanors following drunken and disruptive behavior. For a variety of reasons, most avoided criminal convictions.

"One reason I think the students are upset is because they feel the issue of out-of-control drinking and partying has not been addressed by the university," said Charlotte Pierce-Baker, a research professor in the school's Women's Studies program. "This is almost like a culmination.

"The women are scared. There is no one saying, 'We're protecting you.' "

Pierce-Baker, a black woman who wrote a book called "Surviving the Silence: Black Women's Stories of Rape" in 1998, teaches a seminar called "Trauma Violence, Women Writing." The class of 12 students met on Thursday.

"We talked about white privilege and what happens when the body is racialized," Pierce-Baker said. "If you know that one in six women will be assaulted in their lifetime -- and that doesn't include the many unreported cases -- you can understand why women are quivering. The women of this



AP Photo/Sara D. Davis

Duke president Richard Brodhead speaks to students about the alleged incident.

campus, the place where they live, has been violated, and nobody seems to be paying much attention to that.

"I'm not passing judgment on all of the 46 men in that house; but there was, in the end, one woman. All these articles are being written about concern for the embarrassment of these men, the embarrassment of their families. What about the embarrassment and shame and anger of the woman? She's been taken completely out of the picture."

One of the T-shirts at a vigil Wednesday bore this message: "Get a conscience, not a lawyer." So far, the perception on campus is that most players have ignored that advice. Most of them have retained the services of attorneys.

"The fact that the DA is out in the public saying these boys are guilty is just extraordinary," said Joseph B. Cheshire V, who represents one of the captains. "I am absolutely convinced, and I think everyone in that house will testify, that nothing like these allegations happened."

Outside of a press conference on Tuesday, when athletic director Joe Alleva appeared with President Brodhead, the athletic department has been silent.

"Unfortunately," Alleva said, "sometimes young men have bad judgment."

Art Chase, Duke's sports information director, declined to make Alleva or head coach Mike Pressler available to ESPN.com. Asked how he was holding up during the crisis, Chase sighed.

"It's all a part of the deal," he said.

With the lacrosse season in limbo, no one knows if one of the best teams in the country -- a team that lost to Johns Hopkins in last year's national championship game by a single goal -- will compete in the upcoming 16-team NCAA Tournament. One thing the team can count on: Protesters are making plans to demonstrate at future practices.

OTL: Cultural Divide

Duke is often viewed as the gold standard by which scholar athletes are judged. Recently the image was sullied by allegations that a black exotic dancer was raped by three white Duke lacrosse players at a team party. Compounding the repugnance of the alleged crime, are reports that some players were also shouting racial slurs. The alleged incident has caused many to investigate the rift between Duke students and the residents of Durham. The Duke student population is predominantly white, only 11 percent black, while Durham is 45 percent black. One year's tuition at Duke is \$44,000, \$3,000 more than the mean income of a Durham household. [Outside the Lines](#) examines the ramifications of the alleged sexual assault, as well as the social and cultural divide between Duke and Durham. (ESPN, 1:40 a.m. ET/10:40 p.m. PT).

It is worth noting that Duke recently had purchased the house at 610 N. Buchanan and others like it in response to complaints from the community. Since the three lacrosse players held a lease through the academic year, however, they were permitted to stay. After the incident, the players moved out, for "safety reasons," according to a Duke official.

Other than reporters from "Inside Edition" and the local ABC affiliate, one of the few signs of life around the house Thursday was an azalea in front of the dirty white-brick foundation. Although half of the bush appeared lifeless, rose-colored buds were emerging from the few healthy branches.

A sign of hope among the wreckage?

"If the DNA testing comes back and these lacrosse players are found guilty, the school is going to have to make some serious concessions," said Neal, the associate professor. "They're going to have to go to great lengths to make people feel safe."

"If these assaults are coming from the best and brightest of Duke, it's clear there's something significant going on here that needs to be addressed."

Greg Garber is a senior writer for ESPN.com



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