

EDUCATION AS A CATALYST FOR NARROWING THE SEGREGATION GAPS IN THE POST-SLAVERY AMERICA.

Sory DOUMBIA

Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako (ULSHB)

sorysekou71@yahoo.fr

bancosory@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The present paper seeks to tackle the issue of education as a catalyst for narrowing the segregation gaps between black and white races in the post-slavery America. Education is an important means that permitted many African Americans to suffer less from the rampant segregation that emerged at a time they were expecting a better living condition. From Booker T. Washington to William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and Marcus Mosiah Garvey, all sustained struggles for education were meant to ensure the well-being of African Americans. Nowadays a large number of African Americans are still suffering and fighting for the betterment of their conditions like those of their white counterparts because of the prevailing of segregation. As a matter of fact, the results of the paper show that the education of African Americans has enabled them to break the shackles of white segregation and endowed them with efficient strategies to ensure equality and equity between them and the other American citizens. As a conclusion, education therefore becomes the most efficient catalyst for elevating African Americans beyond the hindrances of white segregation.

Keywords: African American, Black Leaders, Current Generation, Education, Improvement,

RÉSUMÉ :

Le présent article aborde le thème de l'éducation comme moyen de réduire la ségrégation après l'esclavage aux Etats Unis. L'éducation est un moyen qui a permis à de nombreux noirs américains de moins souffrir de la ségrégation rampante au moment où ils s'attendaient à meilleures conditions de vie. De Booker T. Washington à William Edward Burghardt Du Bois et Marcus Mosiah Garvey, tous ont mené des combats pour l'éducation un chemin pour assurer le bien-être des noirs américains. De nos jours un grand nombre de ceux-ci souffrent toujours et continuent de se battre afin d'améliorer leur condition comme celle de leurs compatriotes blancs. En effet, les résultats de ce travail montreront que l'éducation permettra aux noirs

américains de nos jours de briser les chaînes de la ségrégation blanche et les dotera de stratégies efficaces pour défendre l'égalité et l'équité entre tous les américains. Cela sera possible en utilisant les œuvres des trois personnages. Je parlerai de leurs réalisations qui ont permis d'améliorer la vie de nombreux noirs à travers l'éducation. En conclusion, il s'agit de montrer que l'éducation est l'élément le plus important pour les noirs américains de remonter la ségrégation blanche. Certains articles abordant les mêmes les thèmes sont aussi utilisés.

Mots clés : noir américain, leaders noirs, éducation, amélioration, génération présente

INTRODUCTION

When slaves set feet in (the New World) America, they were deprived of the fundamental human rights. Their white masters used strategies which could permit them to use and dominate them more. One of the surest ways to be aware of their condition and fight for their living betterment, being education, was right away forbidden officially because of what could be its outcome. That is why Allen B. Ballard in *The Education Of Black Folk* in 1973 said: "Ever since the days of slavery, constraining black education was used as a method to quell black agency and fears of slave rebellions. This denial only intensified Black people's desire for education. After emancipation, black education was relegated to poorly funded segregated schools." The same idea of fear was mentioned by Frederick Douglass in his slave narrative. In this narrative, Douglass's master totally rejected his education because he feared its impact on him. It was a way for his master to hide the importance of education and keep Douglass in ignorance and perpetual enslavement. However, Douglass understood that he had to learn because, if his white master opposes to his education and that of the other slaves, that is because of its importance.

The education of African Americans had played a vital role in the abolition of slavery. Although slavery was officially abolished, it was not actually accompanied by the abolition of some restricted measures like access to education since white Americans rejected their black counterparts in their schools. That situation pushed black schools and Blacks to strive for their education despite its poor quality compared to white schools. In Virginia, an historical Black state, many studies revealed that only very few Blacks were educated before the opening of public schools during the Reconstruction period. One famous Virginian born writes an important book on the education of the black people, it is Carter G. Woodson. His Book, *The Mis-Education of The Negro* (1933) is very significant. In addition, he was an autodidact en encourages Black people to learn by themselves in order to escape being indoctrinated.

Those schools did not meet all the expectations, for they depended on white funding. We learn from the Virginia Museum of History and Culture through an article entitled "*The Beginning of Black Education*":

Many whites did not want blacks to become educated, fearing they would challenge white supremacy and not be content with jobs working in the fields or in domestic service. Black schools therefore received far less financial support than did white schools. Black schools had fewer books, worse buildings, and less well paid teachers. Ramshackle, segregated schools marked black Virginians with a stigma of inferiority and the status of second-class citizenship that they would have to endure throughout their lives. (18/09/2020)

It was at that moment that two leaders emerged in the Black community with different philosophies as far as the education of their fellows was concerned. The reference is made to Booker T. Washington and W E B Du Bois. They were joined later by another famous black leader who devoted all his life to the improvement of Blacks' living conditions all over the world. That one was the Jamaican born, Marcus M. Garvey. They were all aware of the lack of education among African Americans and thought that it was necessary to find a solution to that situation. How did those leaders manage to obtain an improvement in the living conditions of African Americans? What are some of their major achievements? What can today's people get from their experiences to reduce segregation and improve life in the American Black community? And what can Africa benefit from their experiences to reduce Africans' dependency on the West? These questions are thus formulated to guide the study and they enable us to justify the importance of topic raised in the paper.

1. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON'S BLUEPRINT FOR THE EDUCATION OF BLACK PEOPLE

The struggle for education has always been the concern of African Americans since the early days of slavery. Brave people like Phyllis Wheatley, Paul Cuffe, Benjamin Banneker, Frederick Douglass, and Dr. James Derham revolted against the bad treatment of their fellows and thought that it was through education that could stop their ruthless former masters. Most of those people did not attend any school.

Born into slavery with no education, being able to read and write became an important part of Booker T. Washington's childhood desire. That was why he was determined to have an education that could permit him to read ordinary books and newspapers published every day, week or month, also write anything he would like to write in order to express his feelings. That desire pushed and excited him in his quest for education. For Washington, the most important thing for Negroes was the access to education which might allow them to start the process of improvement of their living conditions. It was the way for them to move from degradation to "civilization" first. According to Booker T., that might be possible with various matters to know in life. He did not teach only literary skills at Tuskegee (the school set up for Negroes in 1881), but also other disciplines that could help his community and himself forever.

Blacks longed for education but they did not have means to make that easy. With emancipation, all of them wanted to have material satisfaction; however, the possibility to reach that goal was hard to get. To solve all those problems, he believed in industrial training as the main method to go through the obstacles which blocked the former slaves in their new situation. He trusted that system as the one necessary for his people according to the time and their living conditions. Washington did not think the poor position of some Blacks should prevent them from searching an education. According to him, if some Whites like Abraham Lincoln could succeed in poverty to become American president, Blacks could do alike. Thanks to education the progress and the position can be obtained. The following quotation illustrates his educational project:

If the colored man will only improve his opportunities and persevere, I believe the time is not far distant when a great portion of them will be equal in education, equal in wealth, equal in civilization, and equal in everything that tends toward human advancement, to any nation or people on earth. (Smock, 2009, p.16)

Based on black's experience, Booker T. directed his first educational project towards agriculture. Since most of the slaves worked on plantations, he thought that they could easily learn and improve what they acquired on the different farms. Agriculture is considered as the most important industry in the world. It gives people food and also provides us with two basic materials that we always need: clothing and shelter. Despite that agriculture is the activity which produces the materials that we use in making many other products like paints and medicines. According to *The World Book Encyclopedia* (Volume 5, 2003), agriculture is one of the oldest industries in the world that started around 10,000 years ago in the Middle East. The main activities of most Blacks during slavery were farming and some menial works they practiced on their masters' plantations. They had been doing these for a very long time and had got some experience in them as Frederick Douglass mentioned it about the Great House Plantation in his narrative. That was the headquarters of his master's (Colonel Lloyd) plantations where the decisions were taken:

The home plantation of Colonel Lloyd wore the appearance of a country village. All the mechanical operations for all the farms were performed here. The shoemaking and mending, the blacksmithing, cartwrighting, coopering, weaving, and grain grinding, were all performed by the slaves on the home plantation. (Douglass, 1845, p24)

That idea is reinforced by the explanation that Booker T. Washington gave about his industrial education for the Negro people. He said that the young black boys and girls were constantly trained on the southern plantations. They did not only learn farming in its formal way. Some of them practiced carpentry, cooking, sewing, housekeeping, etc. Mr. Washington wanted to improve those skills the colored people had, and on which southern Whites often depended for their economic development. To reach that goal, the agricultural training he established required a high level of learning as stated here by Roscoe Conkling Bruce:

Agriculture is, of course, fundamental—fundamental in recognition of the fact that the Negro population is mainly a farming population, and of the truth that something must be done to stem the swelling tide which each year sweeps thousands of black men and women and children from the sunlit monotony of the plantation to the sunless iniquity of the slums, from a drudgery that is not quite cheerless to a competition that is altogether merciless. But the teaching of agriculture, even in its elementary stages, presupposes a considerable amount of academic preparation. To be sure, a flourishing garden may be made and managed by bright-eyed tots just out of the kindergarten, but how can commercial fertilizers be carefully analyzed by a boy who has made no study of general chemistry? And how can a balanced ration be adjusted by an illiterate person? (Smock, 2009, p.31)

A striking example about the importance of agriculture is the case of George Washington Carver. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* George Washington Carver, born by 1861, not far from Diamond Grove, Mo., U.S. and died on January 5, 1943, in Tuskegee, Alabama, was an American agricultural chemist, agronomist, and experimenter whose development of new products derived from peanuts (groundnuts), sweet potatoes, and soybeans helped revolutionize the agricultural economy of the nation in general and particularly the South which was mainly based on the agricultural products. Most of the progress in agriculture nowadays are the results of his brilliant experience at Tuskegee Institute.

Another important idea of Washington's project for his race is masonry. Mr. Washington established his Tuskegee Industrial and Agricultural Institute when the American process of expansion still continued.

The need of putting up new buildings and houses was created at the new discovered or conquered places. The great part concerned the Negroes themselves since most of them did not have where to live. It became important for them to learn a job which would permit them to find a place where to live. The first for that was to make the bricks and build. Some made bricks, but were not able to erect a house. As to Booker T. Washington, the introduction of brick making and masonry was to benefit the institute and then the students. As he said, the making of bricks as the second activity after agriculture and he explained the reasons by saying that the first he had in mind was to make bricks that should be used not only to erect their buildings but also to earn money. Since nobody had a brick industry, they may be interested in what they would make. He sympathized with the “Children of Israel” in their task of “making bricks without straw” (Smock, 2009 p. 31) and he thought that in Tuskegee they were making bricks with neither money nor experience.

They were able to learn how to make bricks by hands and then with the machine. With the requirement of the market, they made many and with good quality that this work brought another unexpected situation. The institute became famous through the South thanks to the quality of their bricks. That was why Booker T. Washington was very proud of their students’ skill in making bricks and he said for that:

Wherever one of our brick makers has gone in the South, we find that he has something to contribute to the well-being of the community into which he has gone; something that has made the community feel that, in a degree, it is indebted to him, and perhaps, to a certain extent, dependent upon him. In this way pleasant relations between the races have been stimulated. (Booker T. 1965, p.111)

That is one of the purposes for which Booker T. Washington initiated the industrial education. After learning making bricks, they should also learn how to use these bricks for themselves and their community, since that was Booker T. Washington’s philosophy: self-reliance and self-help. Learning how to erect building would permit them to make their buildings in an easier way.

2. DU BOIS’ ELITIST APPROACH TO EDUCATION

At the outset of his book on sociology *The Souls of Black Folk* W.E.B Du Bois let us know that the Negro problem was widely that of ignorance (lack of knowledge about their life in general), not simply illiteracy, but deeper ignorance of the world and its ways, of the thought and experience of men, to borrow his words. It was a one of personal and the possibilities of human soul. He thought that the sole manner to get rid of such a difficulty should be education.

Unlike Booker T. Washington, W.E.B Du Bois thought that his people did not need to focus on only one system of education that is the industrial education. He did not believe in the success of his race’s development through that system of education only. Access to education was right given to African Americans by the American Constitution through the 14th Amendment which considered as American citizens. Education existed for Blacks before Mr. Washington’s birth. That is why he defended this idea in his famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk* that at a school in Nashville where he taught Negroes there were different categories of black students who were eager to learn despite their parents’ opposition. Some parents required their children on the farms and others at home. Once Du Bois explained to them the impact education can have

on their lives, they accepted to let their offspring to continue their studies. Those students defied the cold winter and did not care about the rough benches on which they studied. The type of education he considered of paramount importance for America in general and his community in particular should be based on the following:

As an ardent opponent to separation, William Du Bois directed another aspect of his fight to the integrated school for black children. That was due to the poor quality of the education received at black schools and insistent need of education they faced at that time. In *The Souls of the Black Folk*, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois said that Black felt two-ness:

From the double every American Negro must live, as a negro and as an American as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century..... Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism. (Washington et al, 1965 : 346)

He added that American Negro history is that of a strong disagreement or fighting. They had to overcome the double positions to get one. That should be possible when they would be looked at as a Negro and then an American. This was the main complaint Du Bois made about the existing division of the same people in the same nation. The separation between Blacks and Whites aimed at stopping the little progress Blacks started to make with emancipation and during Reconstruction.

Du Bois struggled to get integrated school because America is not a nation of one color or group. Both Blacks and Whites trained can contribute equally to the improvement of their communities. So they should receive the same quality of education at the same school. What is also more remarkable in Du Bois' fight for integrated education was the bad quality of the black schools and their outdated curriculum which did not prevent them from producing qualitative results. He gave a specific explanation of that by arguing that the teachers who taught in those given institutions did not have as purpose to maintain African Americans at a static point. They targeted to help those people to move upward; far from where they were left by bondage. According to John Hope Franklin, some 378,000 Blacks attended the white dominated schools in 1970 and that was 1,100,000 seven years later and, constituted around 9.3 percent of the total number of American students. The third trend was the multiplication of blacks' higher schools which received mainly their children. John Hope told us that in 1977 there was 69 percent graduates with a bachelor's degree among whom 46 percent were Blacks. This integration will have a serious influence on both Black school achievement and improvement of life and lead to the access to higher education, too.

The impact of this school was considerable in the fight undertaken by CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), an organization set up to fight against the inequality African Americans were victims of, with a nuance about the focus and the meaning. That integration fought against separate Black neighborhoods, schools, and jobs. They wanted an America where everybody should be considered American not anyone else. The only different would be the skin color, which would be meaningless. They stated that separation could lead to segregation which is synonymous to considering one superior and another inferior. As long as the facilities were separated, segregation would increase and segregation started up to keep black man down. It was a legalized form of slavery that no Negro wanted to hear about again. This example is used to explain that this

strategy was important and to which degree it affected both the oppressors and the oppressed. It did permit school integration, but also spread to integration in housing. With that, many respectable, courageous and rich (well-to-do) Negroes were accepted in their neighborhoods.

Du Bois believed that high education is the springboard for black people to uplift themselves and reach a higher social status. This is also a way for them to realize the American dream which is grounded on the idea of upward social mobility. The idea of improvement pushed Du Bois to look for more as soon as he noticed the possibility of changing. For a better improvement, he thought that it was necessary to have a higher level of education for any American child who expressed the need. Thinking about the better for his people, Du Bois had struggled for that kind of education the access to which would be of paramount increase for both his community and their nation. This did not come from a supernatural element as Blacks proved to be able to study at higher schools as whites did long before that moment. Blacks trained at those schools did tremendous jobs despite the quality of their training and that of their schools. Du Bois was encouraged by ideas that Negro colleges were, in 1930, combined with a concern for students and their connections to the economic environment surrounding African Americans. Mostly, he was anxious by the fact that Historically Black Colleges and Universities lacked an over-arching curriculum that would equip students with the intellectual tools necessary to negotiate the modern world while simultaneously applying their particular learned skills to a well thought out and explicit program of racial uplift. He said that once at Howard University there could not be the slightest doubt that the Negro college, its teachers, students, and graduates had not yet comprehended the age in which they lived: the tremendous organization of industry, commerce, capital, and credit which formed a super-organization dominating and ruling the universe, subordinating to its ends government, democracy, religion, education, and social philosophy; and for the purpose of forcing into the places of power in this organization American black men either to guide or help reform it, either to increase its efficiency or make it a machine to improve their well-being, rather than the merciless mechanism which enslaves them. He added that the Negro college had neither program nor intelligent comprehension. (Washington et al, 1965)

Before the time Du Bois pledged for the building and access to higher education, some schools developed little by little in some states where Blacks were taught many skills: industrial training and liberal arts. Du Bois considered that there was no obligation to have directly a great number of black educated. The few education would assist the others to get a better level and a developed community, where the idea of the "talented tenth". Those talented would be a kind of driving belt in the black community. One may affirm here that both were necessary and complementary because industrial training requires highly educated trainers. No poor educated person can produce a well-educated people. So, they developed together and fulfilled the needs of the community and the nation. The separation of facilities was another reason to prevent Blacks from getting higher education. The interdependence of the two systems in the practice of separation is mentioned by W.E.B Du Bois that way:

The missionaries of '68 soon saw; and if effective industrial and trade schools were impracticable before the establishment of a common-school system, just as certainly no adequate common schools could be founded until there were teachers to teach them.

Southern whites would not teach them; Northern whites in sufficient numbers could not be had. If the Negro was to learn, he must teach himself, and the most effective help that could be given him was the establishment of schools to train Negro teachers. (Washington et al, 1965)

That fight for higher education led to an incalculable increase in the number of demands for Negro higher education. Despite the poor situation of the black schools and the whites' negative reactions against them from 1875 to 1900, the increase moved from 22 Negro graduates to almost 100 in that period. The southern Negro colleges had for the same moment an increase of 143 to more than 500 according to Dr. Du Bois.

The higher education allowed Blacks graduated to hold considerable positions which were crucial for their development and that of the South and the whole nation. It was necessary and even compulsory to struggle for this kind of training once we refer to what happened prior to the height of the Reconstruction and relying on these records given in the "Souls of Black Folk":

From such schools about two thousand Negroes have gone forth with the bachelor's degree. The number in itself is enough to put at rest the argument that too large a proportion of Negroes are receiving higher training. If the ratio to population of all negro students throughout the land, in both college and secondary training, be counted, Commissioner Harris assures us 'it must be increased to five times its present average' to equal that average of the land. Fifty years ago the ability of Negro students in any appreciable numbers to master a modern college course would have been difficult to prove. Today it is proved by the fact that four thousands Negroes, many of whom have been reported as brilliant students, have received the bachelor's degree from Harvard, Yale, Oberlin, and seventy other leading colleges. Here we have, then, nearly twenty-five hundred Negro graduates, of whom the crucial query must be made. (Washington et al, 1965)

By this statement, Miller talks about of African Americans at the famous schools and their brilliant performance. There were numerous African Americans graduates from the prestigious universities and colleges. Most of those graduates were active in doing different jobs that were profitable for themselves, their race and the nation as well. The majority of them were teachers, which means that they contributed actively in training other people who could also work at various fields for their well-being and that of the nation. Some others were working as leaders of institutions, managers of normal schools, principals of city school system. All these were important positions that Negroes did not have access to in the past. Among the group some served in the churches, another important situation for anyone who knows the place of religion in American society. In addition to these, professions such as physician, merchant, farmer, artisan, government civil servant were exercised by many of these people as mentioned by W.E.B. Du Bois. More access to higher education would be a manner of boosting the number of African Americans in each of them.

Regarding these results and others, we may say that it was worth fighting for higher education not for African Americans only but for every American child so as to promote the individuals through which the country can be promoted. For that reason, it was noticed an important increase in the number of demands for Negro higher education despite their poor situation and the Whites' negative reactions against them from 1875

to 1900. This number moved from 22 Negro graduates to almost 100 in that period. The southern Negro colleges had for the same moment an increase of 143 to more than 500 according to Dr. Du Bois. Since those southern Negro colleges could not satisfy all the need, it was necessary for the white ones to adopt similar solution. There was a need of both integration and higher education for all the American children without distinction of race or color.

3. MARCUS GARVEY'S SEPARATIST VISION FOR BLACKS' EDUCATION

Marcus Mosiah Garvey believed that African Americans were universally oppressed and any program of emancipation would have to be built around the question of race as it happened when they were granted the three amendments at the outset of their freedom. In his mind, African Americans would aspire to positions of influence if they had educational opportunities, and this would bring them into direct competition with the white powerful structure. He never doubted about their possibility of taking up this unexpected challenge because at a time in their history none of them could think of such situation. Garvey was convinced about the blacks' plights caused by the lack education or good level of education. That is why education became a common goal with his predecessors. He engaged any the means he considered necessary to reach his goal in that fight.

Garvey had a feeling of a threat toward the weaker races. He thought that Blacks had to stand and react to it, otherwise, they would face stronger opposition to the Whites who did not want to see them developed the way they were. He said that in one or two centuries the stronger races will have developed themselves to the position of complete mastery of all things material. In that position, the happiness, comfort, and pleasure of the weaker will be endangered. They would be able to stand by themselves anymore. These were the things that strike the thoughtful Negro as being dangerous, and these were the things that caused the members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to be fighting tenaciously for the purpose of building up a strong Negro race, so as to make it impossible for them to be exterminated in the future to make room for the stronger races.

His educational system was focused on learning anything that Blacks could be able to read. For Garvey, nothing should be neglected in that field. Reading a lot was the most important strategy to reach that goal. By reading a lot and reading everything, people may come across to both expected and unexpected elements necessary in their life.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey was totally against integrated education. As a separatist, he urged his people to do everything by their own with no interference with the white oppressors. That is why his education lead him to the creation businesses (Negro Factories Corporation for Blacks) only and gigantic project he named "back to Africa" with a company he created for transportation (The Black Star Line Steamship). This aimed at helping any black who desired to return to Africa. The separated businesses Garvey set African Americans only permitted to some Blacks to ameliorate their living conditions through the income received relying on themselves. That is illustrated by Robert Hill as follows:

With this amount of money the Corporation will be able to place the race on such economic base as to force respect, not only from the opposite race, but from mankind at large. Please call at the office of the Corporation, 56W. 135th Street, New York, U.S.A. and buy more shares. If you cannot call between 9 A.M. and 8 P.M., you may call at Liberty Hall, 120W. 138th. between the hours of 8.30 P.M. and 11 P.M. If you are out of town, you may send and buy more shares by mail, making your remittance by postal money order or by Bank Draft... (1920, p. 225)

CONCLUSION

Up to now, nobody can affirm that segregation totally disappeared in America since different acts occur every time. The progress in science and the different aspects of human evolution have not lessened the anger some white Americans have towards African Americans. There are discriminated colleges and universities created on their behalf preventing from attending whites ones. Michel Obama, the wife of the former American President, was said not to be for Princeton University despite the fact that she was the top of her promotion. Nonetheless, we notice that through different educational strategies Booker T. Washington, William E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey contributed tremendously to the improvement of their nation in general and particularly their community. A large number of African Americans bettered their situation through those skills they learnt at the different schools. From doing the lowest jobs with the lowest wages some of them sat with white people in the same office for the same jobs and the segregation gap got narrower than it was years ago. To exemplify, in *The Struggle for Black Equality* Sitkoff Harvard explained that there were 30 black federal judges, two Cabinet and more than fifty sub-Cabinet officials, fifteen ambassadors, over a hundred members of advisory boards and commissions, and twenty five aides on the White House staff. That brought a new life in the black communities. That progress was hampered with the arrival of the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan who almost closed the doors of opportunities to Blacks and sometimes with the support of some blacks appointed.

We get from the different schools that all brought good change in the living condition of the descendants of the former slaves. There was no training which did not permit to boost someone somewhere in the black community. Examples are given like the case of George Washington Carver in agriculture, Gabriel B. Miller in carpentry, WEB Du Bois himself as far integrated schooling was concerned, etc. To continue with that trend, it is necessary for today's African Americans to understand that going to the university and obtaining a Ph. D or a Master's degree is not enough to lead to economic light. Occupying a political position is not also given to everybody to move forward. No system of education should be neglected. That same situation is true for us Africans who are full of complex of inferiority. We generally think that getting higher diploma is an end in itself. This is attested by the numerous persons graduated from the universities in our countries who are sleeping at home or hunting a job related to their qualification that will never come for some. Instead of learning professional skills some spend long time at school and end by doing jobs they would be better at if they studied them at school earlier. No one should think that working in office is the sole way to direct us to economic stability. All the other ways and means have to be explored and exploited.

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