

# OPINION

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## Families Getting Stronger

Slowly, surely, things are changing

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

For decades there has been much discussion about the disintegration of the black family and of the negative effects single parent households tend to have on our children and our communities.



to search for work in other areas, often far from home. Even then, father's played a part, sending money back to their families.

It wasn't until the late 70s that the fatherless black family became the standard and two parent households were a mere fantasy. As our family unit began to disappear, the teen pregnancy, high school drop out and incarceration rates in our communities began to increase.

America is currently in a place where economic circumstances may begin to weaken families. As more people lose their jobs or their homes, couples find themselves bending under the weight of it

*Strong black families are the cornerstone of a strong black community.*

It is no coincidence that many young gang members come from families where there is no real father figure or that teen mothers often had poor, if any, relationships with their own fathers. These young people would follow in their parent's footsteps, creating a vicious cycle where active black fathers were the exception and not the rule.

Slowly but surely, things are changing.

According to new data from the U.S. Census Bureau, two parent black households now make up 40 percent of all black families; that's a five percent increase from 2004 data. Some of this can be attributed to the bureau's new definition of family.

In the past, only married couples with children would be counted as a two parent household. Under the new guidelines, unmarried couples living together with children are now counted as a two parent family.

Though the increase in black two parent households is modest, it is promising. For years, that number hovered at or near a very low 30 percent, lagging far behind white two parent households.

The traditional black family began to crack during the 1950s when father's had to leave home

all. Black couples must avoid this.

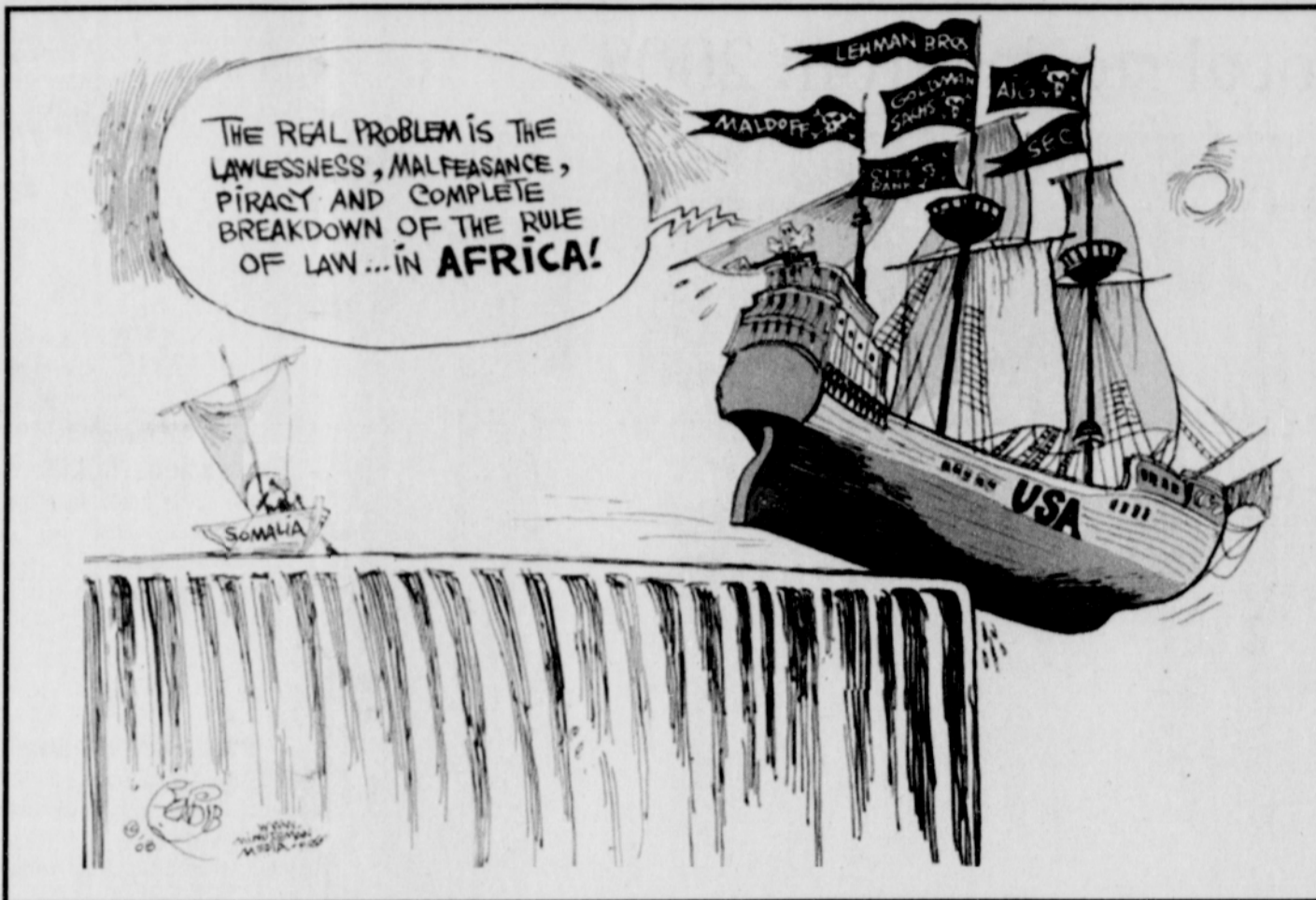
If financial pressures threaten to drive a couple apart, counseling may be one way for them to continue to stand strong. Many churches and community groups offer free couple's groups or counseling for those who are interested.

It's not simply about keeping a couple together, though that certainly is important.

The fact is, with fathers at home and present in their children's lives, black families are statistically destined to do better economically and socially. Our kids perform better in school, they stay out of trouble and our neighborhoods are safer.

Strong black families are the cornerstone of a strong black community. If we are to reach our full collective potential we must individually make a commitment to family and children.

Judge Greg Mathis is vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference



## Winds Blow of Profound Change

Community colleges can help prepare us

BY ALGIE C. GATEWOOD

As is so often the case, the holiday season marks a time of transition - from warm weather to cold, old to new, from the year gone by to the one yet to come. This year, however, something seems different. This year, a wind blows which portends changes more profound than perhaps any in recent memory.

In my estimation, we stand at a point in time when the threads of history have gathered together to pass through the eye of a single needle. The decisions we collectively make in the months and years ahead will have broad-reaching ramifications for us all.

Consider the many momentous events that confront us - on the one hand, we have elected our nation's first African-American president, in defiance of centuries of institutionalized bigotry and injustice. On the other, he is inheriting the most formidable set of economic challenges since the Great Depression.

On the one hand, our nation has never been more honest with itself about the need to reconfigure our society around

a sustainable ideology. On the other, we are still embroiled in two wars born of the very lifestyle we need to leave behind.

On the one hand, the youth of America are as socially, politically, and environmentally engaged as they have ever been. On the other, they face a future where the prospect of affordable higher

education and its corresponding security are in grave doubt.

The questions before us as a nation and as individual citizens in these exciting and daunting times are many and complex. How do we revive our flagging economy while maintaining the social safety net and keeping environmental concerns a top priority?

In the short term, how do we help people make it through the lean times when jobs are being lost and the focus of our regional economy is changing? In the long term, how do we position ourselves and our community to prosper from the predicted boom in

green technologies and sustainable practices? Fortunately, at a national level, the incoming administration has indicated that it intends to enact big solutions to our big problems.

President-elect Obama has spoken of a new New Deal, with massive public investment in both rebuilding decaying existing in-

frastructure and building a new "green" infrastructure for the future.

This carries the twin advantages of putting people back to work (and putting money in their pockets) and focusing national investment on the sweeping changes we need to make in order to shift our economy to a more sustainable footing.

At the local level, this makes education more important than ever. In the short term, people who have lost their jobs need low-cost educational and training options to enable them to transition into new careers. Over

the longer term, the workforce needs the resources to prepare for the new jobs that will inevitably accompany the President-elect's infrastructure and sustainable technology investments.

Where can we turn, today, to take these steps? Fortunately, the answer is with us already - your local community college campus.

Thousands of people in the Portland area are already turning to community colleges as a remedy to the economic downturn, and many thousands more will do the same as more and more "green" jobs become available. But community colleges can only provide these services if they remain fiscally strong. Paradoxically, budgetary constraints at the state level are endangering the community college system at the very time that we need it the most.

So please - support your local community colleges by enrolling and taking courses. And perhaps more importantly, support them by calling and writing your representatives in Salem and letting them know, as they develop the budget for the coming biennium, that community college funding is essential for a healthy and prosperous Oregon, both now and in the future.

Yes we can!  
Algie C. Gatewood, Ed.D., is president of Portland Community College's Cascade Campus.



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## Civility for 2009 and Beyond

Living without the fear of harm

BY BENTLEY DE BARDELABEN

In the aftermath of the 2008 presidential election, I have been conflicted about local and national news coverage, or lack thereof, regarding the



record number of death threats made against President-elect Obama.

On Thanksgiving Eve, Barbara Walters, asked Mr. Obama during an interview, how he lived with the fear of someone wanting to harm him.

He informed her that he was a man of faith and thus he didn't allow that reality to distract him. Moreover he acknowledged he had an excellent team of people whose job was to protect him. (Being a television interview, there was a cut away to an SUV on the road containing armed secret service agents.)

Living with the fear of someone wanting to harm you is not something of which most of us consciously ponder. Sadly, I have.

One such occurrence entered my life as a result of a two page article about me and the charitable institute in which I had been recently employed and the vision for our community in a local newspaper. I was heralded as the first African American to oversee a mostly white organization.

Within a week of that being featured, an anonymous enve-

lope was delivered to my office addressed to me. Inside I found a section of the article, which had my face and a couple of African American youth on it. The picture was defaced. All of our faces had been drawn over in black marker in an attempt to make us look like monkeys. A caption read, "Go back to Africa, you Ni\_\_ers!"

Multiple emotions, thoughts, and feelings flooded my mind and body caused

*I had never experienced a level of hatred such as that in my life.*

my legs to give way. I had never experienced a level of hatred such as that in my life.

Then there were the two young girls who had been victims of this ignorance too. To say the least, fear, paranoia, anger and confusion began to immobilize me. The local police, FBI and my company were informed. After a few days of uncertainty, I knew that I had to find a way to deal with this crazed situation.

The bottom line, I chose to rest upon the faith which I had openly and boldly professed. Granted I didn't have armed body guards to protect me, nor

did I try to ignore the reality of the threat. However, I realized that there wasn't much I could do to prevent someone else from wishing me ill will based upon words and pictures printed in a local newspaper. I had a life to live and a job to do.

Having reflected upon this, I believe I can relate, at least in part, to the President - elect facing an undeserved, imminent threat of harm, and responding to that with a personal faith.

This holiday season, I have received a stocking stuffer in the form of a book, Return to Civility: A Speed of Laughter Project. Perusing between the pages, I have gazed upon many easy steps suggesting ways to live in harmonious community. I will pass one forward. I hope you will also:

"Display, Learn and Teach Compassion. You owe it to yourself and your children. If not from you, where else will they learn it?" Happy Holidays!  
Bentley de Bardelaben is Minister for Communication for the United Church of Christ.

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