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Visions of Economic Liberty

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VISIONS OF ECONOMIC LIBERTY
by
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I am honored to have been asked to convene this panel on Education for Economic Development at the mid-year meeting of The National Bar Association. We have a distinguished panel consisting of Dr. Percy Vaughn, Dean of the College of Business at Alabama State University, who will address The Future Training for Business Leadership; Dr. Broadus Butler, Former Vice-President for Academic Affairs at The University of the District of Columbia; who will address the Educational Responsibility of Public and Private Institution In Creating Economic Development; Dr. Joyce Payne, a member of The Board of Trustees of the University of The District of Columbia, who will address the Implications of Historically Black Colleges in the Economic Development Network and Christopher A. Hart, a Washington, D.C. lawyer, who will address the Role of the Lawyer as an Architect and Coordinator In The Economic Network.

As your moderator, I ask your indulgence to set the tone of this panel by drawing on the words of three distinguished Black leaders of the 19th Century whose opinions may be relevant to the discussion today; namely, Teodore Jones, a businessman and member of The Negro Business League; Reverend J.H. Morgan, a minister; and Andrew F. Hilyer, a lawyer and, 1885 graduate of the Howard University School of Law.

*/Opening remarks at the Mid-year Meeting of the National Bar Association, Washington, D.C., March 21, 1986.

In 1901 Ted Jones made these remarks at the Annual Meeting of The National Business League:

"Despite the fact that the door of nearly every large factory, shop and department store is closed against us, despite the fact that prejudice stalks our business streets with unblushing tread and dominates in all the commercial centers of our common country--yet we are not here today pleading for special legislation in our behalf; we are not here whining to be given a chance; we are not here, even to complain of our hard lot, or to find fault with conditions which we cannot change. This, we conceive, would be a very poor programme to attract the attention of the business world, but we are here, representing hundreds of thousands of dollars, thus demonstrating that we have achieved, at least in a small measure, one of things which, by common consent, is taken as evidence of progress, ability and worth. We have made money, have saved money, and are succeeding in many profitable business enterprises which require the possession of skill and executive ability to direct and control."

Reverend Morgan, the minister made these remarks in 1902:

There has been a vast number of theories advanced as regards the solving of the Negro problem. But the idea of business

seems to have only a minor place, which, to our mind, should be one of the leading factors. It seems that the race has been educated away from itself. It is not an uncommon thing to see young men who have splendid educational abilities, versed in the languages, with check aprons on, scrubbing marble steps, and doing other menial labor. Their plea is, when questioned along this line, "I cannot get anything else to do." To what advantage then, has the hard earned money of their parents and friends been expended to educate them? Their fathers did as well as, if not better, than they without it, and cannot this man, with the advantage of education, "turn up something"? There is something radically wrong with the plan of education. The old man could plod over the farm in his antiquated way; and earn money enough to keep things going, and educate his son, but when that son's education has been completed, he has not the ability or business tact, with modern improvements, to build upon the foundation laid by his less cultured father. Let this cultured boy get down to business. For him, here is the route laid down.

Mr. Hilyer, the lawyer published the following remarks in 1902:
In view of their economic, educational and political history, we should naturally expect the colored race to make

in the first generation of their freedom more progress in the building of churches and in the acquisition of homes and lands than in the exacting arena of business. At any rate such has been the fact. The entire race is passing through a hard and severe economic struggle. The whole nation is in the throes of a great social distress, on account of the presence of this colored race with physical aspects so different from the main body of the people. The colored people are being put to a severe test. They are being tried as it were by fire*/

The words of these early thinkers may or may not have the force today that they had when uttered, but something tells me that, as this panel presents its views, it will soon be determined that their vision of economic liberty still has meaning.

*/For full text of remarks by Jones, Morgan and Hilyer See "The Negro As A Business Man," Twentieth Century of Negro Literature 370-387 (D.W. Culp ed. 1902.