

## **African Americans disproportionately affected by the economic downturn**

Written by Judge Greg Mathis  
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The current recession has certainly taken its toll on everyone. From large corporations to small businesses to families, most of us can fairly say that, in some way, we have suffered a financial loss. But African Americans, more than any other group, are disproportionately affected by the economic downturn. We are losing jobs at faster rates and, as a result, our net wealth is decreasing. Amid reports of an improving economy, many are still worried about their financial futures. America must continue to support its citizens so that they may withstand this downturn and not come out worse for the wear.

The national unemployment rate is currently hovering around 10 percent. For African Americans, that number is just over 15 percent and, in some states, Illinois for example, its over 18 percent. For Black teens, the number is astronomically high: nearly 41 percent. To be fair, unemployment rates have always been higher in the African American community than they are in the general population. But the recession has increased the unemployment – and wealth – gap between Blacks and non-Blacks because key industries, such as automotive and manufacturing, have scaled back considerably. It used to be that a Black worker could secure a stable job in one of these blue-collar industries and work their way into the middle class. That day is long gone.

To compound matters, predatory lending practices that locked many homeowners into high interest rate loans with ballooning payments were prevalent in African American communities. When the housing crisis reached its dramatic peak, Blacks stood out among the millions who lost their homes. Homeownership is the quickest way to build personal wealth. Now, with so many African Americans having foreclosed on their homes, the financial health of our community is in jeopardy.

We are being told the economy is getting better but that the economic growth of America will be irrevocably changed. Businesses will be more conservative when expanding so that they don't overextend themselves. New jobs will be created at slower rates than in recent years. Knowing this, it is imperative that the American government makes a commitment to re-train those workers whose industries have been dramatically reduced.

High-paying jobs in manufacturing are few and far between; this is the information age and our citizens need to be ready to work in it. For our economy to stay vibrant, government sponsored training programs for downsized employees must be implemented. Additionally, we must work to keep technology jobs here in America. Any company receiving government support or contracts must be required to hire American workers. If there are not enough skilled workers to fill the jobs, we must ensure that people are trained. Lastly, special monitored home loan programs for individuals who foreclosed on their homes during the recession should be created.

Taking these steps would ensure that all Americans are able to transition into this new and different workforce and begin to rebuild their lives. As an added benefit, African American workers would be able to get the skills they need to stay marketable in the workplace while being allowed a fresh start on the road to personal wealth.

Judge Greg Mathis became the youngest judge in Michigan's history and was elected a Superior Court Judge for Michigan's 36th District. He has been called upon as a regular contributor to national television programs, including "Larry King Live," "Politically Incorrect,"

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CNN's "Talk Back Live," "Showbiz Tonight" and "Extra" to discuss his opinions on complex issues of the day, such as national security, unique sentencing, affirmative action and celebrity scandals. He also offers his take on high-profile legal cases.