

FAYETTE is GETTING ITSELF TOGETHER

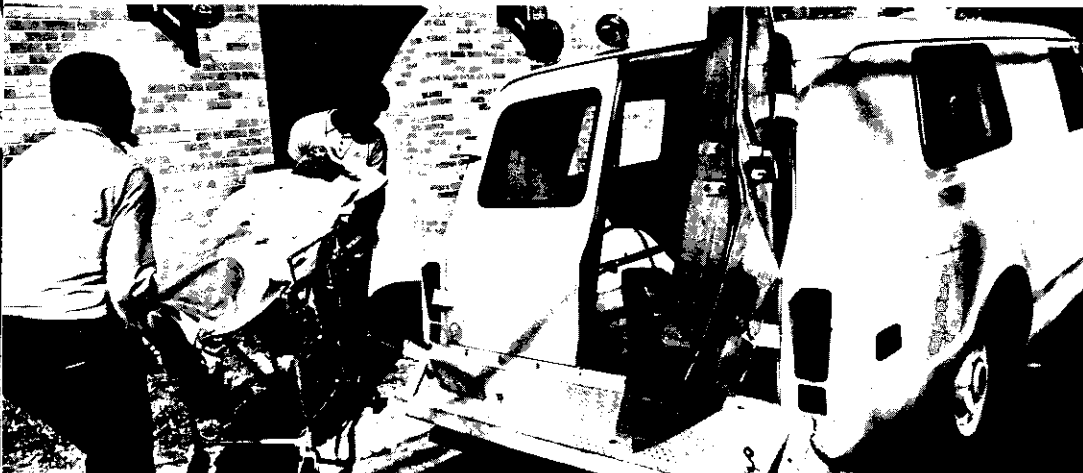


I. HEALTH SERVICES

In 1969 one full-time doctor was available for Jefferson County's 10,000 citizens. About 85 percent of that population — virtually all of the blacks and poor whites — had never been treated by a doctor. One of the Evers administration's first acts was to employ a full-time black doctor as the town's medical director, providing free medical care to the poor. The Medgar Evers Fund provided the initial support. Dr. Marshall Goldberg of Flint, Michigan, recruited almost one hundred Michigan doctors to serve two-week stints in Fayette, treating the region's poor. In 1971, HEW agreed to fund a community health program encompassing Jefferson and a neighboring county at a cost of roughly \$5 million over five years. HEW's condition was that the Medgar Evers Fund build a permanent structure for the program (now housed in the new multi-purpose community center.) Also in 1971, the Fund purchased a mobile medical unit for \$40,000 to expand the medical program. The Fund obtained a \$30,000 mobile dental unit from the United Auto Workers in 1972. Through the Fund a New York supporter donated the town's first ambulance. The Fund also purchased medical equipment, obtained donated medicines from manufacturers, and provided emergency hospitalization for local indigents. It financed the training of the town's first medical technician and began a program of nursing scholarships to sustain the health services. Federal funds enabled the program to add a family planning unit. By 1973, the program was treating about 9,000 different patients a year with a full range of medical and dental services, and it had embarked upon a preventive health program.



A full range of medical services are provided by the community medical program, shown above. In addition, many of the region's poor are receiving professional dental care for the first time (below).



An emergency case is shown here being brought to the medical clinic at the multi-purpose community center. The ambulance was obtained by the Medgar Evers Fund from a New York donor in 1970 to provide Fayette's first public ambulance service.



THE FAYETTE SAGA

Getting Itself Together

In July, 1969, the people of Fayette, Mississippi, entered a new era when Charles Evers was inaugurated as the first black mayor of a biracial town in the South. At the time Fayette was one of the nation's poorest communities — and going downhill steadily.

The Evers administration brought a new spirit to the Fayette region — a spirit based upon reconciliation between the races. Further, it promised to use all of the powers of the city government to better the lot of the most humble and the most poor.

Its major objectives for the Fayette region (comprising roughly 10,000 citizens of Jefferson County, about eighty percent of whom are black) were economic and social. It pledged to create a sound economic base and to dramatically upgrade the community's social services and facilities including health, day care, family planning, sanitation, housing, and recreation. The new town administration was also committed to improving the level and delivery of the municipal government's services and to making that government more responsive to the needs of its citizens.

Underlying these objectives was a compelling desire to demonstrate that a small town — with a modest amount of outside private assistance — could break with the past by radically altering the social and economic conditions of the vast majority. Secondly, it was hoped that a perserverant and systematic effort to utilize the multitude of

federal programs would produce substantial federal grants to finance the long-term development of the Fayette region.

Founded in late 1969, the Medgar Evers Fund made its first grant to Fayette in 1970. In the four full years ending on December 31, 1973, the Fund expended almost \$612,000 on programs in Mississippi, for the most part in the Fayette region. Of this sum, almost \$550,000 was awarded either as direct grants or in the form of technical support. The bulk of the cash grants served as Fayette's local share towards matching federal grants, often two or three times greater than the local share. As a result of grants made by the Fund alone, between \$6 and \$7 million have been generated in federal and state grants. More than \$1 million in additional grants have been obtained by the town directly, without matching funds, at times with technical aid supplied by the Fund. Finally, the Fund has almost \$312,000 earmarked for 1974 programs.

As the succeeding pages of this folder illustrate, concrete changes have taken place in Fayette since 1969. The changes are, however, even more sweeping — they affect the attitudes and living levels of the thousands of people who, until recently, had been locked in a traditional vise of immobility for centuries. The yoke of racial oppression has been cast off by the people of Fayette — forever. All of its citizens — black and white — are the better for it. And we have only just begun.



Mayor Evers and two constituents.

4. MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Fayette — like most other small Southern towns — provided minimal public services prior to 1969, especially for its black community. Law enforcement was not only rudimentary but, for Negro citizens, characterized by heavy-handedness often verging on brutality. The first major transformation in Fayette, after Mayor Evers' inauguration, was in law enforcement. When the all-white police force resigned, Mayor Evers invited other whites to join the newly-recruited blacks. No whites accepted. The town thereupon proceeded to build from scratch a totally new and fully-trained police force, now one of the finer examples in the South. The Fund provided a grant for a New York law enforcement officer to train the force for almost a year in modern police methods. Through the Fund, Philadelphia policemen donated a new police car, the town's second. A Fund grant matched a federal grant to purchase the police force's first radio equipment, linking headquarters, patrol cars and town hall. New uniforms and equipment were also purchased. Gradually, Fayette began to experience enlightened and sensitive law enforcement procedures.

The Fund also reconditioned, repainted and transported a mechanized garbage truck sold to Fayette by the City of New York for \$1. In 1971 Fayette citizens started receiving regular garbage pick-up services and, for the first time, black neighborhoods received the same sanitation services as white neighborhoods.

The town developed a trained volunteer fire department which, also for the first time, responded promptly to fire emergencies.

The Evers administration launched a program of paving streets in black neighborhoods, still uncommon in many Southern towns. Even more startling for the South, the new streets were accompanied by sidewalks.

As a result of the Public Service Careers Program, the delivery and expansion of municipal services in Fayette has already begun to be felt. The town's emphasis on outreach to every citizen, regardless of race, is an everyday fact.

Next on the list of priorities is a total revamping of the town's sewage and water systems. The town has applied for federal grants to carry out the project. The Fund has pledged the local share, of which \$250,000 is now committed. When completed, the project would provide clean water in adequate amounts to *all* of the town's citizens and a modern sewage system which will greatly reduce disease.

Modernized Fayette Police Department boasts women officers as well as new equipment (above). Paved streets with sidewalks is among the first for black neighborhoods in Fayette.



5. HOUSING



Earthmover at work preparing landscaping for newly-constructed private homes built on Fayette's fringes with Farm Home Administration low-interest mortgages. These two- and three-bedroom homes are for middle level executives and professionals in the \$6,000 to \$10,000 salary ranges. Previously, equivalent dwellings were available only in towns 25 to 50 miles from Fayette. The new home dwellers have added to Fayette's tax base and to the town's local commerce, thereby raising the economic level of the entire community.

More than half of Fayette's citizens still live in ramshackle houses with outdoor plumbing and minimal electricity. Their homes are characteristic of rural slums which blight major portions of our nation. Many have earthen floors, leaky roofs and poor ventilation. Their continued presence is a national disgrace.

Working with the Farmer's Home Administration, the town has succeeded in generating scores of low-interest loans for the construction of modest private homes for employed men and women in the \$6,000 to \$10,000 bracket. As a result, two new residential communities have sprung up on the fringes of Fayette.

Most of Fayette's citizens, however, are not yet earning salaries high enough to support such "comfort." Many are only partially employed or are earning the minimum wage, which in itself is a four- or five-fold increase in income over previous years. They are, for the most part, the residents of shacks and cabins with the most elementary conveniences.

Two years ago, the Medgar Evers Fund agreed to sponsor an 80-unit modern housing project for low-income families. Named after the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the HUD-financed project is now ready for construction. The Fund has already expended roughly \$20,000 for engineering costs and construction guarantees. Ground clearing has begun, though intermittently because of bad weather. About 400 men, women and children will reside in the project, which is to be built around a heavily-wooded pond on Fayette's northern border. For most of the future residents, the projects will provide their first indoor plumbing, gas ranges, extensive electricity and a reasonable degree of familial privacy. A day care center will be housed in the project, together with a range of social services. When completed, the project will eliminate about three-fourths of the town's substandard housing. It will benefit, too, from the federal government's income supplement program for poor citizens.

6. SENIOR CITIZENS DAY CARE FACILITY

America's senior citizens are, in relation to their needs and numbers, perhaps the most neglected group in the nation. Among the South's rural poor, the plight of the aged is extreme. To ameliorate their hardships in Fayette, the Evers administration is establishing in 1974 the region's first senior citizens day care facility. It is to be located in the multi-purpose community center, where nourishing meals and medical care are easily accessible. A trained nurse will be on full-time duty to care for the town's elderly citizens. Television and other suitable forms of recreation will be provided as well. Instead of being condemned to spend their remaining years in isolation, Fayette's senior citizens will be able to enjoy a sense of community and belonging, sharing each other's company in a safe, healthy and stimulating environment. Their children, moreover, will be freed of the concerns associated with caring for the aged to pursue jobs during the day, when their parents are being well-cared for. The senior citizens facility will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. The Medgar Evers Fund will support its operation and furnishings with grants totalling \$15,000 in 1974.

MEDGAR EVERS FUND, INC.

Contributions are tax deductible

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Photos by John Messina



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