

Duke assault opens wounds

The rape accusation of a black exotic dancer against three white members of Duke's Lacrosse team three weeks ago was more shocking than the top ranked Blue Devils basketball team's elimination from the NCAA sweet sixteen tournament.

Rape allegations are always incendiary, but when you stir in the elements of class and race, you end up with a volatile concoction like this one which is captivating and further dividing not just a small North Carolina town, but a nation.



ANGELA LINDSAY

"Rich kids unite!" is just one of the signs of support for the team posted outside the house where the alleged incident occurred and is also, apparently, the sentiment of the 46-member lacrosse team. To date, they have remained tight-lipped, refusing to speak to police about what did or did not happen that night. Only the team's captain has given a statement to the media saying that the allegations are false and that the DNA tests, whose results will be kept private, will prove their innocence.

Such defiance in the face of such a serious charge has rubbed many people the wrong way in that here you have an Ivy League university in the middle of a comparably poorer city which happens to be 44 percent black and, to many people, that the powers-that-be there failed to respond appropriately. For instance, the lacrosse season was not suspended by Duke's president until two weeks after the allegations first surfaced. Additionally, as far as we know, there has been no encouragement on the part of the school for the team members to voluntarily tell police their side of the story.

While the lacrosse team is currently under no obligation to step forward and speak since no one has actually been charged with a crime, conventional wisdom, it seems, would dictate that if they are innocent, then they would each be scrambling to exonerate themselves. But it is the unconventional nature of the situation that has consumed the nation.

Save the Tawana Brawley story in 1987, few cases of this particular type have captured headlines and been sensationalized to the extent this one has been. Some people have wondered aloud how the investigation would be proceeding if the alleged victim were white and the accused were black athletes from, say, North Carolina Central University, a historically black institution. A member of the NCCU board who was interviewed by ESPN concluded that they would probably be down at the police station right now trying to figure out how to get out of that situation.

As to who is telling the truth in the Duke case, we will have to wait and see. As much as I hope these boys didn't commit this heinous act, I sincerely hope the alleged victim is not lying. Either way it can only intensify an already strained relationship between elite Duke University and the blue-collar community that surrounds it, which brings up another dynamic of this equation.

Besides the racial component, the class chasm has added to the tension. Lacrosse is a sport that is typically associated with the blue-blooded, high society type. The team's good of boy camaraderie has left some feeling as if the players' parents will simply hire high-powered attorneys to "handle" the situation, something a person of lesser means would probably not be able to do. Ironically, the class issue in this case may actually have the capacity to bring some members of different races together. For instance, I could hear the disgust in the voice of a white male caller on a local radio talk show last week as he defiantly accused the lacrosse players of being guilty but cynically predicted that their "rich daddies" will get them off.

The alleged victim is a student at NCCU, which is my alma mater, and I often had occasion to go to Duke's campus. Save figuring out its complex library system, I personally always felt completely comfortable there. But I suppose the place does have an air about it that could be intimidating to those not used to its atmosphere. The looming stone gray, cathedral-like buildings, though beautiful, are not exactly welcoming and, in my experience, students scurry by you with nary an acknowledgment of your existence. It really is like its own separate community.

Despite this reputation, the university, often referred to as "the plantation," has tried to be more connected to the community. It has poured \$10 million into the city and is Durham's biggest employer. This reality could create a delicate balancing act between the zealous pursuit of justice and the community not wanting to bite the hand that feeds it.

All parties may be innocent for now, but this case is responsible for once again unearthing the race, gender and class elephants in the room that no one talks about until something unfortunate like this happens. The question is what happens next. One thing is for sure - no matter the outcome of this case, things in Durham will definitely change. I'm just not so sure it will be for the better.

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Time for us to live healthier lifestyles

April is Minority Health Month, a time set aside to give particular attention to national and local efforts to address continuing health problems facing racial and ethnic minorities and other health disparity populations.

The government has been working for the past five years to improve access to health care services and eliminate disparities in the areas of infant mortality, cancer screening, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and immunizations. Despite some progress, we have yet to increase quality and length of healthy life in these targeted population groups.



VERNEASE HERRON MILLER

Public policy has clearly identified health disparities as a top priority. The Congressional Black Caucus listed eliminating racially and ethnically based health disparities at the top of its 2005 legislative agenda. Nevertheless death rates for African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans is higher than non-whites for heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic lower respiratory diseases, influenza, pneumonia, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and homicide.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, North Carolina had more than 7,245 total HIV/AIDS cases at the end of 2004 with more than 1,137 new cases in 2004 alone. And Hispanics are at high risk for death caused by motor vehicle injury and homicide.

In order to achieve better access to health services and seriously reduce health disparities, community-based organizations, especially faith-based groups, must be empowered through effective partnerships to screen, monitor and deliver basic health services to their members. President Bush said that "the indispensable and transforming work of faith-based and other charitable service groups must be encouraged. Government cannot be replaced by charities, but it can and should welcome them as partners."

To reach target populations, health care resources and services must be made available where people live, work, learn, worship and play. Public health departments, traditional health service providers and communities must continue to partner with each other in order to prevent service duplication and to ensure that no one fails to get connected to services for which they qualify. The key is capacity building at the community level.

Churches are the epicenters of life in minority communities. They fill the gap left by traditional health care and social service agencies through congregational nurses, missionaries, deaconess ministries and other lay health advisor volunteers. Many churches are developing sophisticated Community Development Corporations to facilitate neighborhood outreach. These CDCs operate schools, food programs, adult and child daycare, housing development projects, and health services that are available to the general public.

The new trend is the development of family life and wellness centers that address the holistic needs of individuals and families. As part of advanced health ministries, trained congregational nurses provide health education classes and seminars, coordinate support groups, offer disease prevention screenings, and act as first responders for medical emergencies during church services and related activities. They also visit congregants at home, in hospitals and nursing homes. They are excellent patient advocates because they are by nature culturally competent, knowledgeable about the people they serve and are trusted by them.

The American Nurse Association recognizes congregational nursing as a specialty practice of nursing. The Cabarrus Health Alliance along with Presbyterian Hospital's Parish Nursing and Health Ministry and Northeast Medical Center are working hard to address disparities through a program called Search Your Heart. This is a faith-based program for heart health and stroke prevention in minority churches and communities and is an excellent example of church-based health ministries in partnership with established health systems.

Churches, temples, mosques and other spiritual gathering places are natural groupings of people who share common characteristics. It stands to reason that faith-based organizations should be viewed as necessary key partners in regional planning efforts to address health outcomes neighborhood by neighborhood. However, to be effective, care must be taken by faith-based groups to establish formal liaisons with public and private health systems to ensure proper referral, patient monitoring and follow-up.

Faith-based organizations need community specific data that can help them plan health and social services programs that to address their congregation's needs. Armed with this information, lay health advisors can target specific individuals and groups for prevention, intervention, and monitoring.

Armed with accurate and specific information, lay health advisors and parish nurses can effectively man the front lines in the battle to eliminate health disparities.

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OUR VOICES

Garinger High international studies benefit students

The writer is principal at the International Studies School at Garinger High School.

I am pleased to inform you about the International Studies School at Garinger opening this August. As the principal, I am excited about how this new school will provide students with the necessary skills to be successful in the 21st century and empower them to be engaged citizens of the world. Globalization has brought the world to our community, so our students now need to have the knowledge of world regions, cultures and global issues in order to seize the opportunities.

The cornerstone of international studies includes the awareness of the world's cultures and geography, proficiency in languages other than English, problem solving skills and inquiry-based learning. The curriculum will have an infusion of international content and the study of global issues into all subject areas. This theme will stimulate students' ability to analyze information from a variety of perspectives and explore linkages across cultural, economic and political lines.

As a small school, it will open with 100 ninth-graders and then add 100 students each year. This concept will allow students to focus on building relationships where they will be assigned to an advisory group, which will provide focused guidance to them throughout the high school years. The International Studies School is looking for students who want to learn about the world around them and who are committed to studying a language other than English.

We are in the process of planning information sessions for parents. Until then, please don't hesitate to call or email me with questions. You can also check out our website for more information at globalstudieshighschool.org. I look forward to hearing from you.

Applications are now being accepted for The International Studies School through April 21. Please return them to: International Studies School, 1100 Eastway Drive, Charlotte, NC 28205.

Natasha Thompson
Charlotte

HBCUs should refocus

I first heard that Morris Brown College was in trouble a few years ago by e-mail. I instantly felt compelled to seek out solutions to the problem, but soon lapsed into complacency due to the magnitude of the problem and the limited scope of our student organizations.

Since then, the nation has been struck by the greatest natural catastrophe of our time. Hurricane Katrina destroyed millions of dreams, and once again dispersed one of America's most cohesive African-American economic communities. Historically black Dillard and Xavier universities suffered enrollment losses being located in a disaster area. Yet there is still hope for New Orleans.

So I am reminded to seek seeking solutions. If Morris Brown, Dillard, Xavier and other troubled HBCUs are to reclaim greatness, they must begin to look carefully at the economics of their existence. In the past, blacks had an overwhelming demand for basic education while the law seriously limited the supply. Since then, the U.S. economy has evolved from agricultural to informational. But more important, the law no longer restricts who can educate black students. Furthermore, many consider today's basic education a commodity.

As a student at Texas, I learned that a market approach to education is a sound economic model. Historical giants such as Booker T. Washington and businessman A.G. Gaston were vastly aware of this. Therefore, it is time again to "cast down our buckets." New strategies must be implemented. An effective approach cannot exclude the importance of African-American institutions or the economic impact of education as a product as well as a process.

The goal of HBCUs should be to restructure as research institutions. Many of the top research colleges and universities demonstrate a market approach to education. They first identify their core competencies and create research programs around them. They then focus their resources on the recruitment and retention of scholars who promote the success of those programs. And finally, they provide their product to industry on the open market - generally as licensed intellectual property providing the school with residual income that funds more research.

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