

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Sunday Edition: Stay Focused - The U.S. Virgin Islands Is Coming Back and Valdemar A. Hill Sr.'s 'Golden Jubilee' Will be Realized

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With a 12.8 percent unemployment rate in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and with HOVENSA's tax revenue no longer a part of the equation shared with Diageo USVI and other companies, these are depressing and unbearable times.

Families find themselves in the eye of the worst recession in our lifetime. There is a lot of hurt, pain, and sadness out there across the U.S. Virgin Islands. People have lost their jobs and homes. Many have moved off island to make ends meet.

Strategically, some have moved to North Dakota to \$100,000-plus oil-boom salaries. Our fixed-income senior citizens are choosing between their WAPA bill and their medication. We see it on TV2 and Channel 8 News. We read it in the *VI Consortium*, the *Virgin Islands Daily News*, the *St. Croix Avis*, and the *Source*. Our hearts wrench and soften because we understand that when times are tough, it can be so easy to give in to pessimism, doubt, and fear.

But that is not who we are as a people. We are strong and resilient, and we will dig deep, dig out, and come back.

People like Valdemar A. Hill, Sr., and other ancestors and their forebears, sponsored legislation for the first minimum wage law, which is known as "Hill's Wage and Hour Law." Hill also sponsored legislation for evening school for adults, rent control, improving housing, sanitation, hospitalization, poor relief, and the first Anti-Discrimination act in 1945. Working men and women, like Hill, paved the way for each of us reading these lines.

It was the labor movement that helped secure the 40-hour work week, minimum wage, family leave, health insurance, Social Security, Medicare, and retirement plans. These tenets are cornerstones of the middle class.

A candle loses nothing by lighting another. Let's never forget it. Let's keep fighting, every single day, to support middle-class principles and turn this economy around, to put people back to work, and to renew Valdemar A. Hill, Sr.'s dream for our families and for future generations.

There is a large machine out there that is betting that between now and Election Day on November 8, 2016, remnants of the *Golden Jubilee* of economic and social progress that Hill wrote about in his 1967 book is realized. This 2016 metric, and its additional key performance indicators and path to progress will spur growth and acculturate change and an upward trajectory that tracks 20 to 30 years from now.

When it comes to just about everything done to strengthen the middle class and rebuild the economy, Hill said "Yes!" Yes to unemployment insurance. Yes to the Organic Act. Yes to the march to Government House on behalf of the people in 1941. Yes to making tuition affordable at the College of the Virgin Islands. Yes to merging the Unity Party and Democratic Party in 1963 and assisting in drafting the first Election Code for the Virgin Islands in 1963.

No is not an option. If we challenge ourselves to reach for something better in the U.S. Virgin Islands, there is no problem we cannot solve, there is no *Golden Jubilee* that we cannot fulfill.

Let's say Yes to rewarding teachers for their greatness by giving them more pay, a pay for performance bonus, and more support. Yes to harnessing the ingenuity of farmers, government employees, gas station and laundry attendants, distillery operators, mechanics, construction workers, electricians, pilots, real estate agents, plumbers, doctors, technology consultants, students, citizens, and entrepreneurs to begin the next great chapter in U.S. Virgin Islands history, with five words that will ring true from Twin City to Rock City to Love City: Yes to Hill's *Golden Jubilee*.

