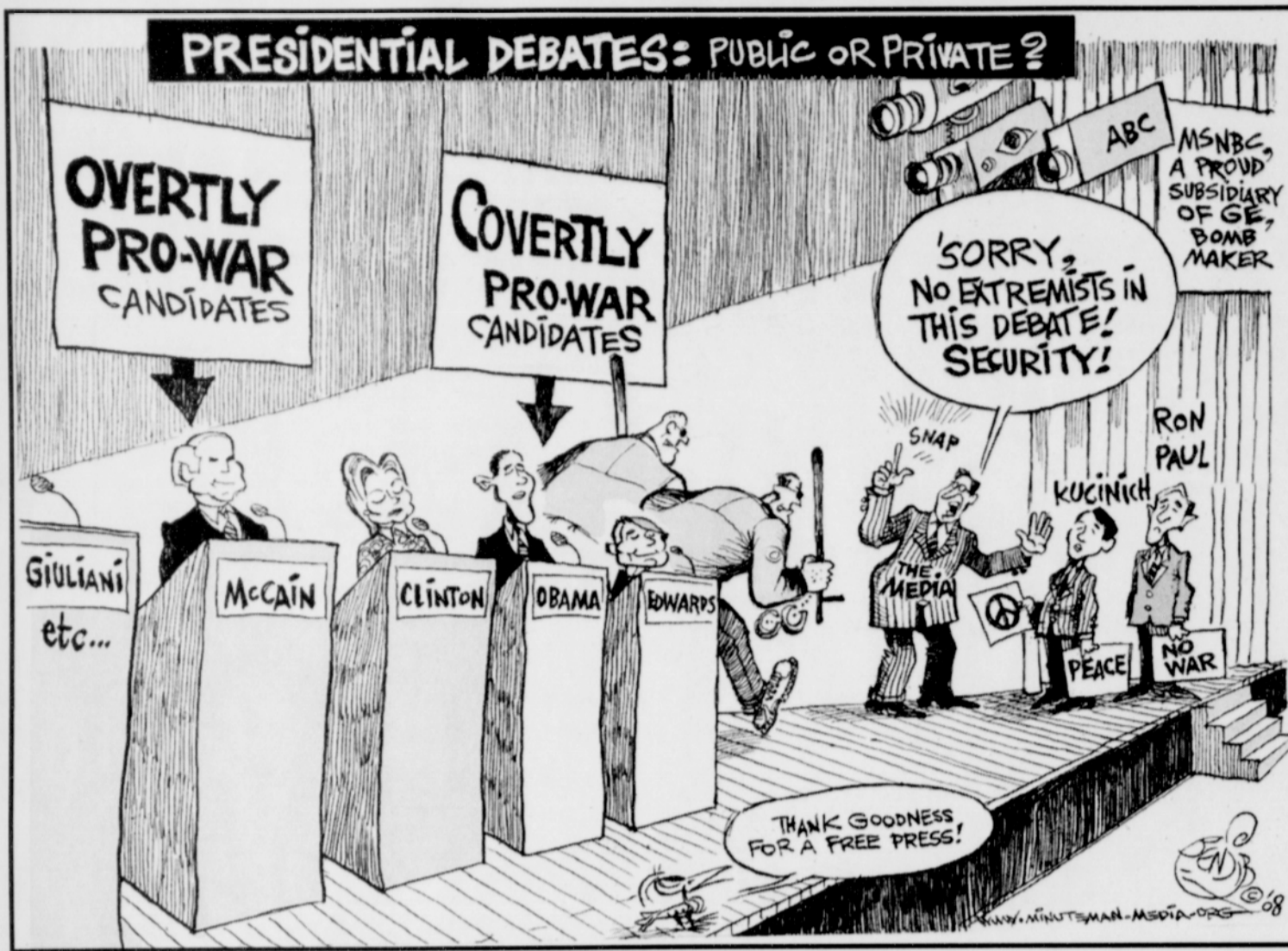


OPINION

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Intimidation Won't Stop Our Progress

Don't give in to fear



BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Lynching, even as a threat, has long been used to intimidate African Americans. At the height of American apartheid, mobs would gather to beat and torture blacks, ending their act of evil by hanging their victims. Speaking up for basic rights, attempting to vote, looking at a white woman in a certain way... all of these actions and others could easily incite a lynch mob. While the actual act of lynching is now illegal, the threat is not. And many still play on the horrible imagery to invoke fear in the hearts of those of us who kicking down doors and blazing new trails. But do not fear; the tactic will not work. The threat of lynching did not stop blacks across the south from pressing for justice. No matter how many victims those early freedom

me. This is a serious issue that, as adults most of us can process and shake off. Our young children are not so adept at simply 'letting it go.' In December 2006, in Jena, Louisiana, a fight broke out between six black teens and a white teenager following an incident where three white students hung nooses from a tree at the local high school. Not possessing the skills to realize the students who hung the nooses were weak and ignorant, the six black students let their rage fester until it exploded. As a people, we cannot let the intimidation stop our progress. Sen. Barack Obama certainly hasn't. Immediately upon launching his presidential campaign, Obama began receiving death threats. The threats came so often that he received secret-service detail earlier than any presidential candidate in history.

I too have received threats, suggesting I be lynched for my outspoken political comments. Thankfully, I don't let the ignorance shake me.

fighters saw hanging from trees, they marched on. And so will we. A golf analyst recently suggested the only way to defeat golfer extraordinaire Tiger Woods was to gang up on him in an alley and lynch him. To add insult to injury, Golfweek magazine then put a noose on the cover of its Jan. 19 issue. The analyst was suspended and the magazine editor was fired. But the comment and images still linger. In the last half of 2007, Madonna Constantine, a black professor at Columbia University found a noose hanging from her office door. She told media outlets that, upon seeing the noose, tears immediately sprung to her eyes. Constantine, who had been outspoken on race and gender issues felt it was the work of an insecure person. I too have received threats, suggesting I be lynched for my outspoken political comments. Thankfully, I don't let the ignorance shake

But Obama has not let this stop him. And nor should we as a people. Many of us so fear for Obama's life that we don't want him to run for president. Some say they will not vote for him because they want to keep him alive. Do not give in to the fear. Had we given in to fear, slavery could possibly still be a part of our reality. Or Jim Crow. Or a myriad of other social sins that we collectively overcame because we dared to hope. It is that hope, that fearlessness, characteristics African Americans can naturally embody, that corrected many of the wrongs committed against us. And it is that same hope and fearlessness that will bring change, not just in our personal lives, but the lives of everyone around us. Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Suffering under the Conservative Agenda

The state of black America

BY DANIELLA GIBBS LEGER

As people across the country celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Center for American Progress took a look at the state of black America to see how African Americans fared since conservatives have been in charge of the economy. The answer? Not very well. Here's a look at the numbers: African Americans' median income declined by an average of

1.6 percent per year under the current administration. In 2006, African Americans' median income was \$32,132, which was \$2,603 lower than in 2000. African Americans' usual median weekly earnings have stagnated under President Bush. In 2006, the usual median earnings of African Americans employed full-time was \$554 per week—\$136 dollars less than that of white Americans. Under Bush, the percent of African Americans without

health insurance has increased from 18.5 percent to 20.5 percent. This is a much different picture compared to the 1990s when the number of uninsured African Americans decreased from 20.1 percent to 18.5 percent. The growth rate of the number of employed African Americans has been 4.2 times slower under the current administration. Between 2000 and 2006, the number of employed African Americans grew on average by just 0.7 percent each year, which is markedly lower than the 2.8 percent annual growth rate experienced in the 1990s.

Over the past six years, the employment to population ratio -- the percentage of the civilian population that is employed -- for African Americans declined by an average of -0.4 percent each year after increasing by 0.8 percent on average between 1992 and 2000. In 2007, the unemployment level of African Americans stood at a distressing 8.3 percent while white Americans hovered at 4.1 percent. This is a sharp contrast to the movement of these levels throughout the 1990s, when African Americans' unemployment averaged an annual decline of -0.8 percent. The increase in African-American homeownership has been slower under Bush than the 1990s. During Bush, the homeownership rate for African Americans increased by an average annual growth rate of just 0.1, from 47.2 percent to 47.9 percent, whereas whites' homeownership rate increased by an average annual growth rate of 0.3 percent. More African Americans were in poverty in 2006 than in 2000, just after we saw a vast improvement the 1990s. In 2006, 24.2 percent of African-American individuals were in poverty. Compare this to 2000, when 22.5 percent were below the poverty line. Daniella Gibbs Leger is the vice president for communications at the Center for American Progress.



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Don't Blame China - Blame Us

Where are our regulatory watchdogs?

BY JIM HIGHTOWER
 The "Made in China" has become a warning label. Look out - toxics in toothpaste, arsenic in shrimp, lead in toys! Politicians are pointing their fingers at China's lackadaisical approach to product safety. But wait a minute - where, oh where, are our own regulatory watchdogs? The big shock is not that Chinese-made toys are laden with lead, but that America's Consumer Product Safety Commission is a toothless watchdog that employs exactly one inspector to oversee the safety of all toys sold in the United States. Likewise, the Food and Drug



Administration has licensed 714 Chinese plants to manufacture the key ingredients for a growing percentage of the antibiotics, painkillers, and other drugs we buy, but provides practically no oversight of these plants. In 2007, for example, FDA inspected only 13 of them. An even bigger shock is that our consumer-protection laws are so riddled with loopholes that unsafe products can legally come into our country. Take phthalate, a chemical additive in plastics that is suspected by scientists here and in Europe of inhibiting testosterone production in infant boys. Yet, Mark Shapiro, author of "Exposed: The Toxic Chemistry of Everyday Products," reports that while the European Union has banned the use of phthalates in products aimed at children under three years of age, our government has refused to act. Thus, China has factories that manufacture two lines of toys -- one without phthalates for shipment to European countries, and one with phthalates for export to our children. The problem is not with the Chinese, but with our own corporate chieftains who have moved their manufacturing to China specifically to get these kinds of low-cost shortcuts in production while simultaneously demanding that Washington cut back on regulations that protect us consumers. We must put our own house in order. Jim Hightower is the author of "Thieves in High Places: They've Stolen Our Country and it's Time to take it Back."