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Justice is getting lost in Duke case
JASON WHITLOCK

If the **Duke** lacrosse players were black and the accuser were white, everyone would easily see the similarities between this case and the alleged crimes that often left black men hanging from trees **in** the early 1900s. That **is** not written to exonerate the lacrosse players of the rape allegations they face. I don't know what happened inside that house.

But I do know that the investigation, the posturing by black activists and the political gains by the district attorney - Mike Nifong won his democratic re-election bid on Tuesday - make me uncomfortable.

Seriously, this case seems like an updated re-enactment of "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Just imagine it **is** 1940 (or 2006), and two white escorts/strippers with criminal records have a run-**in** with a group of drunken black college students. One of the strippers calls the police - with the other stripper present - and complains that the drunken black college students called her names. Ninety minutes later, without further interaction with the college students, the second stripper tells police that three of the students raped her.

Immediately, the district attorney announces that the college boys - who all probably vote well outside the DA's district or don't have the right to vote - are guilty and they have a history of rowdy behavior.

If this were 1940, an angry white lynch mob would then gather at the scene of the alleged crime and promise to dole out **justice** to anyone they suspected of playing a role **in** the crime. **In** 2006, mixed-race prayer vigils and protests were held, and black community activists pressured the district attorney to dole out **justice** to anyone they suspected played a role **in** the alleged crime.

The fact that one of the arrested suspects seems to have an airtight alibi - a cabbie, cell phone records, an ATM receipt and record of entrance into his dorm room - **is** completely ignored. So **is** the fact that the other stripper clearly has questionable motives and **is** interested **in** seeing if she can "spin" this tragedy to her advantage and possibly make a little cash.

If this were 1940, a well-meaning white group would take sympathy on the alleged victim, a mother of two, and promise her a job. The KKK would promise to protect her from those black animals. **In** 2006, Jesse Jackson promised the accuser an academic scholarship, and a group purporting to be the Black Panther Party promised to protect her from those white animals.

Again, I don't know what happened inside that house.

But I do know that Martin Luther King Jr. and many, many others of all races did not die so that the poor, black and oppressed could surrender the moral high ground and attempt to inflict injustice on the privileged.

If that **is** indeed the game, someone needs to warn Jesse and the good people of Durham, N.C., that it's a game that the poor, black and oppressed cannot win.

When it comes to American **justice**, it **is** foolish for black people to choose sides based on race. We're far better served being on the side of **justice** at all times and complaining when it doesn't arrive at our doorstep rather than rooting for injustice to befall the privileged.

If the **Duke** lacrosse players are innocent of sexual assault and are somehow forced into a plea agreement or conviction, it's a mistake to believe that the middle income or wealthy will somehow grasp that the poor of all races face similar injustice on a daily

basis. Well, let me restate that. They're well aware of it. The deeper understanding of it won't cause them to readjust their attitudes or take action to enact change.

To the contrary, if anything, what **is** happening **in** Durham **is** further polarizing the haves from the have-nots, white from black. It's justifying racism. It's justifying a mind-set that states: Do it to them because they'd do it to you.

No one can deny the effectiveness of the high road. Martin Luther King Jr. drove it, and his drive created the freedoms and opportunities that too many of us take for granted now.

It takes real courage to maintain the moral high ground, to avoid resorting to self-destructive violence or revenge, to hold on to your dignity, ethics and principles.

Do we understand that? Do we, black people, understand the brilliance and necessity of Martin's dream any better than the people who despised him when he was alive and claim to love him now?

If we do, then we need to be pressuring the authorities to pursue **justice in the Duke** lacrosse case regardless of where that pursuit leads.

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