

**We are listening to our students.** We're also listening to the Durham community, to Duke staff, and to each other. Regardless of the results of the police investigation, what is apparent everyday now is the anger and fear of many students who know themselves to be objects of racism and sexism, who see illuminated in this moment's extraordinary spotlight what they live with everyday. They know that it isn't just Duke, it isn't everybody, and it isn't just individuals making this disaster.

**But it is a disaster nonetheless.**

These students are shouting and whispering about what happened to this young woman and to themselves.

. . . We want the absence of terror. But we don't really know what that means . . . We can't think. That's why we're so silent; we can't think about what's on the other side of this. Terror robs you of language and you need language for the healing to begin.

This is not a different experience for us here at Duke University. We go to class with racist classmates, we go to gym with people who are racists. . . . It's part of the experience.

[*Independent*, 29 March 2006]

If it turns out that these students are guilty, I want them expelled. But their expulsion will only bring resolution to this case and not the bigger problem. This is much bigger than them and throwing them out will not solve the problem. I want the administration to acknowledge what is going on and how bad it is.

Being a big, black man, it's hard to walk anywhere at night, and not have a campus police car slowly drive by me.

***Everything seems up for grabs--I am only comfortable talking about this event in my room with close friends. I am actually afraid to even bring it up in public. But worse, I wonder now about everything. . . . If something like this happens to me . . . What would be used against me--my clothing? Where I was?***

*I was talking to a white woman student who was asking me "Why do people -- and she meant black people -- make race such a big issue?" They don't see race. They just don't see it.*

## What Does a Social Disaster Sound Like?

You go to a party, you get grabbed, you get propositioned, and then you start to question yourself.

[*Independent*, 29 March 2006]

**... all you heard was "Black students just complain all the time, all you do is complain and self-segregate." And whenever we try to explain why we're offended, it's pushed back on us. Just the phrase "self-segregation": the blame is always put on us. [*Independent*, 29 March 2006]**

. . . no one is really talking about how to keep the young woman herself central to this conversation, how to keep her humanity before us . . . she doesn't seem to be visible in this. Not for the university, not for us.

I can't help but think about the different attention given to what has happened from what it would have been if the guys had been not just black but participating in a different sport, like football, something that's not so upscale.

And this is what I'm thinking right now – Duke isn't really responding to this. Not really. And this, what has happened, is a disaster. **This is a social disaster.**

The students know that the disaster didn't begin on March 13th and won't end with what the police say or the court decides. Like all disasters, this one has a history. And what lies beneath what we're hearing from our students are questions about the future.

This ad, printed in the most easily seen venue on campus, is just one way for us to say that we're hearing what our students are saying.

Some of these things were said by a mixed (in every way possible) group of students on Wednesday, March 29th at an African & African American Studies Program forum, some were printed in an issue of the *Independent* that came out that same day, and some were said to us inside and outside of the classroom.

We're turning up the volume in a moment when some of the most vulnerable among us are being asked to quiet down while we wait. To the students speaking individually and to the protestors making collective noise, thank you for not waiting and for making yourselves heard.

We thank the following departments and programs for signing onto this ad with African & African American Studies: Romance Studies; Psychology: Social and Health Sciences; Franklin Humanities Institute; Critical U.S. Studies; Art, Art History, and Visual Studies; Classical Studies; Asian & African Languages & Literature; Women's Studies; Latino/a Studies; Latin American and Caribbean Studies; Medieval and Renaissance Studies; European Studies; Program in Education; and the Center for Documentary Studies. Because of space limitations, the names of individual faculty and staff who signed on in support may be read at the AAAS website:<http://www.duke.edu/web/africanameric/>