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Shootings change what's normal

How does a community regain its equilibrium after an episode of mass, public violence?

The *Oregonian* evoked that question Monday with a front-page headline: "The slow path back to normal." The topic was Umpqua Community College, which suffered one of the worst school shootings in the U.S.

Some soldiers who return from combat zones deal with their experience for the rest of their lives. In other words, their war experience moves the needle on what is normal in their lives.

It would be one thing if the Roseburg massacre were an isolated incident. But it was not. Many other such school shootings preceded it and in the two weeks since Roseburg, there have been domestic shooting incidents elsewhere in the nation.

We don't know who will be our next president. But we can predict with great assurance that the next president will be called upon to speak just as frequently as Barack Obama has in the wake of incidents of gun violence.

Paying bills is a must for Chinook port

Even by the standards of our relatively nonindustrialized area, the Port of Chinook, Washington is not a big-time operation. Even so, it is critically important to the life of its small town, to crabbers delivering to Bell Buoy and to the company itself, and to hundreds of recreational fishermen who crowd it every August.

Like many of the smaller governmental entities in Columbia-Pacific communities, for years at a time, the Port of Chinook is largely invisible to the outside public. But the port's peace and quiet were recently broken by news that its finances are troubled. This has caused much upset in Chinook, with some "taking of sides" now going on.

It is newsworthy that the port is in a financial hole. Taxpayers find it worrisome whenever examples arise of government bodies spending more than they take in. We expect small boards and commissions to balance their books, while carrying out the specific functions for which they were created — which in our area can consist of everything from operating small ports, to running little sewer and water systems, diking districts, rural fire departments and so on.

Like other states, Washington and Oregon each conduct scheduled audits to monitor these small entities, but these occasional visits don't catch everything and aren't meant to substitute for following common business practices. There is likely to be a more in-depth audit of port books to pinpoint whatever led to it getting behind in paying its bills. This is very appropriate — there's nothing like good, professional accounting to showcase

how things went awry and how to avoid similar issues in the future.

Until this audit is complete, it's premature to judge any one employee's performance or connection to the financial shortage. It may turn out to be the result of "robbing Peter to pay Paul" over an extended period. Port expenditures — largely for fuel — don't perfectly align with when the money is on hand. Clearly, a better way needs to be developed to track expenditures and income, for example by carefully segregating fuel income and promptly paying those bills. This problem probably isn't a crime to prosecute, but a matter of instituting better procedures.

Realizing the port's importance in Chinook's small economy, creditors and potential lenders are likely to work toward a satisfactory resolution. It is good of them to do so.

Moving forward, port commissioners clearly must better monitor port finances and commit themselves to making sure they are on a sound footing. Like most local boards, these are essentially unpaid and volunteer positions. Citizens do not clamor to do these essential jobs. Even so, port board members must recommit themselves to attending meetings, understanding the budgets they approve, and making certain that staff comply with these budgets and other policies.

Without its port, Chinook would be just another residential village. Keeping it dredged and in business takes a substantial investment of political capital. It must do a better job of making sure the faith put in it is justified.

The Asian advantage in America

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

This is an awkward question, but here goes: Why are Asian-Americans so successful in America?

It's no secret that Asian-Americans are disproportionately stars in American schools, and even in American society as a whole. Census data show that Americans of Asian heritage earn more than other groups, including whites. Asian-Americans also have higher educational attainment than any other group.

I wrote a series of columns last year, "When Whites Just Don't Get It," about racial inequity, and one of the most common responses from angry whites was along these lines: This stuff about white privilege is nonsense, and if blacks lag, the reason lies in the black community itself. Just look at Asian-Americans. Those Koreans and Chinese make it in America because they work hard. All people can succeed here if they just stop whining and start working.

Let's confront the argument head-on. Does the success of Asian-Americans suggest that the age of discrimination is behind us?

A new scholarly book, *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*, by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, notes that Asian-American immigrants in recent decades have started with one advantage: They are highly educated, more so even than the average American. These immigrants are disproportionately doctors, research scientists and other highly educated professionals.

It's not surprising that the children of Asian-American doctors would flourish in the United States. But Lee and Zhou note that kids of working-class Asian-Americans often also thrive, showing remarkable upward mobility.

And let's just get one notion out of the way: The difference does not seem to be driven by differences in intelligence.

Richard Nisbett, a professor of psychology who has written an excellent book about intelligence, cites a study that followed a pool of Chinese-American children and a pool of white children into adulthood. The two groups started out with the same scores on IQ tests, but in the end, 55 percent of the Asian-Americans entered high-status occupations, compared with one-third of the whites. To succeed as a manager, whites needed an IQ of 100, while Chinese-Americans needed an IQ of only 93.

Wanted: A tea party speaker

By ROSS DOUTHAT
New York Times News Service

In an earlier, cozier Washington, John Boehner could have been the kind of House speaker whose memory is held dear by high-minded chin strokers on Sunday morning television programs: An icon of sadly bygone bipartisanship, a cutter of the grandest bargains, a man who, by God, made legislative move.

In this Washington, alas for him, Boehner was a humble bomb defuser, and the only grand bargains he cut were between his more intransigent backbenchers and the demands of political and constitutional reality.

And now D.C. looks at his record, his resignation and his possible successors and asks: Can anyone do better?

Probably not anyone with Boehner's precise profile. Probably not Kevin McCarthy, another genial dealcutter distrusted on the right, who would have recapitulated Boehner's struggles had his candidacy not been doomed by gaffes and whiffs of scandal.

But maybe the lesson of those struggles is that the speakership simply isn't a job for a professional dealmaker and institutionalist at the moment. Instead, maybe it's a job for a conviction politician, an ideologue (in the best way!) who's also interested in governing.

Maybe, in other words, House Republicans need a speaker who's an ambassador from the tea party to the GOP's K Street/Chamber of Commerce wing, rather than the other way around.

The reality is this: The only way the Republican House majority can become less dysfunctional and chaotic in the short run is if the next speaker wins the trust of enough conservative

Disadvantage and marginalization are complex.



Nicholas Kristof

So the Asian advantage, Nisbett argues, isn't intellectual firepower as such, but how it is harnessed.

Some disagree, but I'm pretty sure that one factor is East Asia's long Confucian emphasis on education. Likewise, a focus on education also helps explain the success of Jews, who are said to have had universal male literacy 1,700 years before any other group.

Immigrant East Asians often try particularly hard to get into good school districts, or make other sacrifices for children's education, such as giving prime space in the home to kids to study.

There's also evidence that Americans believe that A's go to smart kids, while Asians are more likely to think that they go to hard workers. The truth is probably somewhere in between, but the result is that Asian-American kids are allowed no excuse for getting B's — or even an A-. The joke is that an A is an "Asian F."

Strong two-parent families are a factor, too. Divorce rates are much lower for many Asian-American communities than for Americans as a whole, and there's evidence that two-parent households are less likely to sink into poverty and also have better outcomes for boys in particular.

Teachers' expectations can also play a role. This idea was explored in a famous experiment in the 1960s by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson.

After conducting IQ tests of students at a California school, the experimenters told the teachers the names of one-fifth of the children who they said were special, and expected to soar. These special students in first and second grades improved dramatically. A year later, 47 percent of them had gained 20 or more IQ points.

Yet in truth, the special students were chosen at random. This "Pygmalion effect" was a case of self-fulfilling expectations. Teachers had higher expectations for the special students and made them feel capable — and so that's what they became.

Lee and Zhou, for their part, think that positive stereotyping may be part of an explanation for the success of Asian-Americans in school.

"They're like, 'Oh, you're Chinese and you're good in math,'" the book quotes a girl called Angela as saying.

"It's advantageous when they think that."

(Of course, positive stereotypes create their own burden, with sometimes tremendous stress on children to earn those A's, at the cost of enjoying childhood. And it can be hard on Asian-American kids whose comparative advantage isn't in science or math but in theater or punk rock. Among Asians, there's sometimes concern that there's

too much focus on memorization, not enough on creativity.)

Another factor in Asian scholastic success may be the interaction of social stereotypes and self-confidence. Scholars like Claude Steele have found that blacks sometimes suffer from "stereotype threat": Anxiety from negative stereotypes impairs performance. Lee and Zhou argue that Asian-Americans sometimes ride on the opposite of "stereotype threat," a "stereotype promise" that they will be smart and hardworking.

Lee and Zhou also say the success of Asian-Americans, far from revealing a lack of discrimination, is in part a testament to it. They say Asian-Americans work hard to succeed in areas with clear metrics like math and science in part as a protection against bias — and in any case, many Asians still perceive a "bamboo ceiling" that is hard to break through.

To me, the success of Asian-Americans is a tribute to hard work, strong families and passion for education. Bravo! Ditto for the success of Jews, West Indians and other groups that have shown that upward mobility is possible, but let's not exaggerate the lessons here.

Why should the success of the children of Asian doctors, nurtured by teachers, be reassuring to a black boy in Baltimore who is raised by a struggling single mom, whom society regards as a potential menace? Disadvantage and marginalization are complex, often deeply rooted in social structures and unconscious biases, sometimes compounded by hopelessness and self-destructive behaviors, and because one group can access the American dream does not mean that all groups can.

So, sure, let's celebrate the success of Asian-Americans, and emulate the respect for education and strong families. But let's not use the success of Asians to pat ourselves on the back and pretend that discrimination is history.



Susan Walsh/AP Photo

Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah concludes a conference call in his Capitol Hill office in Washington June 3.

backbenchers to quell or crush revolts from the rest. And the best way to win that trust is to be seen as fundamentally on the insurgents' side, which is a feat that Boehner, given his background and priorities, could never hope to manage.

Hence the recent appeal of drafting Paul Ryan to replace him. Ryan is the Republicans' leading policy entrepreneur, his blueprints have plainly pulled the party's center of gravity rightward, and he has stronger movement-conservative bona fides than anyone else in the House leadership.

The suspicions that the right always had about Boehner, and would have had about McCarthy — that they care more about the deal than about the outcome, more about the party's donors than any defined small-government principle — does not attach to Ryan in the same way. So he would enter the job with a deposit of ideological credibility that might do more than all of Boehner's backroom skills to keep (some) of the caucus' rightward flank in line.

But Ryan is not really of the tea party. In the Bush era he voted for bills like No Child Left Behind, Medicare Part D, and TARP, all of which today's conservative insurgents despise. And he's a dove on immigration, the issue where the party's base always expects — with good reason! — their leadership is poised to sell them out.

A more ideal speaker would share Ryan's conservative credentials and

wonkish spirit, but he wouldn't have that baggage. The ideal speaker, in fact, would probably have led Tea Party-driven brinkmanship at some point in the Obama-era past, the better to channel it more productively in the future.

Such a figure exists. Unfortunately, he's in the other chamber: He's Utah's junior senator, Mike Lee.

Lee has an insurgent's résumé: He was elected with the tea party wave in 2010, defeating an incumbent Republican, Bob Bennett, along the way. He was Ted Cruz's partner in crime during the government shutdown debates. His scorecard with Heritage Action, often the scourge of Republican leaders, currently stands at 100 percent. And unlike almost every member of the House and Senate leadership, he's a genuine foe of comprehensive immigration reform.

At the same time, like Ryan (and unlike Cruz), Lee been a real policy entrepreneur. He authored a pro-family tax plan that breaks with some (if perhaps not enough) of the Republican donor class' orthodoxies. He has offered serious proposals on transportation, higher education and religious liberty. And just this week he was part of a bipartisan breakthrough on criminal justice reform, one of the rare issues where the late Obama years still offer hope for compromise.

In Lee's ambitions, you can see what the House insurgents want to be — a force that moves conservative policymaking away from donor service and toward genuine reform — rather than the purely nihilistic force they often threaten to become.

You can see the outlines of the kind of agenda that might satisfy (some) intransigents and also provide some (very) modest ground for bipartisanship.

And then in his record and persona, you can see a — let's be frank — tribal identification with insurgency that might make easier for him to persuade the GOP's right flank to accept the real limits on the House's power.

Unfortunately the House insurgents do not appear to have a Mike Lee in their ranks.

But there is also no rule preventing the House from electing a senator as its speaker.

Boehner was a humble bomb defuser.