

CAREER & EDUCATION

Cascade Connections

BY ALGIE C. GATEWOOD



Christmas Wishes for Every Young Black Man

Dear Santa Claus: For Christmas this year, I want every young black man to have an education and a good job. I want the number of young black men with a college degree to outnumber those who are in prison. I want every young black man to assume his rightful place in his family, his community, and his nation.

You can handle that, can't you, Santa?

Unfortunately, it will take more than a jolly man in a red suit to make this Christmas wish list come true. Black men, for a whole range of reasons, have for generations found themselves overrepresented in the criminal justice system and underrepresented in business, in the halls of academia, and as family men.

It will take a concerted effort from all corners of our society – including from black men themselves – to undo the legacy of the past.

"When you are young, black and male, you have several unfortunate inheritances converging at once," the very talented Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote for *The Atlantic* magazine. "There is the myopia of youth, the inability to understand how much you have to lose. ... On top of that you come from a people who for most of American history have not been able to secure the safety of their own bodies."

Mr. Coates is right – the "unfortunate inheritances" he mentions comprise a heavy burden and a difficult legacy. But you may have noticed that at the top of my Christmas wish list is one thing that can come true – and it's the key to everything else: education.

There is no more significant de-

terminant for one's economic success – and everything which flows from that success – than education. Earning a two- or four-year degree, or especially a graduate degree, is the one factor that can trump all the obstacles that confront black men – whether those obstacles be intergenerational poverty, institutional racism, or even a shortage of self-belief.

When you embark on the road to a college degree, you also begin a voyage of self-discovery. Whatever you ultimately choose as your field of study, the educational process broadens your awareness of history and clarifies your understanding of society.

More importantly, the educational process crystallizes your perception of yourself, and helps you to realize the options at your disposal and the power you have to choose your own path in the world. You discover, in the words of Mr. Coates, "how much you have to lose," as well as how much you have to gain.

Earning a degree reaps financial rewards, to be sure, but this new concept of self is something that is beyond price. This can be particularly true for black men, many of whom for generations have been denied the power to choose the path before them. Education helps to fuse ambition with the tools necessary to get you where you want to go. Education is the one true way forward from the bonds, both literal and figurative, that have prevented black men from attaining their collective birthright.

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Of course, the transformation I describe here is available to everyone, not just black men. I mention black men because they are the most at-risk group of people in the nation – at risk of everything from chronic incarceration to chemical dependency to an early death.

According to a 2006 Harvard University study, high-risk urban black males can expect to live as many as 15 years less, on average, than members of lesser-risk populations. What better tool than education to break this cycle?

This is not to say that the many factors which put young black men at risk are the result of their own individual choices. Far from it – the historical record of inequity between African Americans and the majority population is copious and detailed. But the right kinds of individual choices can help black men to overcome these obstacles, and it starts with the choice to stay in school and go to college.

Give yourself and your family the best possible gift this Christmas, young black men. Make the choice to get an education. Don't let cost or anything else deter you. There is more financial aid available than you might think, particularly at community college, and classes can be scheduled to fit your life.

If you make the right choice now, this Christmas – and every one to follow – will be merrier for you, your children, and your grandchildren.

Dr. Algie C. Gatewood is president of Portland Community College's Cascade Campus.

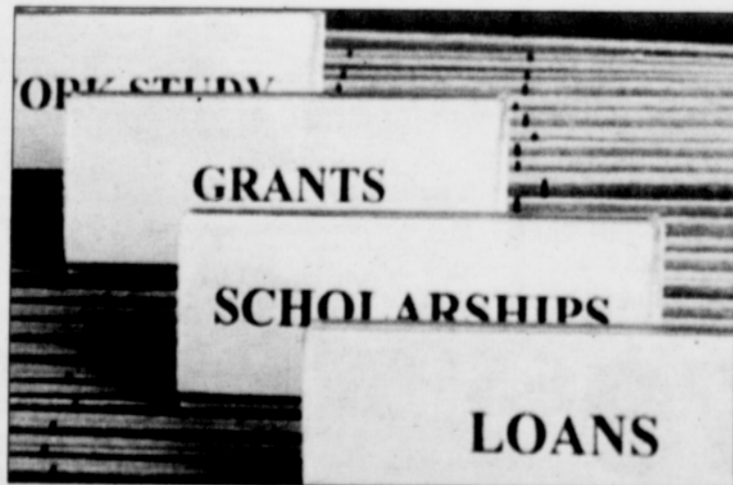
Get Help Applying for Financial Aid

PCC outreach can help you pay for college

Students in the Portland area can get free help submitting their federal financial aid (FAFSA) form when Portland Community College presents Financial Aid Day in partnership with College Goal Oregon.

The help will be provided on each of PCC's four major campuses on Saturday, Jan. 5 from 9 a.m. to noon.

The day will be perfect for students looking for money to go to college, needing help filling out the FAFSA form, or wanting to explore



other resources to pay for college.

Federal grants (free money), work-study and loans are the types of financial aid students may be eligible to receive. In addition, the state of Oregon and PCC have financial aid available.

The only way to find out what a student qualifies for is by submitting the FAFSA form. There will be plenty of help on hand at each PCC location to assist in filling out and submitting the application.

Students do not have to be enrolled at PCC to take part in Financial Aid Day. Spanish language advisers also will be available at all locations.

Both students and parents should

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Boss Hogg Christmas Tree Lot



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