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By George, Urban America Can Look To Joseph

by Riquee Blackman Jarmon | October 19, 2009 7:03 AM



Riquee Blackman Jarmon Photo

To amens and hallelujahs, real estate developer and former basketball star C. Tate George urged New Haven's NAACP to think of the story of Joseph while confronting the current recession.

"The Joseph story was before any of us were thought of," said George (pictured). "But yet it applies to us today. Hallelujah."

George drew the parallel during the keynote speech Saturday at the NAACP's 2009 Economic Summit held at The University of New Haven's Dodds Hall. The summit's theme: "Unfinished Business."

George's is a success story. First he starred as a basketball player at UConn; he went on to play for the New Jersey Nets. Then he launched a business career. Today George is the CEO and founder of The George Group LLC. The group won a bid to develop Seaview Plaza in Bridgeport in September along with Simon Konover Company. The plans include a waterfront

park, a pharmacy, and a gas station. George said his company's portfolio exceeds \$1 billion in current development projects.

In his talk, George stressed three values as essential to helping rebuild urban America's economy: compassion, optimism, and humility.

Speaking about urban development, George broke down the definition of what it means to be "urban" using a Biblical story from the book of Genesis: He compared American cities to Joseph.

Like Joseph confronting Egypt's famine, urban America is caught "in the middle" of an economic crisis, George said. The way Joseph handled his crisis with compassion, optimism, and humility was what counted.

"While in the middle, I always say that no matter how tough it gets for us, we have to maintain compassion," said George. "Because those that are building at our door do not always understand what our fight's about."

George said urbandwellers need to be humble because "humbleness serves everybody." He said that people need to be willing to learn about what's going on around them, that some don't even know the meaning of redevelopment.

"First and foremost," said George, in an interview after the speech, "we can't be disillusioned on the process of what urban redevelopment is. We have to be effective; we have to think like business people."

George said education, too, is key.

"The only equalizer we have coming out of the urban areas is education," he said. "We don't start with a silver spoon and a savings account or an annuity."

He said most people from urban areas start with nothing and have to make something for themselves, but it is possible.

George said people need to get mentors if they're trying to set out to do something and they don't have the background or the education.

"If you don't have the credibility," George said he tries to tell young people, "get someone else's."

He said people "will look past you and where you come from and look at your mentors."

"We have to be able to explain, eloquently, what we want, instead of just picketing and causing headaches and not getting anything done," he said during a brief interview. (George was in a rush to spend the day with his daughter; it was her birthday.)

Norman Forrester, a senior financial advisor for Merrill Lynch, called the keynote address inspiring.

“It was from the heart and it’s informative,” said Forrester about George’s speech. “He’s telling you things that you can apply in your daily life.”

George said that’s what he’s set out to do. He sits on the board of the National Basketball Retired Players Association and is the chair of member services. He said he meets with former NBA players who have lost their fortunes about coming “back to reality” after living in the “fantasy world” of pro basketball.

George said he couldn’t do what he’s doing without his education. He graduated from the University of Connecticut with a degree in business administration and a minor in marketing.

George said it takes a vision, and then people need to have compassion, optimism, humility. He ended his speech asking a favor of the audience.

“I only ask you to do to one simple thing: wrap up those three characteristics and make it your own,” no matter where you are, he said. “I’ve lived by those principals, I’ll die by those principles, I’ll make money by those principles, I will make some people angry by those principles. So, just take some of it and try to install it into some of what you do and how you can make a difference.”

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