

Charles Piot

KC's WORLD

*The Duke lacrosse incident in spring 2006 was touched off by a party held by the men's lacrosse team that featured exotic dancers. One of the dancers claimed that she was raped by three of the players, and charges were filed by the local district attorney. The national media rushed to condemn the players and told the story of the event and of campus culture more broadly as one about gender and race privilege (the players were White and the dancers Black) and about a fraught relationship between the town and the university (characterized as a site of elitism and drunken debauchery). A cottage industry of blogs developed in the aftermath of the event itself, commenting not only on the legal case and the party but also on Duke faculty who were signatories to an ad that drew attention to the racialized atmosphere on campus at the time—a time of backlash against African American students. Many of these bloggers accused faculty of enabling the district attorney's, the university's, and the nation's "rush to judgment" about the players. After the state's attorney general took over the case, he dropped all of the charges against the players, and the district attorney resigned and was disbarred. This essay focuses on one such blog, KC Johnson's *Durham-in-Wonderland*, examining the way in which he used the event to demonize faculty and further ideological agendas that are part of a broad-scale right-wing attack on progressive faculty across the nation.*

KEYWORDS: *Durham-in-Wonderland, KC Johnson, Duke lacrosse, Group of 88*

This essay focuses on the blogosphere that has grown up around the Duke lacrosse case. For some, the virtual space of the Internet (with its personal blogs and web pages) holds out promise as an expanded public sphere, an opportunity for more democratic debate, a

place where anyone with access to a computer can have their say, a populist paradise. Moreover, in replacing or supplementing earlier sites of public exchange, such a space ought to carry important implications and hold out new possibilities for the public intellectual. And, yet, the blogs in the lacrosse case not only disappoint but also invert utopian aspirations. They are strikingly lacking in robust debate and have been little more than soapboxes where demagogues offer partisan commentary and preach to an already converted choir. Like Fox TV's Bill O'Reilly, they bully and demean those who do not share their opinions with a virulence and nastiness that is arresting. Moreover, they have not only produced massive misrepresentations and extraordinary caricatures of Duke faculty—one of their principal targets—but also come to mirror and embody everything they claim to criticize (groupthink, ideological bias, inattention to the facts). They have also had a significant chilling effect on the life of the university and have incited violent racist e-mail and voice mail attacks on faculty members.

Of the half dozen or so blogs that have sprung up around the lacrosse case, KC Johnson's *Durham-in-Wonderland* is the most doggedly engaged with the afterlife of the events of last spring—and is the one I focus on here. This site has run since last April, intermittently for the first few months and then daily since late August 2006—a voluminous, incessant commentary (now into the thousands of pages) on the legal case itself and on Duke's campus culture. Herein, I focus especially on Johnson's characterization of the role of Duke faculty in the events of spring 2006.

Johnson is a history professor from Brooklyn College with no apparent connection to Duke. His blog follows all the latest twists and turns in the legal proceedings and the commentary about them in the press and elsewhere, praising those who take his side and demonizing those who are against. Not surprisingly, a favorite whipping boy has been District Attorney (DA) Nifong, whose massive bungling of the legal case against the players will likely land him in court and lead to proceedings to disbar him. But Johnson has also been obsessively preoccupied with what he calls the "Group of 88," those Duke faculty who took out an ad in Duke's student newspaper in spring 2006 expressing solidarity with students who felt vulnerable to larger issues of racism and sexism on campus, issues exacerbated by the

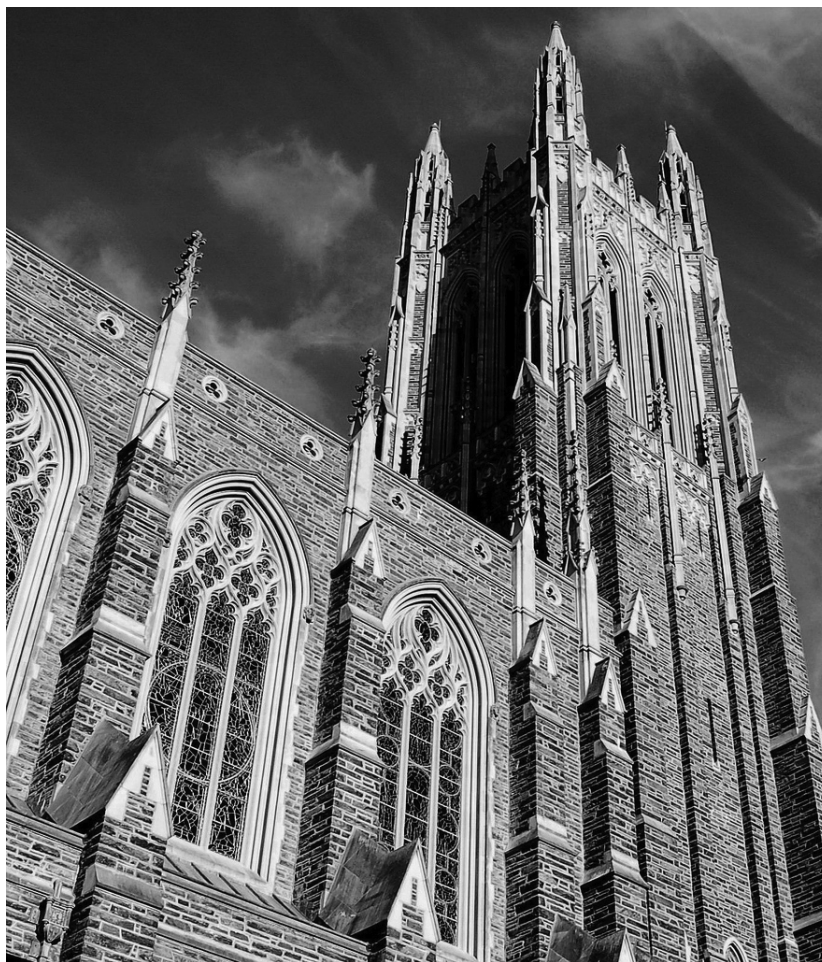
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events of last spring. Johnson repeatedly castigates—a drumbeat through his columns of the last twelve months—the “88” for “rushing to judgment” and trying the case out of court. He not only misreads the ad but also bizarrely assumes that an ad by a group of faculty might be responsible for influencing DA Nifong, university administrators, and the larger public about the legal case itself.

I say “bizarrely” because this was an overdetermined scene if there ever was one, in which multiple players and diverse/conflicting interests—both on and off campus—were brought to a boil by a national media feeding frenzy that was itself as conflicted in its search for stories (about race/gender/privilege/the South) as those it was trying to cover. This was a moment when all of the major television networks and print media—CNN, FOX, CBS, MSNBC, ESPN, the *New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, the *New Yorker*, and dozens more—were looking for a hook. It was a time when the clutch of reporters and film crews on campus was so dense that it

was the rare student who could find her way to class without a microphone being thrust in her face seeking commentary on the case, and when multiple constituencies, both on and off campus (Durham’s City Council, neighborhood organizations, Jesse Jackson, the New Black Panther Party, *Take Back the Night* activists, among others), were jostling to have their say. To claim that a group of faculty whose intent was never to speak to the events at the lacrosse party was in some way responsible for a university’s, a town’s, and indeed an entire nation’s “rush to judgment” speaks volumes about Johnson’s own ideological agenda.

The story line of Durham-in-Wonderland’s (DIW) focus on Duke faculty is a simple one of good and evil: of innocent, falsely accused lacrosse players, on the one hand, and ideologically driven rush-to-judgment faculty members, on the other. Reduced to its essentials, Johnson’s characterization of the Group of 88 goes like this. They published an ad in Duke’s student newspaper, the *Chronicle*, which presumed the guilt of the players



“Duke Chapel” photo by Lee D. Baker

and fueled campus protests that branded the players as rapists. The ad in turn influenced DA Nifong (who charged three of the players with sexual assault) and Duke administrators (who canceled the lacrosse season and suspended the three players from school).¹

And yet the ad in question was neither about the lacrosse players nor about the party they hosted in spring 2006. It quoted eleven students, all African American, in an attempt to give voice to their experiences of racism and sexism at Duke—around the time of the case itself, and beyond. The ad grew out of a teach-in organized by faculty in Duke's (then) Program in African and African American Studies during which students of color told stories about their experiences of racism and sexism at Duke—and this at a time of heightened racial tensions on campus and significant backlash against students of color.² Certainly the lacrosse incident was the trigger for the ad (and a few of the students quoted in the ad referred to the event), but the ad was never about that incident or about the guilt of the players. The ad's title—"What Does a Social Disaster Sound Like?"—drew on analyses of the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina to suggest that events such as these have social roots and ramifications beyond the events themselves. Moreover, to expect that Duke faculty would *not* comment on the racialized atmosphere on campus at the time would have been, as one student put it in spring 2007 at a faculty-student forum on the events of the previous spring, "irresponsible." "African and African American Studies faculty," she said, "were hired precisely because they study race, gender, and class in society today. I would have been disappointed if they had remained silent at a time like this."

Nevertheless, Johnson was determined from the beginning to write his own script and tell a different story—a story of faculty irresponsibility and misconduct. To this end, he invents and reifies a "group" that never existed—many of the ad's signatories have never met one another, hold diverse views about politics generally and about the events of last spring, and share the single commonality of signing onto an ad voicing student concerns in a campus newspaper. Having fabricated their status as a group (to which he attributes homogenizing/totalizing qualities: "groupthink," a singular "mind-set"), Johnson then proceeds to caricature and demonize them—and to do so in the most unsavory of ways. He publishes lists of their names, with links to their e-mail addresses, and questions the hiring practices that brought them to Duke. He posts the titles of classes they are teaching and surveils their syllabi, speculating wildly about course content (and, needless to say, presuming that their courses are designed to indoctrinate students with left-wing propaganda). He writes columns about political causes they have supported. He picks out individual members of the group and engages in ad hominem attacks on their teaching and

scholarship. (Tellingly, many of his favorite targets are faculty of color, especially African American women, and Duke's Department of African and African American Studies [which his readers, in comments attached to his postings, delight in referring to as "Angry Studies"].) He suggests that these faculty have contempt for Duke students generally and for athletes in particular. Throughout, he attributes motives that are remote from those of anyone I know and engages in leaps of logic that stretch the imagination. His characterizations not only are consistently wide of the mark but also deploy surveillance tactics that the right-wing Horowitz machine has canonized and that recall nothing so much as the campus witch hunts of the McCarthy era.

Here is Johnson on April 23, 2006, right at the start of his first-ever blog posting on the case:

88 members of the Duke faculty and 15 academic departments or programs recently signed a public statement saying they were "listening" regarding allegations against the Duke lacrosse team. The statement spoke of "what happened to this young woman" . . . and gave a message to campus protesters: "Thank you for not waiting" until the police completed their investigation. Activities of these campus protesters, as we now all know, included such items as the "wanted" poster and branding the team "rapists."

May 1: More disturbingly, the group of 88 committed themselves to "turning up the volume." They told campus protesters, "Thank you for not waiting and for making yourselves heard." These demonstrators needed no encouragement: They were already vocal, and had already judged the lacrosse players were guilty. One student group produced a "wanted" poster containing photographs of 43 of the 46 white lacrosse players. At an event outside a house rented by several lacrosse team members, protesters held signs reading, "It's Sunday morning, time to confess."

June 13: Affirming a commitment to "turning up the volume," the Group of 88 thanked protesters who had distributed "wanted" posters containing photos of the team and had banged pots and pans outside the residence of lacrosse players while shouting, "Time to confess." The professors' minds were made up: "What the police say or the court decides," the signatories declared, would not affect how they interpreted the "social disaster."

So an ad that was not about the lacrosse players is (mis)read as suggesting their guilt, as fueling campus protests against the players, and as complicit in branding the team "rapists." There are some extraordinary leaps of logic here—not only divining the motives of others from

a single text but also attributing causal relationship between that text and disparate campus events. Moreover, it is important to note that there were multiple campus protests going on at the time. The ones that the ad referred to (“To the students speaking individually and to the protestors making collective noise, thank you for not waiting and for making yourselves heard”) were never the “potbanger” protest that Johnson cites over and over again but rather those taking place at the open mike outside the Allen Building, where students, many of them students of color, spoke not only about what happened at the lacrosse party but also about campus culture more broadly.

All these non sequiturs and mistaken assumptions on Johnson’s part, and, yet, the drumbeat continues.

June 27: . . . the Group of 88 . . . issued a public statement in late March promising to “turn up the volume” and thanking campus protesters who had distributed a wanted poster containing photos of the lacrosse players while banging pots and pans outside one player’s residence, shouting, “Time to confess.”

July 19: Even now, there seems to be no recognition on the signatories’ part as to how a large group of professors issuing a public, denunciatory statement about their own school’s students would have facilitated D.A. Mike Nifong’s witch-hunt.

August 11: . . . 88 Duke faculty members . . . signed a public statement saying “thank you” to campus protesters who had shouted to lacrosse players, “Time to confess”; banged pots and pans outside the residences of team members and Duke provost Peter Lange; and distributed a “wanted” poster containing photos of more than 40 team members.

November 14: The low point of the faculty response to the lacrosse affair came on April 6, when 88 members of the arts and sciences faculty—along with 16 departments and programs—endorsed a public statement denouncing the lacrosse players. The statement unequivocally asserted that something “happened” to the accuser. The signatories committed themselves to “turning up the volume” while saying “thank you” to campus protesters who had branded the players “rapists” and distributed “wanted posters” around campus. And the statement promised that the Group’s crusade “won’t end with what the police say or the court decides.” . . . The rush-to-judgment public denunciation created an image, both in Durham and nationally, that Duke’s own professors believed that a rape occurred . . .

And so on . . . right into the present.

Notice, then, the misreading of the document (by someone, let it be recalled, whose profession entails reading and interpreting documents presumably with some

commitment to what the documents are saying³), then the attribution of actions in which they were not involved to the group itself (a “group” that he himself had invented), and then the mantra-like invocation of these fabrications again and again, as if redundancy or repetition gives them truth-value.⁴ This is a rhetorical strategy characteristic not only of right-wing media in this country (from Limbaugh to O’Reilly) but also of totalitarian thought and authoritarian regimes the world over: state an untruth and repeat it again and again, until readers/listeners/subjects take it as truth. And, indeed, judging from the comments column attached to his blog, most of his readers seem to have.

Moreover, what is astonishing about Johnson’s repetitive misreading of and constant return to the ad is that when it came out it was a virtual nonevent on campus. Other than a Duke *Chronicle* editorial about it, and a *Chronicle* article the previous day by the head of Duke’s Conservative Union,⁵ it was met with silence and disappeared into the ether of the moment. When I asked students about the ad in spring 2007, few remembered it at all. It has become an event only because Johnson made it one.⁶ He invented it as Event—and gave the ad a meaning it never had, a meaning, however, which his loyal readers take as gospel.

Let me now turn to a posting from December 12, 2006. This day’s entry—an attempt to look inside what Johnson imagines are the biased hiring practices that bring so-called left-wing faculty to Duke—attacks the Department of African and African American Studies (AAAS), suggesting that Karla Holloway, chair of AAAS in 1996, rigged searches to hire like-minded, ideologically left colleagues like Wahneema Lubiano and Houston Baker (two of Johnson’s oft-targeted faculty). In fact, however, when Lubiano came to Duke she was not hired by Holloway, nor was she hired into AAAS. She was hired full-time into the Literature Program by Frederic Jameson. (She came over to AAAS, half-time, only a few years ago.) Similarly, Houston Baker was hired by English (with a half-time appointment in AAAS, though he was never much involved in AAAS). Johnson then criticizes Duke administration for announcing (in December 2006) that AAAS is slated for expansion, when as Johnson puts it “as of now, the program has 15 full-time faculty”—far exceeding, by his lights, the faculty–student ratio that would warrant such an expansion. In fact, the program has five (not fifteen) full-time faculty. For someone who is constantly taking the 88 to task for not paying attention to the facts (of the legal case), he himself makes a mockery of the facts he purports to describe—facts that matter in this case because they are part of a larger Johnson jeremiad about whether Duke administration should be supporting the expansion of AAAS.⁷

And these are merely a few of countless such examples.

I want to pause for a moment to consider the “excess” of Johnson’s interest in this case—someone unconnected to Duke has published thousands of pages of cybertext about the legal proceedings and faculty he has never met have become an object of his obsession and contempt/derision. My concern is less with the fact that Johnson is an outsider—others might indeed have interesting things to say about things local—than in trying to come to terms with the degree and intensity of his interest in faculty at Duke.⁸ Of course, I can only speculate about his motives—but, in doing so, I am simply borrowing a page from Johnson’s own book, for he himself has never shied away from speculating about others’ motives for action. Most obviously, Johnson’s inordinate attention to left faculty is rooted in his own fraught tenure decision at Brooklyn College (in which a negative decision, at the hands of those with whom he fought over hiring decisions over women and minority job candidates, was ultimately reversed). Moreover, he has been a columnist for David Horowitz’s on-line journal, well-known for attacking left-wing faculty on college campuses. Johnson is also turning his interest in the case into personal profit: he has a book contract about the case, and without the shadow story of the 88—of a college campus overrun by left-wing faculty—his would be a far less compelling read. Then, too, he is clearly urged on by his adoring followers—that small but fanatic group of parents and conservative alums who follow his daily postings and then attach their own fawning commentary. But the reasons for this “excess” seem deeper as well. His demonizing of faculty who are largely African American and female⁹—and of Duke’s Department of African and African American Studies—would appear to be rooted in deep anxieties about Whiteness and masculinity that are at the heart of contemporary American culture, with its worries about the implications of multiculturalism and immigration for White male privilege.

The December 12 posting I referred to above, and one the day before—where he engages in a truly vicious caricature of a colleague in the Department of African and African American Studies—also reveals another sleazy underside of Johnson’s blog. Although he maintains a certain decorum in his own postings, the same cannot be said of those (now over 100) who post daily commentary on his columns. Here the gloves come off, and vile racist comments—a veritable gallery of ugly Americana—proliferate about faculty these readers have met only through Johnson’s blog.

Similar commentaries—offstage racism, I would call it—have appeared after postings about other

AAAS faculty members and most recently, in February 2007, after two Johnson columns attacking an African American undergraduate who published a pair of articles in the *Chronicle* defending the 88 and suggesting that the ad has been misread by its critics. Readers’ comments on both days (297 alone on the day after the second of this student’s articles) were filled with rants about the student’s IQ and about race and IQ/intelligence more generally. No dummy, Johnson staged a mild intervention into this on-line lynching by his readers, asking them to stop making remarks about IQ, and even took down some of the postings.¹⁰ But the damage had been done, many of the IQ postings remained up, and Johnson imagined he could have his cake and eat it too.

Moreover, throughout spring 2007, Johnson repeatedly insinuated that AAAS faculty were fabricating the fact that they have been the targets of vicious hate mail and death threats (“If the Group had *any* evidence to substantiate their . . . claims [that they have received harassing e-mail messages], it’s hard to believe they wouldn’t have filed a complaint with the U.S. Attorney’s office” [DIW, March 15, 2007]¹¹). This suggestion—that faculty have invented their own victimization—is not only symptomatic of his tactics more broadly but also deeply disingenuous, for Johnson’s comments column routinely receives racist postings whenever he mentions the 88, and he has frequently had to censor and scrub particularly outrageous instances from his blog (“This post has been removed by the blog administrator”). Johnson has also suggested that the quotes in the original ad were made up by the ad’s author, Wahneema Lubiano.

Here, then, are only two of the hundreds of such e-mail messages received since summer 2006 by AAAS faculty members Karla Holloway and Wahneema Lubiano (messages that they have been reluctant to make public for fear that they would engender more of the same):

From: “Lucia Returndo” lreturndo@hotmail.com
To: karla.holloway@duke.edu, wah@duke.edu
Subject: Hock-Tooley
Date: Mon, 16 Apr 2007 06:52:58 -0400

Hock-tooley! Hock-tooley! That’s me expectorating in your scuzzydirty racemonger face at point-blank range. Feel my warm, viscous spittle strike your cowardly bloodshot eyes and rabid hate-screaching mouth as you slaver hysterically to take the scalps of decent, clean, honest Americans because they’re white and YOU’RE NOT. God, how you must loathe yourself, knowing you’ll always be no better than a smelly, bastard-born, low-IQ subhuman!

From: homer wells <homerwells9@yahoo.com>
 Subject: Re: quick question
 To: Wahneema Lubiano <wah@acpub.duke.edu>

Objection, nonresponsive you cocksucking whore.

I guess I shouldn't expect much from a professor of "African-American" studies, since it is more likely than not that your IQ hovers around room temperature on a cool day.

Get a real specialty, you fat fuck.

Best, Homer

And here's a voice mail message received by AAAS faculty member Mark Anthony Neal on his office phone a few days after a lacrosse-related teach-in in February 2007 (and following days of blog postings about the event):

Hello, Mr. Neal. My name is Bill White, commander of the American National Socialist Workers Party. I heard you were a nigger. And I thought I'd give you a call to find out for myself. Listening to your voice, it sounds like you're one of those smarty-art niggers, as opposed to the actual thug nigger intellectual¹² and dangerous nigger that you claim to be. So I just wanted to let you know, fuck you. The White race is aware of your negative behavior. And I hope that one day you end up swinging from a tree.

As to the charge that Wahneema Lubiano made up the student quotes published in the ad, Johnson has apparently never thought to ask the *Chronicle* whether they have a policy of publishing such quotes without first checking their sources. In fact they do, and the *Chronicle* received prior e-mail notification from each student stating that they had been correctly quoted and agreeing to publication (albeit with their names removed).

Another Johnson refrain, repeated throughout the yearlong run of his blog, is that AAAS faculty, and the 88 more generally, have "open contempt" for Duke students generally and for athletes in particular.¹³ Like almost everything else in Johnson's column about the 88, this is pure fantasy. Courses in the two departments I know best, AAAS and Cultural Anthropology, were overflowing and had long waiting lists at the start of both semesters in AY 2006-7, with hundreds of athletes enrolled. There were male lacrosse players in several of these, with six in one alone—and that a class taught by a signatory of last spring's ad. Orin Starn, another one of Johnson's evil professors, because he advocated reining in excessive spending on athletics, had a long line of athletes taking independent study classes with him—while he was on leave.

KC's world is an upside-down world, a through-the-looking-glass world. No wonder he calls his blog Durham-in-Wonderland. He's not only a poor reader of documents but also a bad ethnographer. He knows little about the campus culture he describes and yet writes openly, confidently, and voluminously about it. What he attributes to others—inattention to facts, groupthink, being driven by ideology—are all truer of himself than of those he pretends to describe.

If this were just some fantasy-world, one might dismiss it as just that—a harmless charade. And indeed much remains unchanged on Duke's campus—applications flooded in again this year, annual giving was up, the classes of professors in the so-called group of 88 were overflowing, and no student of the over 100 I polled in February 2007 even knew about the existence of the blogs,¹⁴ let alone had heard the name KC Johnson. Unfortunately, Johnson's is not just a world of fantasy but is one that has real-world effects. When Johnson's blog produces vile racism, when the e-mail in-boxes of colleagues are filled with hideous threats from readers of the blogs, when these colleagues receive threatening phone calls late at night, when right-wing news media and film crews show up on the doorsteps of faculty unannounced with the sole purpose of mocking them, Johnson's fantasy has become a witch hunt of intimidation and terror.

CODA, MAY 2007

The legal case against the three players is over, and yet Johnson's obsession with the 88 continues. Throughout spring 2007 he routinely featured columns about various ad signatories—one who was elected head of Duke's Academic Council, others who have written articles or given talks about the case and its aftermath, three who were on Duke's Campus Culture Initiative. On Sunday, April 15, 2007, after the legal case against the players had been dropped, the *Raleigh News and Observer* ran a special segment on Duke lacrosse, asking seven people—an editor at the *News and Observer*, a Duke professor who directs a Center for Media, a senior producer at CBS (and a junior associate), a dean of a Florida institute for journalists, a history professor at North Carolina Central University, a Duke senior who was editor in chief of the *Chronicle*, and KC Johnson—to write short pieces about why they thought the case had grabbed the national imagination. Tellingly, Johnson was the only one who mentioned the 88, and he spent fully half his article on them.¹⁵

The Campus Culture Initiative (CCI), created by Duke's president to address larger issues of campus culture in the wake of the lacrosse incident, has, not surprisingly, generated acid commentary from Johnson. A constant refrain is that committee recommendations—which were unusually mild—were railroaded by the

presence of three faculty members who were ad signatories. In advancing this claim, Johnson bizarrely assumes that three people could influence the opinions of a committee of twenty-four—a view that not only is patronizing in the extreme to other members of the committee but also assumes that a body constituted to explore complex issues of campus culture should refrain from engaging a diversity of opinion (and the robust debate that such diversity might produce). Moreover, throughout his diatribes against the CCI, Johnson repeatedly ignores or denies that Duke’s campus culture has a problem (while making two small concessions: that Duke students drink excessively and that there ought to be more faculty–student interaction). And yet official report after official report over the last several years has documented the high incidence of sexual assault and racial discrimination on campus, and students widely acknowledge that there is a class- and racially segregated social scene organized around four predominantly White fraternities that ramifies throughout the larger culture. How one attends to these widely agreed upon facts is a complicated issue—and is one that demands serious discussion, a discussion in which Johnson apparently is not interested.

Moreover, Johnson repeatedly—robotic reiteration appears to be his principal rhetorical strategy—calls into question the CCI suggestion that Duke undergraduates be required to take a class that “has a primary focus on racial, ethnic, class, religious, and/or sexual/gender difference in the United States” (CCI Report, p. 15). Predictably, Johnson uses this as an opportunity to skewer the 88 again—mockingly referring to this proposal as “the Group of 88 Enrollment Initiative.”¹⁶ And, yet, not only might this requirement be a sensible way to begin to engage undergraduates about issues that vexed Duke’s campus culture in spring 2006 (issues that were symptomatic of a campus divided along racial lines) but also—and more to the point of Johnson’s mockery—this is not an initiative that members of the 88 will rush to embrace. Their classes are already overflowing (because their ranks are filled with award-winning teachers), and many will be reluctant to swell enrollments even more.

Telling silences haunt Johnson’s spring 2007 blog. Why did he barely mention President Brodhead’s comment, in an interview in Duke’s student newspaper on January 22, that, upon rereading the original ad, he realized that it did not say what its critics thought it said?¹⁷ Why did Provost Lange’s lengthy January letter to Duke’s Arts and Sciences Council, a strong defense of the 88’s right to speak out on issues of campus culture—while also pointedly decrying the nastiness of the blogs—generate no comment at the time (and only a whisper later)? Why does Johnson claim on February 7,

2007, one month after Lange’s letter was published, that “virtually no one seemed to speak up in support of the embattled ideologues”? Why did he not mention a faculty-friendly WRAL TV report on the racist messages African American faculty have received? And all this from someone who combs the media daily looking for and commenting on everything written on the case. Surely Johnson’s silence about these events is due to the fact that they contradict the story about rogue faculty he wants to tell.

On the flip side, why does he always take at face value the views of anyone who supports his position? A particularly revealing example of the latter is a student petition in spring 2007 (coordinated by Stephen Miller, the undergraduate head of Duke’s Conservative Union) demanding an apology from the Group of 88 and calling on Duke’s president to “finally stand up for his students.” The petition gathered over one thousand student signatories, and Miller’s group ran an ad in Duke’s *Chronicle* during finals week calling on President Brodhead to side with students in demanding an apology from the 88. What Miller does not mention in the ad—nor does Johnson care to explore either—is that this was a Facebook petition. As anyone who is familiar with Facebook knows, and as one student said to me, “Facebook petitions are ‘friends’ networks”; they’re not political documents. Things come around on Facebook all the time, with a note from a friend saying, ‘Hey dude, sign on,’ and you just click ‘yes’ without reading what it’s about. Everyone has dozens, even hundreds, of people on their friends’ network. This is a social and not a political thing.” Another student commented, “Joining a Facebook group is the lowest form of pledging allegiance to a cause. Speaking with a few peers [who had signed on to the Miller petition and who have since canceled their memberships], I have heard such lines as: ‘Oh, I join basically every group I’m invited to,’ and, ‘Oh, I was drunk when I joined. What did the petition say?’” Even more revealingly, many freshmen (who were not at Duke in spring 2006) signed the petition because they saw it as a way of affirming their pride in and allegiance to Duke (in the face of constant queries by friends at home about their decision to attend Duke after the events of spring 2006). When I asked several such freshmen signatories why they would sign a document that attacked faculty, they said they had no idea that is what it said.

As I send this essay to print, I note that Johnson’s most recent blog posting (May 21, 2007) slams a *New York Times* article that appeared the day before—just as Duke’s men’s lacrosse team was about to play an NCAA tournament game to qualify for a trip to the Final Four. Johnson takes issue with the fact that the article—a largely positive piece about the community service that

team members have been engaged in throughout the school year—also alludes to the shabby off-field behavior of Duke’s players in years past (the hiring of a stripper for the infamous party, the fact that a team member made a racist remark that night, the fact that fifteen players were arrested for public drunkenness). One of those cited in the *Times* article was Duke undergraduate Shadee Malaklou, a columnist for the *Chronicle*, who commented that she “was uncomfortable turning the Duke lacrosse players into heroes who had overcome adversity,” and suggesting that they were no choirboys: “They think college kids will be kids and boys will be boys.” Johnson, in his customary attack-dog mode, tries to impugn Malaklou’s credibility by alluding to statements she had made in recent *Chronicle* columns about the excessive drinking habits of lacrosse team members and about the fact that it still remained unclear what had happened at the lacrosse party last spring. And, yet, Malaklou’s statements to the *Times* correspondent, and her commentary in her columns, are strikingly similar to Johnson’s own published views: “Few would deny that several players on Duke’s lacrosse team have behaved badly [*sic*]. Two team captains hired exotic dancers, supplied alcohol to underage team members, and concluded a public argument with one of the dancers with racial epithets” (DIW, May 1, 2006).¹⁸ Johnson concludes his attack on Malaklou by saying that “at some point, it would seem to me, people who make repeated unsubstantiated or inaccurate statements cannot be treated as credible figures.” I can think of no words that better capture KC Johnson’s own sordid contribution to this entire affair. “Durham-in-Wonderland” indeed.

NOTES

1. Johnson also supported canceling the season: “Duke’s president, Richard Brodhead . . . quite appropriately, it seems to me—suspended and then cancelled the lacrosse season; based on the most benign interpretations of their actions, many of the lacrosse players were guilty of conduct unbecoming university students and gravely embarrassing the school” (DIW, April 16, 2006).

2. A triggering event occurred on March 31, 2006, one week before the ad was published. Students and faculty received a letter from Duke administration warning them about threats of a drive-by shooting. One sad (and ironic) consequence was that Black students began to be profiled as criminals and rapists by campus police and fellow students. One Black male student, for example, was stopped so many times by campus police and asked to show his ID that he started wearing a jacket and tie to class. Another walked into a dorm only to have a female undergraduate scream and run in fear—until he shouted out his name to her.

3. As a colleague in the English Department commented: “If his reading of the ad is representative of his reading practices generally, KC Johnson would have failed Intro to Reading.” The ad was reprinted and is available on page A10 of the February 16, 2007, issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

4. He similarly reiterated again and again comments falsely attributed (by members of the press) to two AAAS faculty members. One was quoted as claiming that the DNA results (exonerating the players) were a step “backward,” but someone else made that statement at a teach-in, not her. Another AAAS faculty member was quoted by ESPNmagazine.com as saying that “some would see the ad as a stake through the collective heart of the lacrosse team.” Again, she never made that statement and, yet, Johnson cited it again and again whenever he mentioned her name (and, believe me, this faculty member became a household word on his blog).

5. The author of this article has a long history of attacking left and liberal Duke faculty—faculty with whom, by his own admission, he has never taken a course.

6. Other than these two articles, the only evidence I have seen Johnson cite to support his claim that the ad had an impact on campus opinion is the fact that, in December 2006, it was cited by defense lawyers (as one of over sixty reasons) in their request for a change of trial venue. However, taking lawyers’ arguments in such a setting—where they are instrumentally advancing clients’ interests—as “facts” shows a remarkable ignorance of lawyerly practice. Moreover, and not incidentally, the lawyers misread the ad in precisely the way that Johnson does and use language that is virtually identical to that which appeared on his blog, suggesting that Johnson’s postings were in fact the source of their information about campus climate. But consider the tautology: Johnson now cites as evidence (for his claims about the ad’s influence) a legal document that is based on his own published (mis)reading of the ad.

7. When a Duke faculty member challenged him on his facts about AAAS, Johnson defended himself by referring to websites from which he’d culled his information (about the number of AAAS faculty and their affiliations). But why didn’t he better check his sources—for example, by contacting the chair of AAAS—to verify his figures? Such sloppy research practice is a standard feature of Johnson’s blogging about the 88.

8. In Johnson’s own words: “As a professor, the behavior of the Duke faculty remains, to me, the worst aspect of this affair. Nifong’s performance will earn him a place in any discussion of major instances of prosecutorial misconduct. But, at least, there have been other prosecutors (not many) in the past who have disregarded legal ethics to the degree Nifong has in this case. On the other hand, I cannot think of a single other example in

the history of American higher education when an institution's faculty members have not only abandoned their students but gone out of their way to harm their students as Duke's arts and sciences professors have done over the past seven months" (DIW, October 17, 2006). And, again: "My interest [in blogging the lacrosse case] began when the Group of 88 issued its statement on April 6. As of that date, I had no connections to Duke and knew no members of the team or their families. At the time, I considered the statement a betrayal of the signatories' duties as professors; I feel even more strongly on the issue now" (DIW, November 23, 2006).

9. He has also profiled White male faculty members—and is quick to point out that his hero in the lacrosse case (Duke law professor Jim Coleman) is African American, while his antihero (D.A. Nifong) is White—but the virulence and ad hominem nature of his attacks on Black female faculty far exceeds that reserved for their White male counterparts.

10. Johnson after the first posting: "Please avoid discussion of IQ issues, since this is just speculation that isn't really relevant to this specific article" (DIW, February 2, 2007). And after the second posting: "The IQ angle is pretty extraneous to the specific issues at hand, it seems to me, and I'd urge people to avoid it" (DIW, February 17, 2007).

11. Also on the same day: "The Group's assertion of hostile 'e-mail campaigns' directed against them likewise stretches credulity"; and "The Group . . . appears to have adopted a strategy of defining hostile, or misogynist, or racist, or engaging in 'verbal fisticuffs' in a way that stretches these terms beyond recognition—with the apparent purpose of deflecting any and all criticism that comes their way" (DIW, March 15, 2007).

12. The phrase "thugniggaintellectual" is one that appeared on Johnson's blog for months whenever he mentioned Neal's name. To be sure, this is a moniker Neal himself uses, but when Johnson, a White critic out to demonize Neal, deploys it incessantly (and without any explanation as to its provenance and meaning), it takes on the aura of a racial epithet.

13. ". . . a striking subtext of this whole affair has been the open contempt in which faculty like the Group of 88 seem to hold many of their students. . . . How strange it must be for people like Baker and other members of the Group of 88 to be surrounded by students whom they loathe" (DIW, May 7, 2006). Again: "Continuing one of the most troubling aspects of this case—the sense that some Duke professors just don't like many of their own school's students" (DIW, January 17, 2007).

14. Another colleague asked a 110-person Intro class in spring 2007, a class filled with athletes and lacrosse players, how many had heard of the Group of 88, and only three raised their hands.

15. The *News and Observer's* short lead-in to the seven pieces also mentioned the 88, but notably suggested that the ad was directed toward campus culture rather than the guilt or innocence of the players: "Before the facts were in, 88 Duke professors signed a controversial letter, which deplored racism and sexual assault on campus" (*News and Observer*, April 15, 2007, 23A).

16. Johnson: "It's just a coincidence, of course, that the vast majority of these offerings are taught by . . . the Group of 88. The CCI, in effect, is a glorified Group of 88 Enrollment Initiative, with the Group seeking to use the lacrosse case to force *all* Duke students to take their classes" (DIW, February 26, 2007). "The most chilling provision of the CCI report is the Group of 88 Enrollment Initiative, with the Group seeking to use the lacrosse case to force *all* Duke students to take their classes. The report urges a requirement that all Duke students take a class that engages 'the reality of difference in American society and culture.' The vast majority of these offerings are taught by . . . the Group of 88" (DIW, February 28, 2007).

17. Brodhead: "Quite a number of people have assured me that the ad said the students were guilty, but if you go back and look, that's not what the ad says" (*Chronicle*, January 22, 2007).

18. And again, as quoted above (in footnote 1): "Duke's president, Richard Brodhead . . . quite appropriately, it seems to me—suspended and then cancelled the lacrosse season; based on the most benign interpretations of their actions, many of the lacrosse players were guilty of conduct unbecoming university students and gravely embarrassing the school" (DIW, April 16, 2006).