Black political empowerment in rural Mississippi: the cases of Mound Bayou, Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula

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BLACK POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL MISSISSIPPI:
THE CASES OF MOUND BAYOU, FAYETTE, BOLTON,
SHELBY AND TCHULA

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

MAY 1982
ABSTRACT

Political Science

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Black Empowerment in Rural Mississippi:
The Cases of Mound Bayou, Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula

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Dissertation dated: May, 1982

This study looks at black empowerment in five rural Mississippi towns with black mayors by analyzing the impact they have had in attempting to alter the socio-economic status of blacks in their respective towns. The following indicators were used to measure the political effectiveness of black mayors in reordering the socio-economic status of blacks: (1) distribution of governmental services to the black community; (2) employment and economic development; (3) housing; and (4) health care.

This study was initiated because of the recent changes in the political position of blacks in Mississippi and the American South in general. It was also
Chief Oliver Anderson.34 In May 1979, United States District Court Judge Orman R. Smith, Jr., awarded Crowe $10,000 in damages. And six months later Crowe was awarded $11,000 in attorney's fees and $1,363.97 in expenses for the suit he brought against city officials after he lost in the 1973 municipal election. A third case is pending in federal court alleging that Crowe was deprived of the right to be on the ballot in the 1977 city election, an election in which he ran for Alderman.35

The current suit further alleges that Mound Bayou officials denied many residents the right to vote in the 1977 municipal election. In addition, the suit charges that officials rigged the city voting machines to reject ballots that were not marked for a slate of candidates controlled by Mayor Lucas; as a result over 1,100 votes were invalid.

The final intrablack conflict to be mentioned centers around a move to change the name of the local high school from John F. Kennedy Memorial High School back to its original name - Mound Bayou High School. In 1963, immediately after the death of President John F. Kennedy, the

34Ibid.
35Interview with Milburn Crowe, 10 March, 1980.
undertaken because of the need to question those social scientists who accept the usual assumption that voting and black empowerment are prior conditions for changing the socioeconomic status of blacks in the American South. The findings of this study, however, reveal that voting and black empowerment will bring few changes in the socioeconomic makeup of the black community. In fact, the economic plight of black constituents and the fiscal situations of political subdivisions controlled by blacks will, in many cases, worsen.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 served as the primary impetus for black political empowerment in Mississippi and has had its greatest electoral impact for blacks in rural areas of the state. Before 1965 black political empowerment was, for the most part, a novelty for Mississippi blacks. For example, Mississippi, a state with 42 percent of its population black in 1960, had only one black mayor, five aldermen, and no other black elected or appointed officials.¹

Now that Mississippi's political culture has been modified by the election of blacks to positions of leadership, we are in a position to analyze this new political environment and conduct an empirical investigation of black empowerment in Mississippi. This paper represents an effort in this direction by analyzing the effect five rural black mayors have had in attempting to reorder the socioeconomic status of blacks in their respective communities. Indeed, this is a significant

¹U.S. Bureau of the Census, General Population Characteristics, 1960, Table 18. The State's only black elected officials were in the all-black town, Mound Bayou.
study to the extent that much of the black struggle for electoral participation in the South was predicated on the assumption that equal access to formal governmental processes would alter the socioeconomic status for blacks. While a number of studies have been done on the election and evaluation of big city black mayors, there are insufficient data in respect to small, rural towns with black mayors. This is due in part to the relatively short tenure of these officeholders and largely because scholars have opted not to do studies of rural black officeholders. This study is an effort to fill this void and stimulate further research in this important area.

For this empirical investigation, the writer has chosen four transitional black towns and one traditional black town with black mayors as units for analysis.² The four transitional towns - Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula - were chosen because their mayors had the longest tenure in office and because of their geographical location

²Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula are referred to as transitional towns because they were formerly controlled by an all-white administration. Now Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula have integrated governments--all of the mayors are black and only in Shelby is there a white majority Board of Aldermen. A traditional town refers to Mound Bayou, an all-black town founded by two ex-slaves in 1887 that has never had a white elected or appointed official. More importantly, Mound Bayou was the only town with black elected officials before 1968.
within the state. On the other hand, Mound Bayou was chosen because of its historical importance for black empowerment in Mississippi and also because our study attempts to establish a causal relationship between electoral changes in Mississippi's political arena and the nature of socioeconomic changes in five rural communities headed by black mayors. No previous effort has been made to establish such a relationship; however, the writer is aware of the limitations of this study. Nevertheless, some light can be shed on this question by carefully establishing identifiable indicators which can be used to determine the extent to which black empowerment has been accompanied by changes in the socioeconomic status of black community residents.

Moreover, Mound Bayou's long history of black empowerment provides us with sufficient data with which to compare the socioeconomic status of Mound Bayou's residents with residents of the four transitional towns. Such a comparison should improve our theoretical understanding of black empowerment in Mississippi. For example, if our socioeconomic measures indicate that Mound Bayou's residents' socioeconomic status was similar to the socioeconomic well being of residents of the four transitional towns, then is black empowerment relevant? At the same time, if the study shows that Mound Bayou's residents fared better on these socioeconomic measures, can this be contributed to Mound Bayou's long history of black
empowerment? Moreover, if the socioeconomic measures show that residents of the transitional towns fared better, what factors influenced this phenomenon? Can it be attributed to aggressive leadership in these towns or are there other variables impacting on this situation? For example, can they be explained by changes in the political-economic environment of the broader society? Answers to these questions and related questions will add to our theoretical understanding of black empowerment in Mississippi and the impact of black empowerment on the socioeconomic status of blacks in these respective towns. Finally, any scheme to compare the socioeconomic status of Mound Bayou's residents with that of the residents of the transitional towns should consider the situational context in which Mound Bayou's officials operated to the extent that their program initiatives were subject to the prevailing politics of Mississippi and the nation.

At this point, it would be useful to outline indicators which will be used to measure the political effectiveness of black mayors in reordering the socioeconomic status of blacks in their respective towns. The following indicators will be used: (1) distribution of governmental services to the black community; (2) employment and economic development; (3) housing; and (4) health care. These indicators were chosen because they represent the most acute problems facing black mayors upon their ascendancy to office and because
these problems were given top priority by their administra-
tions.  

Frame of Reference

Unlike other minorities in the United States, the political rights and privileges of black Americans have been prescribed by the Constitutions and statutes of both the national and state governments. Consequently, black political activity in the United States has been designed primarily to enhance the political, social and educational position of blacks vis-a-vis the white ruling elites. Because of the nature of the black struggle,

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3Interview with Town Mayors, Summer, 1980.

4From ideas promoted in Dr. Mack Jones' class in Black Politics, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, January, 1969.

5Political Activity - those activities which are designed to enhance the social, economic, educational, and political development of blacks in their respective towns vis-a-vis the local power structure. It should be noted that those activities in question, which will be called "political," have undergone periodic changes and as such, have evolved from one form to another. The varied forms of "political" activity have been commensurated or conditioned by the social context in which they have occurred; as the nature of the struggle changed so have the activities engaged in by blacks designed to alter their conditions changed. Therefore, when speaking of those activities which will be called "political," it must be understood that this concept, "political activity," has represented a multitude of similarly motivated activities which have evolved in a changing struggle. For example; during slavery the struggle was designed to achieve citizenship, gain economic independence, and to maintain social parity; during the 50 and 60 years prior to and during the 1960's the struggle was designed to alter the "Jim Crow" political culture.
black political activity has undergone periodic changes and as such, has evolved from one form to another. The varied forms of political activity have been conditioned by the political, social and economic environment in which they have occurred; as the nature of the struggle has changed, so have the activities engaged in by blacks designed to alter their conditions.

Most studies on black politics do not consider the black political experience as an important variable in developing a frame of reference for understanding black politics in the United States. Professor Mack Jones of Atlanta University has been in the vanguard of developing a framework that has contributed to our understanding of black politics. In assessing the most commonly used conceptual schemes for the study of black politics, Jones suggests that

Much of what is done proceeds in an atheoretical manner, and when a theoretical network is evident, it is likely to be one with limited relevance for the black political experience.

The melting-pot theory of American Pluralism seems to be the frame of reference most commonly used for analyzing and interpreting the black political experience in America, although attempts have been made recently to carry over the modernizing traditional-systems model from the field of comparative politics. In such instance, the researcher looks not to the black political experience for guidance in developing his conceptual scheme, but rather to the political experience of other
people. Such approaches posit a level of isomorphism between the black political experience and the experience by other groups which is denied by even a cursory examination.6

Jones further suggests that:

...a frame of reference for black politics should not begin with superficial comparisons of blacks and other ethnic minorities in this country or elsewhere, because such an approach inevitably degenerates into normative reformist speculation around the question of what can be done to elevate blacks to the position occupied by the group with which they are being compared. This, in turn, leads to the establishment of a linear model of ethnic or out-group politics and a procrustean forcing of the black political experience into the contrived model, and in the process obfuscating, if not eliminating outright, the crucial variables in the black political experience. In developing a frame of reference for black politics, one should begin by searching for those factors which are unique to the black political experience, for this is the information which will facilitate our understanding of blacks in the American political system.7

In developing a framework for this study, the writer has borrowed from Jones' conceptualizations of black politics in


7Ibid.
the South. Jones suggests that black politics in the South is a "power struggle between whites motivated by the canons of white supremacy seeking to maintain superordinacy at the expense of their black compatriots and the latter trying to throw off white domination. Electoral politics as it relates to black officeholders involves these formal political structures in which this conflict is played out." For this study, the writer argues that race is still an important variable in Mississippi politics and black politics in the state should be conceptualized as a continuing struggle between leaders of the black community to enhance the life chances of blacks on the one hand, and the white community, along with some black support, to maintain the Southern tradition of black exploitation and repression on the other.

Now that the scope and method have been established, we can now turn to a discussion of black electoral politics in the South.

**Blacks and Electoral Politics in the South: An Historical Overview**

This section of this investigation focuses upon black electoral politics in the South with special reference to black electoral politics in Mississippi. The history of

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9 "Electoral politics" as used throughout this paper, refers to voting and officeholding by blacks in the South.
blacks in the South, and in Mississippi in particular, is the history of unmitigated domination by whites. For example, blacks were denied the right to vote, the right to use public facilities, and were put under an inhumane system of slavery. With the demise of slavery and the coming of the Reconstruction Period, along with the aid of three Civil Rights Amendments and several statutes designed to protect the rights of freedmen, blacks in the South participated in electoral politics along with their white counterparts. However, black participation did not reach its full potential and the socioeconomic status of these persons, to a large degree, remained the same.

During the heyday of Reconstruction, from 1867 to 1877, black men served in every Southern state legislature. Moreover, twenty blacks were elected to the United States House of Representatives while two black men were elected to the United States Senate from the State of Mississippi. It is interesting to note that in 1870 Robert Wood, the first black mayor elected to an American city, was elected as mayor of Natchez, Mississippi, a city located in the heart of the Confederacy.

Electoral politics, however, brought few changes in the socioeconomic status for blacks in the South. Nevertheless, some changes were made. Among these was the use of the electoral process to create a public school system, supported
by public taxation, for every citizen, regardless of race. Thus to some degree, the concept of democracy had a real meaning for blacks in Mississippi during the heyday of black power in the Reconstruction Era. However, these symbols of democracy were short lived.

In what has been described as the compromise of 1877, the national government agreed to end military occupation of the South, thereby giving up its efforts to transform Southern society and lending tacit approval to white supremacy in the region. More importantly, in the Civil Rights Cases of 1883 the Supreme Court held that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional, thus eliminating the only real barrier to the Jim Crow system in the South. The Court further took the position that the Fourteenth Amendment could not be used to prevent discrimination by individuals and that only the state could do so. In the case of Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railroad Company v. Mississippi in 1890, the United States Supreme Court upheld Mississippi law requiring segregation on railroads, and between 1887 and 1907 every Southern state enacted similar segregation laws. Thus, Jim Crow expanded to every mien of black life in Mississippi as well as to black life in other

Southern states, even to the extent of using "Jim Crow Bibles" in Mississippi court rooms.\textsuperscript{11} With the withdrawal of federal troops from Mississippi and the collapse of the national judiciary in protecting constitutional rights of blacks, the political, economic, and social status of black Mississippians fell into the hands of radical white Democrats. The radical Democrats passed new election laws which placed voting registration in the hands of "local boards appointed by the governor, the president pro-tem of the Senate, and the secretary of state."\textsuperscript{12} According to Wharton:

Of the prospective voters, the registrars were to require each voter to state, under oath, in what election-district of the county he resides..., and in what portion of said district; and, if resident in any incorporated city or town, in what ward of said city or town; and his occupation, and where prosecuted, and, if in the employ of any one, whom, where, and the nature of such employment. Whatever the intention of the legislators may have been, a number of the local board carried the matter to the extreme of demanding that the Negroes know the section, township, and range in which they lived and worked. At the first incorrect answer or confession of ignorance, the prospective registrant was ordered to "stand aside."\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., pp. 199-200.
Moreover, in 1889 the Supreme Court upheld a Mississippi law requiring voters to be able to read, understand, and interpret any section of the Constitution. Along with the new election laws, extra legal devices were also used to discourage blacks from participating in the electoral process.

With the development of Jim Crow and the disfranchisement of blacks with the sanction of the national, state, and local governmental apparatus, black participation in electoral politics in the South, for the most part, was abolished. It was not until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that black political participation increased significantly in Mississippi, as well as in other areas of the South. The elimination of the white primary in 1944, the Brown decision in 1954, and the enactment of Civil Rights Acts in 1957, 1960 and 1964 had no measurable impact upon black participation in Southern electoral politics. During the period of disfranchisement and after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the vote was held by journalists, so-called civil rights leaders, and politicians to be the black man's strongest and most accessible weapon in his struggle for full participation,¹⁴ "with the

implied assumption that such participation would bring
about equal status."\textsuperscript{15} We can now begin to review some
of these studies.

\textbf{Review of Literature}

As previously noted, most studies on black politics
do not provide a theoretical or conceptual framework that
facilitates our understanding of black politics. Hanes
Walton states that the study of black politics has suffered
from a narrow conceptualization. Walton suggests that
black politics:

\begin{quote}
Encompassed the actions of legislative assemblies, political parties, election contests, and
other formal trappings of modern government. The
beginning and end of studies on black politics have
been primarily from the electoral angle. Heretofore, those studies of the American political pro-
cess (black or white) have begun their scholarly analyses with the elemental assumption that if
blacks could not vote, they had little chance to
have any meaningful effect on the political pro-
cess. In fact, the vote has come to be seen as
the basis for all other political action. For
though it is admitted that the vote is only one
weapon among many that are available to groups,
students of black politics tend to feel that the
alternative devices (e.g., lobbying, pressure
groups, demonstrations, etc.) derive much of their
value and significance from the existence of the
vote.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15}Mack H. Jones, "Black Politics: From Civil Rights to
Benign Neglect" in Negotiating the Mainstream, ed., Harry J.

\textsuperscript{16}Hanes, Walton, Black Politics, A Theoretical and
Structural Analysis (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1971),
p. 2.
This section reviews some of these studies and points out the shortcomings of these approaches for understanding black electoral politics in the South. The utility of electoral politics has been addressed by a number of political scientists and others as well. These studies do not address themselves directly to rural electoral politics but, nevertheless, fall within the purview of this study to the extent that they all hypothesize about electoral politics as a means of improving the socioeconomic status of blacks.

Henry Lee Moon declares that the vote is "a tool to be used in the ultimate demolition of the whole out-moded structure of Jim Crow." Harry Bailey sees the vote as the most important weapon in the struggle for citizenship. In 1968 Chuck Stone, a black journalist, stated that "the age of demonstrations has passed and the age of the ballot is upon the black man. It is the tool of survival." Likewise, former President Johnson saw the vote as the most


"powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustices and destroying the terrible wall that imprison men because they are different from other men."\textsuperscript{20}

While the aforementioned scholars have addressed electoral politics as political symbolism, others have attempted to show a direct correlation between electoral politics and the improved socioeconomic status of blacks. One of the early studies by Paul Lewinson employed survey and sampling techniques, and based on his findings, concluded that "the Negro's votelessness reacted unfavorably on his general social and economic welfare."\textsuperscript{21} In addition to Lewinson's work H. D. Price, using a similar conceptual scheme, analyzed black electoral politics in Florida and inferred that the more blacks voted the more benefits they received in their communities.\textsuperscript{22} On the contrary, other scholars conclude that the vote has considerable limitations for altering the socioeconomic status of blacks. For instance, William R. Keech concluded that "gains do not automatically


result from voting.\textsuperscript{23} In a similar view, Professor Jones' study of "Black Officeholders and Political Development in the Rural South," indicates that electoral politics is insignificant for changing the socioeconomic status of blacks. It further concludes that:

Black officeholders in local governments in the South have not had significant success in re-ordering the priorities of the bodies on which they served as they have enjoyed only limited success in increasing the black community's share of benefits and services within the constraints of present priorities.\textsuperscript{24}

Most of these studies add little to our general understanding of the impact of black electoral politics on the socioeconomic status of black in the South. At the same time, most of these post-1965 studies do not address the economic changes in the Southern region. As a result, these studies give an incomplete picture of Southern politics to the extent that these economic changes are not linked to the Southern electoral changes of the last decade and a half.

Nevertheless, economic development in the so-called Sunbelt is taking place and it has been postulated by some that this economic growth is contributing to the relative economic decline of the Northeast region of the nation.

\textsuperscript{23}Keech, The Impact of Negro Voting: The Role of the Vote in the Quest for Equality, p. 103.

According to the National Journal survey on economic trends in the United States, "there is a massive flow of wealth from the Northeast and Midwest regions of the nation to the faster growing West and Southern States." The Journal cites the federal government tax structure as the main factor for declining economic activities in the Northeast. On the other hand, a United States Department of Commerce study denounces these findings as myths. The study states that the primary cause of economic decline of the Northeast region has been primarily due to "death" or "closure" of existing firms. In the Southern region, however, the primary cause of the increased economic development is due in part to expansion of the existing firms.

At any rate, industrialization of the Southern region of the United States is taking place at a fast pace. However, current research suggests that industrialization of the South has not altered the socioeconomic status for blacks in the rural South (Chapter 3 discusses this to a greater extent).


Methodology

This study uses case studies of five rural Mississippi Mayors to explore the impact that black mayors have had in reordering the socioeconomic status of residents in their respective communities. A comparison will be made of the socioeconomic status of blacks which existed four years prior to the election of a black mayor in these towns with the conditions of May 1981. Unlike most studies on mayoral effectiveness, this study established indicators with which mayoral effectiveness can be measured.\textsuperscript{27} As noted earlier, the following indicators will be utilized to measure the effectiveness of black mayors in reordering the socioeconomic status of blacks in their respective towns: (1) distribution of governmental services to the black community; (2) employment and economic development; (3) housing; and (4) health care.

In these case studies, efforts have been made to conform to techniques designed to add theoretical import by examining mayoral initiatives in each town and the reaction of major centers of power to these initiatives. Moreover, the impact of internal and intracommunity conflict was considered because the success or lack of success of mayoral initiatives is directly related to the community conflict patterns.

\textsuperscript{27}See Walton Bean, \textit{Boss Fuef's San Francisco} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), Chapter I.
The survey data collected for this study were argumented by monitoring local newspapers, including black papers from the State of Mississippi, and national and state papers. Official records and community plans from each town were also read and analyzed. In addition, journal articles, magazine articles, video cassettes and audio tapes were used. Finally, field work for this project began in the spring of 1980 and continued through the summer of 1981. Structured interviews of mayors, members of the Board of Aldermen, community leaders and local citizens were also conducted during this period.

The foregoing discussion has provided an overview of the black experience in Mississippi with respect to electoral politics from the Reconstruction era to the present along with the establishment of an appropriate frame of reference for evaluating the effectiveness of black mayors in reordering the socioeconomic status of blacks in five rural Mississippi towns. We need now to develop a pre-black mayoral profile of black life under white mayoral leadership in the aforementioned towns.
CHAPTER II

TOWARD BLACK POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT:
A PRE-BLACK MAYOR PROFILE OF
FAYETTE, BOLTON, SHELBY
AND TCHULA

Conventional wisdom suggests that "demographic factors and community setting play decisive roles in influencing group political behavior."¹ Nowhere have these factors been so important for black political behavior than in the South where blacks were disfranchised. This chapter analyzes certain demographic and community setting factors in developing a pre-black mayor profile of black life under white mayoral leadership in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula. Such demographic factors as the configuration of the population, median income and occupation distribution along with the following community setting factors: the distribution of governmental services to the black community, and the level and nature of black political activity leading to black political empowerment will be analyzed.

¹ See William H. Boone, Jr., "An Exploratory Study of the Black Political Environment in Two Southern States," (Ph.D. dissertation, Atlanta University, 1976). See also Donald Matthews and James Prothro, Negroes and the New Southern Politics (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966). The demographic data for Mound Bayou will be discussed only in this section because Mound Bayou has always been controlled by blacks.

-20-
Mound Bayou, Shelby and Tchula are located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta "where cotton was king and plantation slavery demanded a large enslaved populace" (see map for location of towns). By the 1970 Census Mound Bayou had a population of 2,313 (see Table 1). All residents were black while the population of all the transitional towns was bi-racial. Mound Bayou, like the four transitional towns, is a poor community. According to a 1970 random sample of the community residents, over three-fifths of all residents lived at or below the national poverty level and 91.7 percent had an annual income of $5,000 or less. The black family median income for Bolivar County, in which Mound Bayou is located was 2,534 in 1970. Mound Bayou's economy is basically service oriented, thus a large percentage of its residents work outside the city.

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2 Minion K. C. Morrison, "Preconditions for Afro-American Leadership: Three Mississippi Towns" prepared for the National Endowerment for the Humanities, June, 1981. Also see the map of Mississippi for the location of these towns and the percentage of the black population for the 82 counties in Mississippi.


4 Interview with Earl S. Lucas, Mayor of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, 11 March, 1980. See also Rebecca Shaw and Wanda Stringer, "Community Development Plan," Mound Bayou, Mississippi, June, 1977, p. 16.
BLACK PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION BY COUNTY, 1970

MISSISSIPPI: 36.6%

SHELBY

MOUND BAYOU

TOCHULA

LEGEND

☐ 50.0% AND OVER

☐ 25.0% - 49.9%

☐ UNDER 25.0%

BOLTON

FAYETTE

TABLE 1
SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF BLACKS AND WHITES IN MOUND BAYOU,
FAYETTE, BOLTON, SHELBY AND TCHULA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Towns</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Percent of Blacks/Whites in Population</th>
<th>Counties in which Towns are Located</th>
<th>Median Family Income by County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mound Bayou</td>
<td>2,930</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>Bolivar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayette</td>
<td>1,919</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>Hinds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelby</td>
<td>2,555</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>Bolivar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchula</td>
<td>1,734</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>Holmes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The county family median income was used because the median family income for these towns were unavailable.

Source: Social and Economic Profile of Black Mississippians and Mississippi Community Data, Mississippi Research and Development Center, Jackson, Mississippi, 1981.
Data from Table 1 indicate that Shelby had a population of 2,355 with blacks constituting 68.2 percent of the population. Fayette, located in the central part of the state, had a population of 1,919 in 1970 with 76.4 percent of the population black. Fayette, like Mound Bayou, has a service oriented economy. The black median family income for Jefferson County in 1970 was $3,025.5

The two smaller towns, Tchula and Bolton, have populations of 1,734 and 812 respectively. The black family median income for their home counties (Tchula-Holmes County and Bolton-Hinds County) in 1970 was $2,144 and $4,277 respectively (see Table 1). The real family median income for blacks in Hinds County is obscured because it is located in the Jackson metropolitan area.

Because Fayette, Shelby, and Bolton all have agriculturally based economies, the political and economic institutions of these towns were controlled by the large plantation elites. Most blacks in these towns were employed in farm related jobs before 1970, it should be noted.6 In 1969, the

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5 The black family median (county) income was used because the median income for these towns were unavailable. Mound Bayou and Shelby are located in Bolivar county. Fayette is located in Jefferson county while Bolton and Tchula are located in Hinds and Holmes counties respectively.

6 "Social and Economic Profile of Black Mississippians," May, 1977. See also, Mississippi Research and Development Center, Jackson, Mississippi.
year in which Fayette elected its first black mayor, black per capital income was about $1,000 and 75 percent of the black population relied on welfare of one form or another to survive. The median income for white families, that same year, was $4,880, four and a half times greater than that of black families. Black family median income in Mississippi for 1970 was $3,200 while for whites it was $7,577, over two times that of blacks.

Very few blacks were employed in factory related work before black empowerment in these towns under study. Shelby and Bolton had the highest number of blacks employed in factory related work. However, Shelby was the only town at the time of black empowerment with a large proportion of its revenue coming from local industry. While blacks in Shelby were employed by local factories, blacks in Bolton commuted to Jackson, Mississippi for employment. In contrast, Mound Bayou, Fayette and Tchula had a large number

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8 Ibid., p. 16.
9 Fifty-nine percent of Mississippi's black families were below the poverty level in 1969. See "Social and Economic Profile of Black Mississippians," pp. 34-41.
10 Interview with Mayors of Bolton and Shelby, February-April, 1980.
of blacks employed in farming related jobs before 1970.\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, Mound Bayou, Fayette, Bolton and Tchula all had a high unemployment rate, with a large percentage of senior citizens and minors constituting a dependent class. As noted previously, 59 percent of Mississippi's black families were below the national poverty level in 1969 and there is no reason to believe that the proportion has decreased substantially since then.

\textbf{Distribution of Governmental Services to the Black Community Under White Mayorships}

The distribution of governmental services in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula was allocated on the basis of race.\textsuperscript{12} For example, total municipal services such as water, fire protection, and garbage services were provided for whites only. Without the vote as a potential political resource for blacks, municipal services to the black community were almost nonexistent. While streets were paved in all

\textsuperscript{11}Interviews with Mayors of Fayette, Bolton, and Shelby, February-April, 1980. See also Gilbert Jonas, "Two Years in Fayette," Freedom at Issue, 1971, p. 17. See also Social and Economic Profile of Black Mississippians, pp. 7-14.

\textsuperscript{12}See Community Development plans for the towns under study. For a discussion of the unequal distribution of governmental services to black communities under white mayoral leadership, see also Hawkins v Town of Shaw 427F.2d1286 (5th Cir. 1971) (en banc).
sections of the white community in every town under study, no streets were paved in any section of the black community before 1968. In Fayette, for example, a few months prior to the election of Charles Evers as mayor, not a single street was paved in the black neighborhood. 13 In Bolton, a few streets were paved in a section of the black community in 1972, one year before a black was elected as mayor. 14 On the other hand, some streets in Tchula and Shelby were paved only after black voter registration drives and economic boycotts of town merchants in 1975 and 1976, respectively. 15

Complete water and sewer systems were provided to the white community in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula, whereas no complete systems were provided for the black community. 16 In Bolton, and Tchula, for example, water systems in black sections were composed primarily of two and four inch mains while there were six inch mains in the

13 Jonas, "Two Years in Fayette," p. 16.

14 Interview with Bennie Thompson, Former Mayor of Bolton, Mississippi, February 28, 1980. See also Bolton's Community Development Plan, 1972, Mississippi Research and Development Center, Jackson, Mississippi.

15 Interview with Mayors of Bolton and Shelby, February-April, 1980.

16 Interview with Debra Griffin, Assistant to the Former Mayor of Bolton, Mississippi, 26 February, 1980.
white sections of town; accordingly, water pressure in Bolton and Tchula was low in the black sections of town and in the event of fire the pressure was not strong enough to extinguish fires. The same discriminatory patterns were present with respect to sewer systems in the black community. Sewer facilities were present in some sections of the black community in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula; however, in Shelby and Tchula one section of the black community had open sewers.

Fire protection, for the most part, was nonexistent for blacks in Fayette, Tchula and Bolton. There were only a few fire hydrants in the black sections of town. According to Bennie Thompson, former mayor of Bolton, housing in the black sections of town was always destroyed by fire because the town had no fire trucks and the fire trucks from Edwards, a small town nearby, were slow in responding to calls to the black sections of town. Similarly, Ken Cockrell, assistant to Charles Evers, mayor of Fayette, states that the fire trucks were also slow in responding

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17 Interview with Ken Cockrell, Assistant to the Mayor of Fayette, Mississippi, April 10, 1980, and mayors of Shelby and Tchula, February-April, 1980. See also Community Development Plan for each town, Mississippi Research and Development Center, Jackson, Mississippi.
to the black sections of Fayette.\textsuperscript{18} Unlike Fayette, Bolton and Tchula, however, fire protection was provided to blacks in Shelby and there were fire hydrants in some sections of the black community.

Garbage collection, another essential public service provided by local governments, was provided for the white community in the aforementioned towns on a regular basis and sometimes twice weekly; however, collection in the black community occurred on an irregular basis, even though blacks shared the cost for municipal services.\textsuperscript{19}

**Social Services**

Virtually every form of social services had been neglected in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula, especially those available to blacks. There was no doctor in Fayette for blacks before a black was elected as mayor of the town; Shelby, Bolton, and Tchula had doctors but the distribution of health services to blacks, for the most part, was negligible. In Bolton, to cite an example, the doctor's offices were open only two hours daily for blacks, while

\textsuperscript{18}Interview with Ken Cockrell, 10 April, 1980.

\textsuperscript{19}Interview with town mayors, February-April, 1980.
in Shelby and Tchula whites received medical treatment first. ²⁰ There were no health clinics or local child
care facilities for blacks in Fayette and Bolton; but
Shelby blacks were served by the Mound Bayou Health Center,
and Tchula blacks were not served until a health clinic
was opened in 1976.

Recreation facilities for blacks were nonexistent in
all four towns; yet, ball parks, swimming pools, and tennis
courts were commonplace in the white communities in each
town. In 1969 when Fayette and Bolton were ordered to
integrate their recreational facilities, the town admin-
istration closed them rather than comply with the court
order. ²¹

Similar action was taken when public schools in
Mississippi were ordered to integrate; whites pulled their
children out of public school systems and sent them to
newly erected private academies. Thus, the schools in

²⁰ Interview with Debra Griffin, Assistant to the Former
Mayor of Bolton, Mississippi, 26 February, 1980.

²¹ Interview with Charles Evers, Mayor of Fayette,
Mississippi, 10 April, 1980, and Bennie Thompson, Former
Mayor of Bolton, Mississippi, 28 February, 1980. See
also James W. Silver, Mississippi: The Closed Society
Fayette, Shelby, Bolton and Tchula became all black; nevertheless, whites did not relinquish their control of them.

**Housing**

Housing is a special problem for most rural blacks in the United States and there was no exception for blacks in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula. There were no private or public programs initiated to alter the housing problems of black residents under white mayorships; on the contrary, public housing was provided for whites in Fayette.\(^{22}\) The same discriminatory practices were prevalent in Tchula; the town received a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to repair substandard housing but the town administration repaired housing only in the white sections of town, while no renovating was done in the black sections where much of the substandard housing existed.\(^{23}\) It is interesting to note that blacks in the town were not aware of the grant until 1977 when they were informed by the newly elected


\(^{23}\) Interview with Eddie J. Charchan, Mayor of Tchula, Mississippi, 4 March, 1980.
black mayor, who, in turn was informed of the grant by a
local white banker. According to the Mayor, Tchula's
housing had been rated by the state housing authority as
being the poorest in the state.  

Housing statistics reveal that in 1969, 85 percent of
the blacks in Fayette lived in substandard housing; while
52 percent of the 274 residential structures in Bolton
were classified as standard, 19 percent as deteriorating
and 29 percent as dilapidated. Of the occupied housing
units in Bolton, 35 percent lacked complete plumbing
facilities and almost 26 percent were classified as over
crowded; and according to Mayor Gray, similar housing
conditions existed for blacks in Shelby under white
leadership.

**Employment**

There have always been few employment opportunities
for rural Mississippi blacks outside the plantation
economy. With the decline of these job opportunities,

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Housing in Bolton, January 10, 1981.
27 Interview with Robert Gray, Mayor of Shelby, Mississippi, 20 March, 1980.
blacks migrated from the plantation to small farming towns with high unemployment rates among its citizens. Consequently, few displaced farm workers found jobs.

Blacks who found work were employed mainly as domestic workers. A few gained employment with town governments, mostly in the sanitation department, although some blacks were employed as policemen.

Where blacks were hired to protect the public, their jurisdiction began and ended in the black community. They could only patrol in the black neighborhoods and arrest blacks; but more importantly, they were agents of the white ruling elites. Thus they became an oppressive agency in the black community and maintained the community's local political culture.

Violent acts were directed at local blacks by black police officers even though the officers inherited their positions as a result of political activity on the part of the black community. In every case, blacks were employed as policemen only after demonstrations and economic boycotts.

White policemen, on the other hand, had jurisdictions which encompassed the entire town, and even after blacks were employed, they remained visible figures in the black community; in addition, the county sheriff and the state policemen were always on hand to reinforce community mores.
Thus, race relationships between blacks and whites in the four towns included in this study tend to center on economic rather than social or political concerns. Blacks were welcomed as local consumers by merchants as long as they obeyed the social mores of the town. Some consumer goods, however, were off limits to blacks; for instance, blacks in Tchula, up to the later 1950's, were not allowed to purchase cokes while blacks in Fayette were not allowed to wear white shirts or walk on the same street with whites.  

The Political and Social Setting

The governmental structure of the aforementioned towns consisted of a mayor and five aldermen, elected for a four-year term. The towns had a weak mayor form of government with the mayor serving as both mayor and town judge.

The Board of Aldermen had the power to appoint such town department heads as police and fire chiefs as well as other less important governmental functionaries.  

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The mayor had veto power which could be overridden by a two-third majority of the Board of Aldermen.

Fayette

Given the fact that Mississippi's political culture prescribed non-participation rather than participation for blacks in the political affairs of the state, few community organizational efforts were made to mobilize the black majority population in the aforementioned towns before 1968. As such, the economic, political and social institutions of the state enforced this position. For example, no blacks were registered to vote in Fayette in 1966; this was also the case in Bolton, Shelby and Tchula. Mass political activities in Fayette began in 1968 when Charles Evers led marches throughout the state after replacing his brother Medgar Evers, Field Secretary of NAACP, who was killed in 1963 as a result of his political activities.

Charles Evers, like most of the black leaders in Bolton, Shelby and Tchula, was associated with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The party, formed after blacks were systematically excluded from participation in the Mississippi State Democratic party, took on the Regular Democrats at the grass root level by organizing at the precinct, county and state levels. However,
the success of the party from precinct to precinct was negligible. Charles Evers, Field Secretary of the NAACP, along with Aaron Henry, lead the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in its 1964 unsuccessful attempt to unseat the all-white Mississippi delegation to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

After the unsuccessful attempt to unseat the all-white delegation at the convention, the members of the party continued their efforts to establish party structures all over the state. The Freedom Democratic Party, after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, and even before, began to run candidates for office throughout the state; the party was becoming a force to be reckoned with in Mississippi politics. At the same time, the lily-white Democratic Party continued to exclude blacks from the party in spite of the National Democratic Party ruling that no delegations would be seated if they excluded citizens from participating in party politics by virtue of their race or color.

Consequently, Mississippi had two Democratic parties, the all-black Freedom Democratic Party committed to the

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30 Mamie E. Locke, "Black Party Factions: The Case of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the Loyalist Democrats of Mississippi" (Unpublished paper) Atlanta University political science department, Atlanta, Georgia, 1979, p. 20.
politics of the National Democratic Party and the all-white Regular Democratic Party less committed to the National Democratic Party because of its disposition toward black voters. Moreover, the all-white Democratic Party had increasingly embarrassed the National Party by supporting Republican presidential candidates.

At the same time, there were ideological conflicts boring within the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party over political strategies and the contentions of some members that they should not have an all-black party in Mississippi. There was also the feeling that the party was becoming too radical; these conflicts within the party led to a breakdown in communication among members and eventually to a split among party members and finally the demise of the party.

Thus, Charles Evers and Aaron Henry, both members of the NAACP, along with so-called liberal whites, joined the newly created biracial Loyalist Democratic Party of Mississippi. The party was headed by Hodding Carter, Jr., editor of the Delta Democratic Times, a pro-integration newspaper. Members of the Loyalist Party were more concerned with the interest of the National Democratic Party and with furthering their own political careers rather
than addressing the concerns of the grass root Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. 31

In 1968 this newly formed biracial Loyalist Party succeeded in its effort to unseat the traditional Mississippi all-white Democratic Party at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Charles Evers, then considered by many to be the spokesman for blacks in Mississippi, was, in a symbolic move, appointed to the twelve man Democratic National Executive Committee, making him the first black to sit on the Democratic Party's highest ranking policy making body.

Concurrent with the attention given Charles Evers by the national press for his activities at the Democratic National Convention was his political organizing in four predominately black southwest Mississippi counties in which by 1968 he had established a political base. In addition, Charles Evers was supported by white liberals, and business and labor elites because of his stand against the so-called radical element in the Mississippi

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Freedom Democratic Party, and more importantly, his outright rejection of "black power" as a political ideology for blacks and, accordingly, his position toward the Black Panther Party. 32

After his unsuccessful congressional campaign in 1968, Evers announced his candidacy for mayor of Fayette, a biracial community in Jefferson County on April 3, 1968. 33 In spite of Evers' political activities in the state, mass political activity did not begin in Fayette until 1968, three years after passage of the Voting Rights Act. However, Evers had been politically active in Port Gibson and Natchez, leading marches and economic boycotts from 1965 through 1968. 34

Evers, along with Ferd Allen, long time community leader, transferred the movement from Port Gibson and Natchez to Fayette and led marches and initiated economic boycotts against town merchants. As a result, blacks were beaten in Fayette by policemen, the county sheriff, and local whites who were deputized in the wake of mass marches in Fayette. The highway patrolmen were always

32 Interview with Charles Evers, 20 March, 1980.
33 Ibid.
34 Evers and Halsell, Evers, p. 130.
on hand to enforce the local mores in town and according to Will T. Turner, a member of Fayette's all-black Board of Aldermen: "We could just make a false statement that we were having a march and all the highway patrolmen would be right here in town."

Economic reprisals were leveled at local blacks who participated in marches, especially those blacks who were economically dependent on merchants and other local whites. But in spite of these impediments Fayette blacks supported their leaders; and on May 13, 1969, that support manifested itself at the ballot box when they voted for the black mayoral candidate, Charles Evers. Evers defeated the incumbent Mayor R. J. (Turnip Green) Allen (Allen won the nickname by trading vegetables for black votes). Evers defeated the incumbent mayor of eighteen years by 128 votes; and five blacks were elected as aldermen, thus making Fayette the first biracial town in Mississippi to be headed by an all-black elected body.

Bolton

Unlike the three other towns under study here, Bolton, before 1969, never had an election. The local whites

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would meet at the local masonic hall and decide who would be the mayor and who would be aldermen.\textsuperscript{37} Blacks were not registered to vote until 1967, two years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

Nevertheless, black electoral activities began around 1962, but efforts to register blacks to vote were fruitless.\textsuperscript{38} In 1965 and 1966, the white registrar refused to register blacks and as a result, federal registrars were sent to Bolton in 1967 to register blacks for the first time since Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{39} Economic reprisals had long been used against southern blacks when they did not accept the South's political culture; and this was the case in Bolton when blacks attempted to register to vote in the early 1960's.\textsuperscript{40} In addition, police brutality and other violent acts were directed at the black community by policemen and local whites. For instance, in 1969 the local Head Start

\textsuperscript{38} Interview with Bennie Thompson, 28 February, 1980.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
school building which served as a community center and
meeting place for black political meetings was burned. 41

In addition to the violence against Bolton blacks, the
traditionally all-white Mississippi Highway Patrolmen, on
five separate occasions, beginning on May 18, 1973 set up
road blocks in and near the black community in Bolton.
Whites were waved on through the road blocks, but blacks
were stopped and verbally and physically harassed: the
officers called them "Nigger" and other names; black
women were told to walk home while black males were
restrained and beaten; and a black man's beard was pulled
out and his lip torn by wire pliers at the hands of a
patrolman. 42

According to former Mayor Bennie Thompson, patrol-
men set up road blocks after voter registration activities
began and his announcement of his intention to run for
mayor in 1973. A suit was filed on June 14, 1973 calling
for an injunction prohibiting the highway patrol from

41 Interview with Etha M. Jones, community leader,
Bolton, Mississippi, 20 February, 1980.

42 "Black Achievement in Bolton: A Clipping Book," p. 5. For a detailed examination of police brutality
in Mississippi see Council of Federated Organizations, ed., Mississippi Black Paper (New York: Random House,
1965), p. 16.
entering the black community until an investigation could be made. Moreover, those injured by the patrolmen filed suits demanding punitive damages from the Mississippi State Highway Patrol Department.43

Notwithstanding these acts, blacks in Bolton ran for political office. John Johnson, a community leader and former member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, ran an unsuccessful race for justice of the peace in 1967 and again in 1971 (these were county elections). In 1969 Bolton held its first election since the Reconstruction era; three blacks ran and were elected to the five member Board of Aldermen.44 As a result they constituted a majority of the members; they were not, however, able to reorder the priorities of the Board to address outstanding problems in the black community; and when they attempted to do so the white mayor used his veto power to block such proposals.45 When blacks attempted to override the mayor's veto, the Board members usually voted along racial lines.46

43 Ibid.
44 Interview with Bennie Thompson, 28 February, 1980. See also "Black Achievements in Bolton," p. 4.
Furthermore, Bennie Thompson states that when he announced his candidacy for public office he lost his teaching job and the local draft board attempted to draft him into the armed forces. He filed for conscientious objective status; the all-white local draft board refused him this status and sent him an induction order, in violation of the board regulation while his case was on appeal. With the aid of his lawyer, Thompson was not inducted into the army; however, he was continually harassed by the board until the draft finally ended.\(^47\)

On the contrary, other black Mississippians were not as fortunate as Alderman Thompson; when Jimmy Smith announced his candidacy for mayor of Port Gibson in 1970, he received an induction notice. He, too, went to court but was finally drafted despite a serious medical condition; however, the army had to discharge him after 60 days of service because he was medically unfit to serve.\(^48\) Thus, the draft as an agency for political oppression manifested itself in Mississippi's political culture and became commonplace during the early part of the 1950's and up until the end of the draft.

\(^{47}\) Interview with Bennie Thompson, 28 February, 1980.  
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
After being harassed by the local draft board and the Bolton governmental stalemate created by mayoral vetoes, Alderman Thompson and community leaders decided to run an all-black slate in the 1973 municipal election. The slate was headed by Alderman Thompson, candidate for mayor, along with thirteen blacks running for positions as aldermen and several seats on the Bolton Municipal Democratic Executive Committee. The latter is a local committee that receives election returns from the Municipal Election Commission; the Executive Committee is made up of people appointed by the mayor while the Commission is established by state law and its members are elected. The Municipal Democratic Committee is given the responsibility by state law to receive the election returns and announce the names of Democratic nominees who are winners in primaries.

On May 8, 1973, Bolton's second Municipal Democratic primary since Reconstruction was held under the auspices of the Bolton Municipal Democratic Executive Committee—composed of four whites and three blacks. Several black candidates ran for municipal offices (mayor, town clerk, and alderman); in addition, several blacks ran for membership on the Bolton Municipal Democratic Committee and received a majority of the vote. The next day, May 9, 1973, the Democratic Executive Committee met as required by Mississippi law to receive the returns and announce the
names of the Democratic nominee for the general election on June 5, 1973. The Committee declared fourteen (14) black candidates winners in the primary election; and by law they were legally qualified to run in the general election on June 5, 1973. Following the Committee's announcement, the losing white candidates made an effort, both legally and illegally, to prevent the winning candidates from running in the general election. The incumbent mayor and the defeated Municipal Election Commission made up of individuals appointed by the mayor, charged that black candidates won the primary election by fraudulent methods. The Commission then voided the primary election and qualified two independent white candidates for mayor and town clerk in the general election. 49 When this attempt failed, the incumbent mayor

49 Interview with Bennie Thompson, 28 February, 1980.
and the Commission attempted to prevent the general election from being held at all.  

At the same time, blacks who won the May 8 primary appealed to the Secretary of State asking him to settle the dispute but the Secretary of State refused to intervene. Thus, the Municipal Election Commission held the June 5, general election in which black candidates who won the May 8, primary election ran unopposed and received all the votes cast. But when they attempted to take office the losing whites refused to relinquish their offices and filed suits to prevent them from taking office.

50 After the primary elections on May 24, 1973, the white losing candidates filed petitions with the Democratic Executive Committee contesting the primary election. On May 30 and 31, after hearing charges of fraud and irregularities, the Committee ruled in favor of the white candidates, threw out the May 8 primary results and declared that the black candidates were no longer the nominees. The black candidates were notified of the results, but the party did not hold a new primary election before the general election. Therefore, the Municipal Election Commission had no choice but to list the original winners from the May 24 primary in the June 5 general election.

As a result of this action, four law suits were filed by local whites. The first, by a local noncandidate, filed in May, sought to prevent the general election from being held. When that failed the losing white candidates brought three actions in June, one to prevent the blacks from taking office, a second to void the general election, and a third for $37,500 against the Municipal Election Commission for holding the general election. For discussion of these activities see, "Black Achievements in Bolton", pp. 4-5.
The Governor and Secretary of State again refused to issue commissions to the newly elected blacks, stating that the election was being challenged by court suits.

Bennie G. Thompson, the mayor without a town, along with other elected blacks, asked the federal court to take jurisdiction over all cases filed by whites on the grounds that the courts of Mississippi were racist and that the attempt to block blacks from taking office violated their civil rights. 51 A total of eight law suits were filed; after trial dates were set, postponed, reset and the location of the trial changed twice, U.S. Judge Dan Russell ruled that the defeated Democratic Executive Committee lacked the authority to set aside the May primary and that the newly elected Executive Commission was correct in holding the June 5, general election. 52

The Judge further ruled that there were no irregularities in the conduct of the primary election and there was no evidence of fraud, as contended by the incumbent mayor, members from the Municipal Election Commission, and the Democratic Executive Committee (all defeated in the May 8, primary). Then finally, after nearly five years

51 Interview with Bennie Thompson, 28 February, 1980.
of organizing Bolton's black community and a struggle from traditional adversaries bent on maintaining Mississippi's political tradition, black political empowerment became a reality for blacks in Bolton, Mississippi.

**Shelby**

Black political activity in Shelby began in 1967 when black leaders formed the Voters League and began boycotting town merchants in response to the dismissal of a local black school teacher for his political activities in Bolivar County. From the economic boycott emerged a bi-racial committee of black leaders, merchants, and local elected officials; and due to the success of the boycott, blacks pressed for political and economic participation in the affairs of Shelby. The success of the boycott manifested itself in the deal struck between black leaders, local merchants and political elites in 1968.

The political and economic elites of Shelby agreed that one of the white members on the Board of Aldermen would resign and that a black would run unopposed by whites for the vacated position in a special election. At the same time, black leaders agreed to call off the

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53 Interview with Owen Brooks, The Delta Ministry, Greenville, Mississippi, 16 March, 1980.

54 Ibid.
boycott against the merchants; needless to say, however, the deal backfired when a section of the white community rejected the proposal and declared that whites on the biracial committee did not speak for the entire white community. It was their contention that white members were yielding to blacks who could not elect representatives through normal political channels, pointing out that blacks were the majority population in Shelby.

Notwithstanding this charge, the political deal was carried out when a member of the all-white Board of Aldermen resigned in October, 1968 and a special election was held to replace him on November 5, 1968. However, whites on the Committee were not able to keep their promise that whites would not oppose the black candidate running in the election. The election was held with a white candidate running against Robert Gray, the black candidate and member of the biracial Committee. When the final votes were tallied on November 5, 1968 Robert Gray won over his white opponent making him the first black elected to a biracial Board of Aldermen in Mississippi since the Reconstruction period.

The success of this political tactic served as a political springboard for much more black political activity; members from the Voters League pressed for
economic concession from local merchants. Merchants and other economic elites reacted by employing blacks in their business institutions; they were hired in local stores and in two local factories. The political elites, in a similar response, hired blacks in the police department and other town agencies.

Some white citizens opposed these concessions and initiated a move to replace Shelby's political officials, mainly the mayor who was chairman of the biracial committee. White citizens charged that the mayor and town merchants were yielding too much to black demands; and according to a white informant, white economic elites applied economic reprisals against the mayor by foreclosing on debts owed local banks and financial institutions.

In the wake of these economic reprisals and growing resistance from local whites regarding the mayor's concessions to the black community, he resigned November, 1976 and moved away. At the time of his resignation, one year remained on his four-year term.

On December 14, 1976 a special election was held to fill the mayor's unexpired term. Robert Gray, the only

55 Interview with Robert Gray, Mayor of Shelby, Mississippi, March, 1980.
56 Interview with a local white businessman who wished to remain anonymous, Shelby, Mississippi, March, 1980.
black member of the Board of Aldermen was the black community's candidate in the mayoral election. The white community, dissatisfied with their elected leaders, ran a young white with no previous political experience hoping that the black majority would vote for him. The white candidate established a biracial campaign organization of whites and local traditional black leaders, while Robert Gray organized the black community into wards and appointed ward leaders whose main function was to point out those blacks who were not supporting his candidacy. After these blacks were identified, informal contacts were made with those who were supporting Gray's candidacy and were friends of the black non-supporters. On election day, transportation was furnished by the Gray campaign and names of black voters were checked as they came to vote.

Gray defeated his young white opponent and became the first black in the history of the predominately black town to be elected mayor. In the 1977 municipal election Mayor Gray was reelected along with two blacks and three whites to the Board of Aldermen.

Tchula

Black political activity in Tchula began in 1962; however, blacks were not elected to office until 1973. The political activity was initiated by local black traditional leaders and local college students from Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena. These students were members of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and were active in a voter registration project in Greenwood, Mississippi, a rural town located in the Mississippi Delta, twenty miles from Tchula. 58

Members from SNCC came to Tchula in 1962 and began a voter registration drive led by John Ball of SNCC, Eddie Carthan (later to become mayor of Tchula) and Hartman Turnbow, local farmer and community leader. After weeks of classes designed to teach Tchula blacks the proper process for filling out the registration forms, twelve of the original twenty-four blacks trained went to Lexington, the county seat for Holmes County, to attempt to register to vote. 59 On arriving in Lexington, they met some


resistance from the Holmes County sheriff and the circuit clerk. However, one black was allowed to register to vote while the remaining eleven registered the following day.60

Blacks in Tchula continued to register to vote but did not become active voters in local elections until 1965. From 1965 through 1976 Tchula's blacks voted in local elections and helped to elect two white mayors.61 Nevertheless, business in Tchula went on as usual to the extent that, while receiving a majority black vote, these mayors did not initiate programs to address outstanding problems in the black community. At the same time, members from the Freedom Democratic Party were organizing in the county and came to Tchula, gained control of the local NAACP and began to hold political education classes, thus initiating a mass voter registration drive with the aim of registering every black in Tchula.

With a large proportion of Tchula blacks registered, Saul Sulton, a member of the Freedom Democratic Party, ran for mayor in 1969 and again in 1973. He lost both elections; but in the 1973 election, blacks elected

60 Ibid.

61 Interview with Hartman Turnbow, 1 March, 1980.
Evander McLaurin, a local social science teacher, to the Board of Aldermen, making him the first black to hold an elected position in Tchula's history.\textsuperscript{62}

Four years later, two blacks ran for mayor of Tchula--Eddie J. Carthan, a former member of SNCC and local business man, and Saul Sulton, a former unsuccessful mayoral candidate. Black community residents tried unsuccessfully to persuade Sulton, who had been defeated twice, to withdraw from the race, feeling that one black candidate would have a better chance of winning the mayoralship against white opponents.\textsuperscript{63}

Thus the battle lines were drawn between the two black candidates and their white opponents. The candidates for the white community were three-time incumbent Lester Lyon and a young male who, according to Alderman Jessie Banks, was urged to run because it was felt by some whites that a younger white could win with two blacks running for mayor. However, when the election was held Eddie R. Carthan defeated his adversaries by a two-to-one margin and blacks won four of the five seats on

\textsuperscript{62}Interview with Jessie D. Banks, member of Board of Aldermen, Tchula, Mississippi, 5 March, 1980.

\textsuperscript{63}Interview with Evander D. McLaurin, member of Board of Aldermen, Tchula, Mississippi, 7 March, 1980.
the Board of Aldermen. 64 Thus Tchula blacks had elected a black majority government for the first time in the town's history.

In this chapter an attempt was made to develop a pre-black profile of black life under white mayoral leadership and to establish generally the political environment out of which blacks operated in the four transitional towns before black empowerment. In the succeeding chapter we will focus on black empowerment and political development in these transitional towns.

64 Ibid.
CHAPTER III
BLACK POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Chapter II revealed that the black communities fared poorly at the hands of white mayoral leadership without exception on any given political, economic, or social indicator in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula; that white mayors adopted a policy of benign neglect toward outstanding and salient problems in black communities. To be sure, the policy of "Benign Neglect" manifested itself in discriminatory distribution of governmental services to black communities and the absence of mayoral initiatives to address outstanding community problems.

The pre-black mayor profile further revealed that Mississippi's political culture prescribed non-participation rather than participation for blacks in the political affairs of the state. And when blacks ventured outside the prescribed political and social ethos they were met with violent resistance and sometimes death at the hands of white Mississippians. State institutions reinforced these activities while the national government was a silent partner in the scheme of total domination of black Mississippians for much of the twentieth century.
With the pre-black mayor profile behind us, attention can now be directed to the primary focus of this study--determining the extent to which black mayors in four rural Mississippi towns have been able to reorder the socioeconomic status of blacks in their respective towns. Before an assessment can be made, however, it would be useful to inquire briefly into outstanding community problems inherited by black mayors at the time of political empowerment and to outline indicators for measuring the political effectiveness of black mayors in reordering the socioeconomic status of blacks in their respective towns. In addition, special attention must be given to the internal politics of each town and those systemic elements that may impact upon the mayor's ability to effectuate changes. Internal politics of these towns is important because of the necessity of support from members of the Board of Aldermen, along with major centers of power such as state and county elected officials, regional bodies and support from community residents. At the same time, the structure of local government and the changing character of southern development are variables that black elected officials in the South must become aware of if they are going to bring social development to their communities. Boone and Willingham point out that
the power of local government is seriously circumscribed because of certain traditional restrictions including:

1) home rule which is still severely limiting, 2) the supremacy of the state based on Dillon's Rule, 3) the creation of administrative agencies which are charged with the responsibility for guiding localities in certain matters, (e.g. state boards of education), and finally, 4) state legislatures have reserved to themselves the power to pass special legislation which in most instances is only applicable to a special locality. In addition to these traditional restrictions there is now the move to substitute regionalism as another possible drain on local power.¹

Indeed, these governmental arrangements transcend "the traditional authority apparatus in which blacks have fought to insure representation and are now an added dimension" for black politics in the South.²

In addition to these impediments, it should be noted that most black mayors "have served for only short periods of time, that they are almost always acute minorities, and their constituencies are badly disadvantaged vis-a-vis other groups when it comes to backing demands made in formal political structures with socioeconomic


²Ibid.
Coupled with these impediments, black mayors inherited towns with high unemployment rates, large concentrations of substandard housing, emigration by local youth, low tax bases and inadequate public facilities and services. Still other problems faced by black mayors were the lack of town infrastructures and little or no industry. In virtually every case, white administrators left towns with empty treasuries and in some cases black mayors were left with outstanding town loans. In Tchula, for example, Mayor Callahan inherited a $150,000 loan, while in Fayette, Mayor Evers’ administration was left without sufficient funds to finish the last quarter of the 1969 fiscal year, forcing him to embark upon a speaking tour in order to raise money to complete the fiscal year. A television appeal by Evers on Walter Cronkite’s Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) news show for a one dollar contribution from listeners produced over $150,000, more than enough to cover the town’s emergency.


5Interview with Ken Cockrell, Assistant to Mayor of Fayette, Mississippi, 10 April, 1980. Also see, Charles Evers and Grace Halsel, Evers (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1971), Chapter 1.
In addition to the lack of resources, one finds that local, county, and state officials have been uncooperative at best, but often hostile toward black mayors. Similarly, black mayors charge that regional and state institutions have not loaned the expertise to the town as they had done when the town officials were white. They further charge that publicity has been generated by local whites to undermine mayoral initiatives directed at solving outstanding problems in their respective communities. It is from the predicament discussed above that an assessment of the impact of black mayors in reordering the socioeconomic status of blacks in their respective communities must be guided.

Internal Politics of Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula

Before we begin our discussion of internal politics it would be useful to establish a frame of reference and outline some general theoretical propositions through which we may analyze internal politics in these towns under study. As noted earlier, this study supports the general proposition that the success or lack of success of mayoral initiatives, in part, can be attributed to a community's conflict patterns. Thus, the importance of developing a frame of reference for analyzing intra-community politics is evident.
Since historically, blacks have been excluded from controlling the local governmental apparatus in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula, the nature and structure of politics under black control were unknown. What would be the posture of the new black elected officials and how would the black majority and white minority populations react to the new political environment are questions of major importance. Would the leadership class seize the initiatives to address salient problems in the black community "without being unduly deferential to white interests." Moreover,

Would the black leadership class, developed and nurtured during the period of Paternalistic politics, retain its status as black political leaders? Would new black leaders with different priorities emerge? Would such leaders have the support of black rank and file?

In addition, the reaction of white political actors and the white rank and file to the new changing political environment is of equal importance inasmuch as white interests waged a valiant struggle to prevent the election of blacks to political offices in these towns. In Bolton,

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
for example, white interests sought to subvert the political process by filing several law suits to prevent blacks from taking office.

Tactics used by whites to discourage black political participation are well-documented in literature on southern politics. However, there are few established patterns of white political behavior or tactics used to minimize the effectiveness of black elected officials. In a study of black empowerment in Atlanta, Georgia, Jones suggests that white political behavior will be reflected primarily in racial terms. According to Jones,

As a beginning we may assume that the extent that white political actors define themselves vis a vis the new black political participants in terms of ethnic identity, the white struggle to maintain their dominant position will be reflected primarily in racial terms. On the other hand, if the dominant political actors define themselves in relationship to the new black participants in non-racial terms, as businessmen or professional civil servants, for example, their struggle to remain dominant may include strategies designed to integrate the new black participants into their ranks. And, of course, the converse holds true. The self-definition of the new black participants, as well as the definition of the entrenched white leadership, will determine the salient characteristics of their strategy to change the existing subordinate-superordinate relationship.


Since, black subjugation and white supremacy have been integral parts of the South's political culture, would whites see black empowerment as white subordination and withdraw from the political process or would they develop tactics to subvert the political process? From data collected during the course of this study we suggest two models for explaining white political behavior in black-controlled jurisdictions in the rural South.

These models will be referred to as the "withdrawal model" and the "subversive model." The former model suggests that whites will generally withdraw from the political process under black political empowerment, or at best, their political participation will be limited mainly to voting. While some whites may seek political office from time to time, full potential participation as elected officials will be circumscribed because of the cohesiveness of the black leadership class and the black rank and file. Under such circumstances, whites will be quiescent on most policy initiatives from the black leadership class. The black community, on the other hand, will give almost solid support to the black leadership class and will support their policy initiatives. Indeed, because of solidarity of the black leadership class and black community residents, the development of the subversive model is retarded.
By contrast, in black-controlled jurisdictions where the subversive model is functional white resistance to black empowerment will be intense, while politics in the black community will be marked by a quiescent black community and by competing interests among the black leadership class. Conversely, the white community will be well-organized and white political actors and business elites will employ tactics to neutralize black political potential. Prominent among strategies to neutralize black political potential is the development of a well-disciplined interracial coalition consisting of white political actors and business elites, and black influencers from the leadership class and the rank and file. Thus, the politics of paternalism will describe this intracommunity cooperation. The politics of paternalism is essential for enabling white political elites to undermine black political potential in political subsystems where blacks are the majority population. With the development of a functional biracial coalition, the group will employ radical tactics ranging from locking the city hall, instructing residents not to pay for city services, using the local courts as a political tool and other legal and non-legal methods to undermine black political potential. Under such political conditions stagnation will occur in
the conduct of government business and whites will be able to regain formal control of local government.

From the foregoing analysis the following theoretical propositions from which our discussion of internal politics is guided by may be constructed:

1) In a community where the majority black population is quiescent, white political elites will attempt to neutralize black officeholders through direct confrontation.

2) In a black controlled community beset by intra-black conflict, whites will attempt to undermine black political potential.

3) Competition among black aspirants will weaken overall black political potential.

Our discussion of internal politics will be preceded by a brief look at the posture of black mayors in attempting to gain white community support.

Black mayors have sought to make town government more democratic and responsive to citizen's needs by encouraging community participation and initiating programs to address community problems. White communities, however, have charged that black mayors do not want participation from white communities into the local government process but only a rubber stamp approval of mayoral initiatives. As a result, the white communities in Fayette, Bolton and Shelby have taken a hands-off position toward mayoral initiatives; while in Tchula, the white community has become a disruptive force and has blocked programs initiated
by the mayor to alter problems in the black community. The black community, at the same time, has not been a willing participant in supporting programs initiated by the mayor to alter community problems. To be sure, some black elected officials have used their positions to form coalitions with white mentors, resulting in the disruption of normal governmental operations, and thus helping continuation of the policy of "benign neglect" adopted by the ancien regime.

In Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula, black mayors have made deliberate efforts to maintain white employees and to encourage white participation in town politics. As mentioned, whites, for the most part, have chosen to become non-participants in community politics and when they do participate in community politics, it is usually in the adversary role. When Charles Evers was inaugurated as mayor in 1969 every white police officer resigned and many whites were upset when the mayor outlawed guns within the city.\textsuperscript{11} Similar circumstances occurred in Bolton and Tchula; but the white community in Fayette, for the most part, has not hampered political development.

\textsuperscript{11}Jonas, "Two Years in Fayette," \textit{Freedom at Issue}, 971, p. 17.
There have been no major intrablack community conflicts in either Bolton or Shelby. Conflicts, however, did surface in Bolton and Shelby as a result of mayoral initiatives designed to equalize property taxes. Black residents were paying proportionately more property taxes than whites because black property tended to be older and built on smaller lots. The reappraisal of property in Bolton and Shelby meant that whites with larger houses and property would pay a sizeable increase in property taxes. The white community dissatisfied with the appraisal, charged that their properties were appraised much higher than the actual property value and that properties belonging to white residents were assessed at a higher rate than that of black residents. The reappraisal of property netted the new black administrations sizable increases in town revenue. In Bolton, for example, property taxes increased from $363,000 to $1.4 million in the first year of the tax assessment while in Shelby the property taxes increased from $67,000 to $109,000.12

The black community's support of mayoral initiatives in Bolton and Shelby has been, for the most part, solid;

however, it, too, protested the property assessment. Notwithstanding the protest by property owners, the new administrations saw the new property tax increase as a source of revenue to attack salient community problems. Cleavages within the black and white communities have not seriously inhibited mayoral initiatives in either Bolton or Shelby. For example, Mayor Gray of Shelby and Thompson of Bolton have been successful in attracting funds to address the housing and sewer problems in their communities without opposition from the white community or the Board of Aldermen. Whites are in the majority on the Board in Shelby while the reverse is the case for Bolton.

A cohesive organization is an important prior condition for political development in communities such as Shelby, Bolton, Fayette and Tchula; yet, one finds that such an organization exists only in Shelby and Bolton and is notably absent in Fayette and Tchula. The black communities in Bolton and Shelby have been important sources of support for mayoral initiatives to solve salient community problems. The support from the black communities in Shelby and Bolton may explain why whites have not attempted to block mayoral initiatives. In Tchula, on the other hand, the intrablack and white community conflicts between the mayor and three members on the Board of Aldermen have all but ruined the town. In contrast, in
Fayette internal and intrablack conflicts during Mayor Evers' administration did not seriously inhibit program initiatives as our discussion of internal politics will show.

Recent cleavages within the black and white communities in Fayette were initiated after a part-time security guard (who was also a city policeman) and two black female employees were dismissed by a local merchant for allegedly stealing groceries. The former employees initiated a boycott of the supermarket, and according to Marie Walker, the local newspaper editor, the boycott was very effective. After losing over $10,000 a day, the merchants contacted Mayor Evers demanding that he stop the boycott and dismiss Al Brown, a town policeman and leader of the boycott.  

The mayor refused to comply with their demand, stating that as long as the boycott did not conflict with Al Brown's ability to perform his duties as a policeman and as long as the Constitution provided for such recourse, there were no grounds for the dismissal of Brown from the police department.  

During the course of the boycott, a local hotel owned by the white merchant, subject of the boycott, was destroyed by fire. Whites in the town believed that the

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13 Interview with Marie F. Walker, Editor of the Fayette Chronicle, Fayette, Mississippi, 17 April, 1980.
14 Interview with Ken Cockrell, 10 April, 1980.
burning of the hotel was connected to the boycott and that persons connected with it were also connected with the burning of the hotel. Since then, the state fire marshal ruled that the fire was the work of an arsonist; however, in April 1980, no one had been formally charged with the crime.

The burning of the hotel and the boycott were offensive to some blacks and, as a result, presented white community leaders with an issue which could be exploited to gain black support. Thus, a few days after the hotel was burned, a coalition was formed between whites from the ancien regime and black sympathizers to protest the burning of the hotel and the town boycott. The coalition marched to the mayor's office and demanded that the mayor intervene in the conflict and order Al Brown to call off the boycott. Moreover, the coalition charged that it was within the mayor's authority to do so, thus pointing out that he had the authority because under state law he was both town mayor and judge.

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15 Walker, Editor of the *Fayette Chronicle*.
16 Ibid.
17 Interview with Ken Cockrell, April, 1980.
The boycott had lasted for a week and a half when, in the face of mounting tension, the mayor called a meeting at city hall to discuss the boycott. At the meeting, the mayor asked by voice vote how many people (approximately three-hundred were present) wanted to end the boycott. The prevailing sentiment was against prolonging the boycott; thus, Brown, complying with the decision, called off the boycott the next day and business resumed as usual in Fayette. The two female employees were rehired by their former employer and were given back pay, while Brown was paid a month's salary and was not rehired.\(^{18}\) Through coalition politics, the white community leaders were successful in ending the boycott in Fayette. The conflict, however, was not resolved; it extended beyond the jurisdiction of local officials and was subject to investigation by federal authorities. It was learned by the mayor's office that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had publicized information showing that Brown had served time in a Chicago penitentiary for manslaughter.\(^{19}\) As a result of this new information, the Board of Aldermen called a special meeting to discuss the status of

\(^{18}\)Ibid.

\(^{19}\)Ibid.
Brown's employment with the town. At the meeting the Board voted three-to-two to dismiss Brown from the police department; however, the mayor and the remaining members of the Board voted against the dismissal.\(^{20}\) The majority decision of the Board endured and Brown was dismissed from the Fayette police department. Despite his dismissal, Brown later gained employment with another local program under the jurisdiction of the Evers administration.

In addition to the above conflict, intrablack conflict was a major problem for the Evers administration during his last year in office. The first major conflict centers around charges made by Charles Chambliss in a letter to the State Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) stating that Mayor Charles Evers was using dictatorial tactics and making exorbitant charges on tenants of low-income apartment buildings he owns in Fayette.\(^{21}\) Chambliss stated that tenants in the Martin Luther King Memorial Apartment, built with money from a HUD loan, were being badly mistreated by Mayor Evers. Specifically, Chambliss charged that the major

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Interview with Charles Chambliss, Fayette resident, 12 April, 1980.
arbitrarily imposed a $25.00 garbage fine on any tenant who did not put out garbage in plastic bags and put them out only on pick-up days. Moreover, Chamliess stated that if one tenant puts garbage out and stray dogs scatter it, each family in the building will be charged $25. Another charge against Evers was that certain persons who work for him were given special visiting privileges in the apartments while some female occupants are not allowed to have male visitors in their apartments. On May 5, 1981 a $1.5 million lawsuit was filed by legal services attorneys Patricia Dunmore and Lillie Blackman on behalf of several residents of Fayette charging Mayor Charles Evers, the Board of Aldermen and the Police Chief with depriving them of their civil and constitutional rights by:

1) Sentencing and incarcerating them without a trial.
2) Conducting a hearing and trial without notice.
3) Conducting trials before courts without jurisdiction.
4) Assessing excessive fines.
5) Imposing excessive sentences.
6) Refusing to allow bail.

\[22\text{Ibid.}\]
7) Imposing excessive bail.
8) Coercing guilty pleas.
9) Denying representation by counsel.
10) Denying plaintiff the right to confront his accusers.
11) Requiring involuntary servitude.
12) Failing to give adequate notice of trial.
13) Failing to inform plaintiff of the nature and cause of their accusation.
14) Trying persons for an infamous crime without presentment or indictment.²³

Further, some blacks charged that the mayor's first priority is his personal enrichment, pointing out that the mayor has substantial business holdings in Fayette. Owen Brooks, a political activist, and others further charged that Mayor Evers' political services are available to the highest bidder.²⁴ This perception of Evers as being self-serving may have manifested itself in voters rejection of Mayor Evers in the town's 1981 Democratic primary. Evers was defeated by Kennie Middleton, a local black attorney, who campaigned with a symbolic slogan that read "We've


²⁴Interview with Owen Brooks, Director of the Delta Ministry, Greenville, Mississippi, 15 March, 1980.
seen what this town has done for one man, now let's see what one man can do for this town."25

White community leaders did not have an opportunity to develop a functional coalition to take advantage of intrablack conflict in Fayette because the black community gave almost solid support to Mayor Evers' administration until 1980. However, with the black vote split between Mayor Evers and Kennie Middleton in the 1981 Democratic primary, the white vote gave Middleton the winning margin thus ending Mayor Evers' bid for a fourth consecutive term as Mayor of Fayette.

In Tchula, on the other hand, white community leaders have been able to neutralize the black controlled government by direct confrontation. The vehicle for confrontation was made possible by the development of a biracial coalition of two blacks and one white Aldermen. Indeed, the deep cleavages that developed between Mayor Carthan and the opposition members of the Board of Aldermen were superimposed on all the community conflicts as our analysis will show.

At the heart of these conflicts is the division of power between the Mayor and Board of Aldermen. According to the Mississippi code:

The full and complete executive and legislative powers of the municipality as vested by law, or inherent, shall be vested in such council. The council, however, may delegate such of its administrative functions as it deems proper and necessary to the officials so elected by it as provided in Section 21-7-15, and in addition may delegate administrative power and functions to such other person or persons as may be selected by said council in order to carry out its functions, whether municipal, or proprietary, which would permit the efficient administration of its municipal affairs. Said council has the right to select, appoint or designate departmental heads, such as but not limited to superintendent of utilities, superintendent of public health and sanitation, superintendent of fire and safety, superintendent of parks and recreation, superintendent of public buildings and grounds, and such other departmental heads as the council may deem best and proper.26

In addition, the Board of Aldermen is given the authority to determine the compensation and duties of the Mayor and other town employees. In contrast, the Mayor is given few formal powers and it is this lack of power that has led to considerable conflict between Mayor Carruth and a majority of the Board of Aldermen.27


27Ibid.
At the first meeting of the newly elected majority black government in Tchula, conflict surfaced over the hiring of a town clerk. John Hayes, the only white and incumbent on the Board of Aldermen, and black Alderman Roosevelt Granderson wanted to hire Wanda R. Ford, wife of Sharkey Ford, town police chief and a hold over from the ancien regime (the Fords are also black). The mayor objected to the hiring of Wanda Ford, arguing that the hiring of the police chief's wife would create a conflict of interest.\(^{28}\) Three black members of the Board supported the mayor's contention and Wanda Ford was not employed by the town. However, she was hired subsequently at a meeting of the town government after Alderman Hamilton resigned and Jason Gibson was elected to replace him (Hamilton voted originally against the hiring of Wanda Ford; both Hamilton and Gibson are black). Hamilton worked for Holmes County supervisor B. T. Taylor, a white leader of the mayor's opposition, and it is believed by members of the black community that Hamilton was forced to resign.\(^{29}\)

\(^{28}\) Interview with Mayor Eddie Carthan of Tchula, Mississippi, 5 March, 1980.

\(^{29}\) Interview with Jessie D. Banks, Member of the Board of Aldermen, Tchula, Mississippi, 5 March, 1980.
The importance of Hamilton's resignation for the internal politics of Tchula will be discussed shortly.

Notwithstanding the conflict over the hiring of Wanda Ford as clerk, the mayor and members of the Board of Aldermen were able to agree that the mayor should seek federal and foundation monies to address outstanding community problems. The mayor took the Board's mandate and was successful in bringing in numerous social services programs, including a senior citizens program, a day care program, and a nutrition program within the first six months of his administration.\textsuperscript{30} The administration, however, ran into opposition from the white community and three members of the Board of Aldermen. According to Alderman Banks, a supporter of the mayor, whites approached her asking her to vote along with Aldermen Hayes and Granderson against mayoral initiatives stating that the mayor was bringing in too many programs to Tchula which the community did not need. Alderman Banks, however, refused to go along with the inclination of the white community.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30}Interview with Mayor Eddie J. Carthan, 5 March, 1980.

\textsuperscript{31}Interview with Jessie Banks, 5 March, 1980.
As mentioned earlier, Alderman Odell Hamilton resigned and a special election was held to fill the vacated seat on the Board of Aldermen. Two blacks, Jason Gibson, an unsuccessful candidate for a position on the Board of Aldermen in the 1977 general election, and General Van, ran for the position.\textsuperscript{32} The black vote was split between the two candidates while the white community gave solid support to Jason Gibson who, according to Alderman Banks, assured white community leaders that he would vote along with Hayes and Granderson in opposition to Mayor Carthan's program initiatives. The election of Gibson to the Board of Aldermen gave the Hayes and Granderson coalition a voting majority on the Board of Aldermen and also signaled hard times for Mayor Carthan's administration. Indeed, a stalemate "occurred in the conduct of public business because of the inability of the mayor to achieve a voting majority in the Board of Aldermen."\textsuperscript{33}

This stalemate has occurred because two black and one white Aldermen have systematically voted as a bloc against Mayor Carthan's initiatives. It is unclear, however, why

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

these two black Aldermen have given unabridged support to the biracial coalition in voting against proposals directed at addressing salient problems in Tchula's black community.

Professor Morrison argues that the conflict between the mayoral bloc and the two black Aldermen can be explained by differences in family backgrounds of the parties involved. Morrison writes:

A prominent feature about this "mayoral bloc" is its status of quasi-independence historically vis-a-vis local whites. This bloc always had the wherewithal to make their way outside the traditional caste system, within certain limits. Two other Aldermen, however, of markedly different backgrounds, are almost always opposed to the "mayoral bloc". While highly educated, these two are not traditional townsmen. Their antecedents are in the plantation fields as dependent workers. Presence in the town for them is recent and their approach to politics is marked by interracial alignments and the presumption of interdependence between the races. Therefore, conflict relations between the two blocs and the different backgrounds considerably lessens the potential of the leadership group to rule as a class.34

For an alternative interpretation of the actions for the oppressed we turn to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire writes:

...during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation,
tend themselves to become oppressors, of "sub-oppressors". The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity. The phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of "adhesion" to the oppressor. Under these circumstances they cannot "consider" him sufficiently clearly to objectivize him--to discover him "outside" themselves. This does not necessarily mean that the oppressed are unaware that they are downtrodden. But their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression. At this level, their perception of themselves as opposites of the oppressor does not yet signify engagement in a struggle to overcome the contradiction; the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identi-

The above paradox can hopefully shed some light on the action of the two black Aldermen in Tchula who almost always vote in opposition to Mayor Carthan's program initiatives. The charge that Alderman Gibson was an agent of Tchula's white elites seems to be born out by his action at the first meeting of the mayor and Board of Aldermen. Alderman Gibson joined forces with black Alderman Granderson and white Alderman Hayes in supporting a list of demands that white merchants brought to the Board meeting. Some of the most important of the eighteen

demands presented to the mayor and Board of Aldermen after Gibson was elected to office were:

(1) That the mayor and Board of Aldermen salaries be reduced.
(2) That the town fire a black maintenance worker and hire a white maintenance supervisor.
(3) That the town will no longer pay the telephone bill of the mayor's office located on Highway 49.
(4) That there be a resolution to let the aldermen sign town checks if the mayor refuses to sign them.36

As mentioned previously, the support of Alderman Gibson gave the Hayes and Granderson Coalition a three (3) to two (2) voting majority on the Board of Aldermen, thus, the power to neutralize black political potential in Tchula through the formal governmental structure. The Board acted on these demands with Gibson voting along with Aldermen Hayes and Granderson, and by a three-to-two vote the demands from town and local political elites were approved. Subsequently, the mayor's salary was reduced from $600.00 to $60.00 per month and the salary for aldermen was reduced from $60.00 to $10.00 per month, after having been raised to $600.00 and $60.00 respectively at

36 Interview with Evander D. McLaurin, Member of the Board of Aldermen, Tchula, Mississippi, 7 March, 1980.
a previous meeting of the Mayor and Board. More importantly, a black employed as a maintenance supervisor earning $400.00 per month was dismissed while a white was employed to replace him and was paid $800.00 per month. 37

At about the same time, blacks present at the meeting began protesting the action of the three members on the Board who were voting for the white community's list of demands. 38 A fight erupted between blacks and whites, at which time, members from the white community, Aldermen Hayes, Granderson, and Gibson left the meeting in the face of violent resistance from the black community. In response to the town merchants, a group of the mayor's supporters initiated a boycott against town merchants and issued a list of grievances demanding that more blacks be hired in the area of management, that more blacks be hired as cashiers, and that black customers be treated more courteously. While some blacks protested the biracial coalition's support of the white merchant's demands, the black community has been generally quiescent on most conflicts between the Mayor and the Board. 39 Consequently,

37 Interview with a committee of concerned black citizens, Tchula, Mississippi, 5 March, 1980.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
the white community leaders have been able to carry out their policy objective in Tchula with a black controlled government through coalition politics.

These events were an omen for what was to come in the intensive political struggle between Mayor Carthan and three members of the Board of Aldermen. On July 7, 1979, the mayor was locked out of his office and the town bank account was frozen by Aldermen Hayes, Granderson, and Gibson (it should be reiterated that Granderson and Gibson are black). They charged that the mayor was mishandling town funds and that he would not let the Board of Aldermen run the town. Alderman Hayes stated that city hall was locked in order to have the books audited; the books were audited but the charge that Mayor Carthan was mishandling funds was proven false.  

City hall was locked for two and a half months, and during this time residents could not pay for municipal services provided by the town. Because Tchula could not meet its financial obligations, the town received a poor credit rating, town employees were not paid, and the Carthan administration was not able to purchase food and other essentials needed for the operation of federally funded programs. City hall was finally

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40 Interview with John E. Hayes, Member of the Board of Aldermen, Tchula, Mississippi, 8 April, 1980.
reopened by the mayor and a few community supporters armed with guns; and the bank lifted the freeze on the town's bank account when Alderman McLaurin informed bank officials that the bank was subject to a law suit because the entire Board of Aldermen did not approve of the freeze on the town's money.\textsuperscript{41}

Another major conflict that has constrained black political potential in Tchula began in September, 1978 after the police chief took an unauthorized trip to Biloxi, Mississippi in a town police car. While on the trip the car developed mechanical problems; the police chief called the Tchula police department and authorized a policeman on duty to dispatch the last operating police car to Biloxi to tow him back to Tchula (it should be noted that again the police chief did not inform the mayor of his actions).\textsuperscript{42} Meanwhile, a town emergency was created when a senior citizen became ill and the mayor ordered the police department to dispatch a car to the citizen's home to rush her to the hospital in Lexington, Mississippi, a town several miles from Tchula. The mayor was informed by a policeman on duty that no police cars

\textsuperscript{41} Interview with Evander M. McLaurin, March, 1980.
\textsuperscript{42} Interview with Eddie J. Carthan, 5 March, 1980.
were available and that Sharkey Ford, the police chief, had taken one car to Biloxi, and after having mechanical difficulties with the car, ordered a second car to tow him in. When Ford returned, the mayor directed him to write a letter explaining his actions in the matter. Ford refused to comply with the mayor's demand stating that he worked for the Board of Aldermen. As a result of Ford's refusal to comply with the mayor, he was suspended from duty for thirty days without pay and was asked to turn in his equipment, which he refused to do.

The mayor's opposition on the Board opposed the suspension and on August 26, 1978, two days after Ford was suspended, a special meeting was called, without the presence of the mayor, by the three opposing members of the Board of Aldermen. The agenda for the meeting was the reinstatement of Sharkey Ford as police chief without any pay being taken from his salary. By a three-to-two vote, the Board voted to reinstate Ford, with Aldermen Hayes, Granderson, and Gibson voting for reinstatement and Banks and McLaurin voting against reinstatement.

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
Because the mayor was not present at the August 26 meeting, the issue to reinstate Ford was on the agenda again at the regular meeting of the mayor and Board of Aldermen on September 5. Again, the Board voted three-to-two to reinstate Ford; the mayor, nevertheless, vetoed the Board's action.

Sometime prior to the December regular meeting of the mayor and Board of Aldermen, the Board received a letter from Mayor Carthan stating that Wanda Ford was suspended for disruption of town meetings and for spraying mace on Samuel Callahan, an employee of the police department. The legal basis for the mayor's disciplinary action against the Fords is covered under the personnel policies and procedures of Tchula adopted at the September, 1978 meeting of the town government. However, at a specially called meeting of the Board of Aldermen on December 9, 1978, the Board voted three-to-two to re-appeal the personnel policies; the mayor vetoed the decision, however,46

At the same meeting, the mayor vetoed the Board's three-to-two vote to reinstate Wanda and Sharkey Ford and refused to issue the Fords commission. In reaction

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46 The Circuit Court of Holmes County, Mississippi, Roosevelt Granderson and John Edger Hayes, Aldermen of the Town of Tchula, Mississippi, vs. Eddie J. Carthan, Mayor of the Town of Tchula, and Greta Nalls, City Clerk of the Town of Tchula, No. 7492 (April 5, 1979).
to the mayor's vetoes, Aldermen Granderson and Hayes filed a suit in the Circuit Court of Holmes County, Mississippi against Mayor Carthan and the town clerk, Greta Nalls, on behalf of the Fords, asking the court to order the mayor to:

1. Reimburse Sharkey and Wanda Ford for past due wages and salaries.

2. Be enjoined from withholding any future salaries of the aforesaid Sharkey Ford and Wanda Reshell Ford.

3. Be enjoined from wrongfully exercising his veto power with regards to majority votes of the Board of Aldermen.47

In March, 1979, the Circuit Court of Holmes County ordered the mayor and town clerk to pay Sharkey and Wanda Ford $5,775.46 and $1,629.35, respectively. The court further issued a permanent injunction against the mayor and town clerk for future withholding of salaries from the Fords. The court also issued a permanent injunction prohibiting the mayor from exercising his veto power with regards to any majority vote of the Board of Aldermen, and he was permanently enjoined from issuing any expenditures and/or sums of money from any town account on behalf of the town of Tchula where such expenditures have not

47 Ibid.
been approved by the Board of Aldermen. 48 Thus, the court decision was a symbolic victory for Mayor Carthan’s opponents and gave legitimacy to their action.

Nevertheless, the defendants appealed the decision of the Circuit Court to the Supreme Court of Mississippi, alleging that the Circuit Court erred in its decision by:

Denying oral motion by plaintiff’s counsel for defendants to continue this cause in order that the petition for mandatory injunction and other relief may be heard simultaneous with the appellant’s cross petition for mandatory injunction and other relief and by hearing this cause in a disjunctive manner prejudicial to appellants. 49

Moreover, the defendants alleged that the Court erred in its April 5, 1977, decision when it ruled that the municipal attorney was entitled to represent the municipality for which he was a party to the proceedings before the Court. Further, defendants charged that the Court erred in its ruling that Mayor Carthan wrongfully exercised his veto power; and he did not have the authority to discharge employees under the town personnel policies.

On March 5, 1980, the Supreme Court of Mississippi dismissed the case without prejudice noting that neither

48 Ibid.
Sharkey nor Wanda Ford was a party to the petition before the court, although they were the persons alleged to have suffered a financial loss. This being the case, the Supreme Court's ruling that Aldermen Granderson and Hayes had no standing to sue for a writ of mandamus, left the door open for a suit by the Fords. The Fords filed suit but the case was settled out of court by members of the Board of Aldermen.

On March 6, 1980, one day after the Mississippi Supreme Court's decision in the Eddie J. Carthan, et al., v. Roosevelt Granderson, et al. case, the Mississippi State Legislature passed a law (House Bill No. 315) settling the controversy over the payment of town employees which had been one of the major conflicts between the Carthan administration and three members of the Board of Aldermen. House Bill No. 315 states that:

The clerk of the municipality shall draw all warrants for claims and accounts allowed and approved by the governing authorities, which said warrants shall be signed by the mayor or a majority of the members of the Board of Aldermen in any municipality operating under a mayor-aldermen form of government and attested by the clerk, and to which there shall be affixed the seal of the municipality.51

50 Ibid.

Laws such as the above further weaken the already weak position of the mayor, thus making it extremely difficult for the mayor to use his position to alter outstanding community problems in a town such as Tchula in which a majority of the members of the Board of Aldermen has taken an adversary position toward mayoral initiatives.

The court decision in *Eddie J. Carthan, et al., v. Roosevelt Granderson, et al.*, further polarized the black and white communities in Tchula. The latest controversy between the mayor and the three board members centers around the appointment of the town police chief by the mayor and the subsequent appointment of another police chief by Aldermen Hayes, Granderson, and Gibson. Immediately after the Mississippi Supreme court's decision in *Eddie J. Carthan, et al., v. Roosevelt Granderson, et al.*, Mayor Carthan appointed a black chief of police along with several other local blacks as policemen. A few weeks after the mayor's appointments, three members of the Board of Aldermen met and appointed Jim Andrews, a local white, as police chief. Andrews and James Harris, a local black, along with several other persons, according to the mayor, came to the police department and:

Ran off the acting police Chief Johnny Dale. Andrews, according to Carthan, began changing the locks to the building. Carthan, who was called about the incident by Dale, went to the city hall
where he was told by Andrews, "don't come no further." Carthan states that he told Andrews to go home because he was not yet chief of police nor was he bonded as required by law. Andrews then drew his gun on Carthan. In an ensuing struggle to take Andrews' gun and place him under arrest, other loyal members of the police force took part. Aiding also were several other men, sworn in as temporary officers by Carthan.

Carthan states that another of the blacks who accompanied Andrews, James Harris, "was sitting in a back room in the dark with a .357 magnum and a shotgun. I told him to come on out which he did. Nobody touched him." 52

Later both Harris and Andrews filed assault charges against Mayor Carthan and six other local blacks. Warrants were issued by Tchula's Justice of the Peace, Dean Taylor, Andrew's sister-in-law. The case was heard in Judge Taylor's court and Carthan and six blacks were bound over to a grand jury which subsequently indicted the defendants. Counter charges were brought against Andrews by the defendants, however, he was never indicted. According to Mayor Carthan, the "assistant prosecutor in charge of the case stated that Andrews testified before the grand jury and was therefore immune from prosecution." 53 Thus, the local courts became one of the primary agencies used to block Mayor Carthan's initiatives.

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53 Ibid.
Meanwhile, Andrews dropped charges against Mayor Carthan but the charges brought by Harris were not dropped. At the same time, Mayor Carthan charged that Andrews dropped charges against him so blacks would not see it as the "racial issue which it is thereby giving the case more validity." Moreover, Carthan stated that James Harris was hired by the Taylors immediately following his indictment and given a town car by the owners of J. R. Auto Sales, cousins of the Justice of the Peace, Dean Taylor.

On April 23, 1981 a Holmes County jury composed of nine blacks and three whites convicted Mayor Carthan and six other blacks on simple assault for an alleged attack on James Harris on April 30, 1980. On May 1, 1981 Mayor Carthan was sentenced to a three-year prison term by Circuit Judge Webb Franklin in Greenwood, Mississippi. Also sentenced were six co-defendants, including Alderman McLaurin (McLaurin was fined $1,000 and the other five co-defendants were fined $500). The case is being appealed to the Mississippi State Supreme Court.

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
The foregoing analysis has generally supported our first two theoretical propositions (whites will attempt to neutralize black officeholders through direct confrontation and will attempt to capitalize on an intrablack conflict to undermine black political potential). Thus, this brings us to the last variable to be assayed in this chapter, the extent to which competition among black aspirants weakens overall black political potential. There is little known about the impact of this variable on black political potential because of the atheoretical nature of most studies on black politics. However, Jones suggests that:

The number of "black leaders" usually varied in direct proportion to the number of white candidates with money to spend. Such "leaders" still exist and mitigate against the effort of civil leagues. Also, among blacks, as is the case among members of any group, the number of persons aspiring to public office is often greater than the number of offices available and not every black is willing to sacrifice personal ambition for some corporate definition of community welfare. Closely allied with the foregoing problem is the fact that white elements often try to recruit additional black candidates to further divide the black vote. And finally, many leagues have become identified with the more conservative political factions in their communities and younger more aggressive blacks often prefer to run as their own candidates.58

As long as black candidates are unwilling to sacrifice their personal ambition for the common community interest, black political potential will be seriously retarded. The 1981 municipal election in Tchula demonstrates this point. In this election three blacks and one white ran for mayor of Tchula (Mayor Carthan did not seek a second term). Two of the black mayoral candidates, Charles Bacon and Herbert Granderson were running for political office for the first time. Saul Sutton, Jr., the third black mayoral candidate, ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1969 and 1977. The white community candidate was former mayor Lester Lyon, defeated in 1977 by Mayor Carthan.

In the aldermanic race, all five incumbents ran for reelection along with five newcomers--three blacks, and two whites--raising the number of candidates to ten. Two of the four black incumbents ran with white community support. The biracial coalition of Hayes, Gibson and Granderson took on three new white members during the municipal election. They included formal mayor Lester Lyon, mayoral candidate, James Andrews and John W. Henderson, Jr., aldermanic candidates. The coalition represented Mayor Carthan's opposition during his tenure in office.
The coalition's opposition in the 1981 municipal election consisted of eight independent candidates including two incumbents, Aldermen Banks and McLaurin and six black newcomers, three aldermanic and three mayoral candidates.\textsuperscript{59} Five of these candidates ran with support from Mayor Carthan. It was believed that the other black candidates were encouraged to run by white community leaders.\textsuperscript{60} An effort was made to limit the number of black independent candidates to six, one for mayor and five for the Board. This effort, however, was unsuccessful. Thus, the number of black candidates remained greater than the number of positions available, while the number of coalition candidates were equal to the number of positions available. On election day, the black vote was divided among the three black candidates thus eliminating any hope for a solid voting bloc. Consequently, the coalition candidates won all seats.

According to a post election analysis in a local paper, Lester Lyon received 251 votes for mayor while his three

\textsuperscript{59}The coalition candidates refers to the biracial team that ran in Tchula's 1981 Municipal election while the independent candidates refers to eight black candidates who ran for mayor and seats on the Board of Aldermen.

\textsuperscript{60}Interview with Eddie J. Carthan, 23 December, 1981.
black opponents, Charles Bacon, Herbert Granderson and Saul Sutton, Jr., received 3, 33, and 196 votes respectively. However, when votes received by the three independent mayoral candidates are consolidated the black independent received 304 votes compared to 251 for the white coalition candidate. In a one-to-one-man race a black would have won the mayorship assuming that blacks would have voted as a bloc.

Tabulation of the votes from the aldermanic race shows that the five coalition candidates finished ahead of the independent candidates. Incumbents Granderson and Hayes were the top vote getters with both candidates receiving 333 votes respectively. Henderson, incumbent Gibson, and Andrews, the remaining coalition members, received 313, 312 and 267 votes respectively. The coalition members received a total of 1,556 votes including 599 received by the two black coalition members. What percentage of the 599 votes came from the black community is unknown; but, it is reasonable to assume that the black coalition members received some support from the black community.

On the other hand, the five independent aldermanic candidates received a total of 814 votes. The breakdown shows that Charles Bell a newcomer received 233 votes and incumbent Aldermen McLaurin and Banks received 187 and
186 respectively. (The two incumbent aldermen were a part of Mayor Carthan's bloc during his tenure in office.) The remaining independent candidates, R. L. Whitaker and Samuel Calhoun received 173 and 133 votes respectively.

A comparison of the votes from the independent and coalition candidates indicates some significant findings. The biracial coalition out polled the independent candidates by 742 votes. Even when the 595 votes received by the two black coalition members are subtracted the three white coalition members out polled the five black independent candidates by 146 votes. What this tabulation reveals is inconclusive. But we can assume, however, that the white coalition members received some black support. At the same time, we can also assume that a percentage of the 599 votes received by the two black coalition members came from the white community inasmuch as the two black aldermen's support was essential for enabling Tchula's white leaders to block Mayor Carthan's program initiatives and produce an environment in which whites were able to gain formal political control in Tchula during the 1981 municipal election.
Black Political Empowerment and Political Development

At this juncture, an evaluation of the success of mayoral initiatives in four areas--municipal services, economic development and employment, housing, health care and social services--will be used to determine the impact black mayors have had in altering the socio-economic status of blacks in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula.

Municipal Services

Any causal observer of the South's political culture is struck by the vast disparities in both the quantity and quality of municipal services provided to the black and white communities. This is not a totally southern phenomenon, however.

In 1969 the first law suit challenging the unequal distribution of municipal services was filed on behalf of the black residents of Shaw, Mississippi by legal services lawyers. The suit charged Shaw's officials with racial discrimination in the distribution of municipal services to the black community. However, the United States

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61 Hawkins v. Town of Shaw 427 F.2d 1286 (5th Cir. 1971) Aff'd 461 F.2d 1171 (1972) (en banc).
District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi refused to enter such finding and the case was appealed to the United States Court of Appeals (5th Cir.) which reversed the decision of the lower court.

The Court of Appeals declared that:

The Town of Shaw, indeed any town, is not immune to the mandates of the Constitution...A city, town or county may no more deny the equal protection of the laws than it may abridge freedom of speech, establish an official religion, arrest without probable cause, or deny the due process of law.\textsuperscript{62}

The landmark decision, however, did not have an immediate impact on towns such as Shaw as our discussion of the distribution of municipal services to the black community in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula, has shown. Unequal distribution of municipal services to these communities manifested itself in the allocation of these services by white mayors. While the white community had full access to municipal services provided by the town governments, municipal services provided for the black community were quite limited.

Since political empowerment, black mayors have sought to equalize the distribution of municipal services to their respective communities and to reorder the priorities of

\[\textsuperscript{62}\] Ibid.
their offices to address outstanding community problems. The improvement in the distribution of municipal services to the black community has been singled out as one of the accomplishments by mayors of Fayette and Bolton. For instance, the mayors have been credited with paving all streets in the black community, and providing them with curbs and gutters. Mayors of Tchula and Shelby have not been so successful; only a few streets have been paved in Tchula by the Carthan administration, while no streets in the black community have been paved in Shelby by Mayor Gray's administration.

In addition to paving all streets in Fayette, Mayor Evers' administration built a water storage system, while both Mayor Evers and former Mayor Bennie Thompson equalized water mains in the black community and corrected the feeble water pressure existing at the time of black political ascendency. They have also provided sewage systems for all sections of the black community, equalized garbage collection, and improved fire protection for the communities. Thus, these municipal services improvements reflect some of the most obvious results of black empowerment in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula.
Employment and Economic Development

One of the most persistent problems for blacks in the South is the limited employment opportunities. Historically, blacks could not find jobs outside the southern agriculturally based economy. However, a few non-traditional jobs were available to blacks in those occupations catering to blacks (the teaching profession and black entrepreneurships). However, according to the Task Force on Southern Rural Development:

There have been some important changes in these occupational patterns since World War II. Change was particularly noticeable during the last half of the 1960's. Black women increased their share of metropolitan employment between 1966 and 1969, but the share of black men remained constant. In nonmetropolitan areas, on the other hand, black men and women increased their shares substantially between these dates.63

Notwithstanding the above, the lack of employment opportunities is still a persistent problem for many southern rural blacks and, according to the Task Force, industrialization has not helped rural blacks. A study of 244 nonmetropolitan counties with 5,000 or more blacks shows that the black population during the 1960's

...gained only 16 percent of the nonagricultural jobs - not even as much as the 21

percent they gained during the 1950's. Indeed, because they were displaced from farms at a faster rate than they gained nonfarm positions, blacks in these counties lost 97,000 jobs during the 1960's while whites gained 287,000 jobs. As a consequence, the black proportion of the work force declined from 29 percent in 1960 to 26 percent in 1970.64

In Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula, black mayors have attempted to provide jobs for residents of their respective towns, however, their efforts to reorder the economic status of blacks reveal an inconclusive picture. With the aid of monies from federal agencies, black mayors in Fayette, Bolton, and Tchula developed town staffs. Through a number of federally sponsored programs and new local industries, Mayor Evers of Fayette has been credited with bringing in over five hundred jobs to Fayette during his eleven year span as mayor; while in Bolton and Tchula, federally sponsored programs have provided employment opportunities for one hundred and eighty residents respectively. Shelby's mayoral initiatives in this area have been negligible.65

64 Ibid., p. 14.
65 Shelby's Mayor Robert Gray secured federal money to build a cotton processing plant which will provide jobs for 35 employees when completed.
The degree of success by black mayors in providing new employment opportunities for their constituencies depends upon the allocation of federal agencies and foundation monies. Unfortunately, however, when monies have been forthcoming from federal agencies and foundations, mayors of Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula have not been able to comply with grants that carried matching fund provisions. By contract, the matching funds provision has not been a serious problem for Mayor Evers' administration. The Medger Evers Fund, established in 1969, has provided monies to comply with the provision, and more specifically, has served as the primary agency for community improvement since black empowerment in Fayette. At the same time, mayors of Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula have, for the most part, relied heavily upon federal agencies and foundation monies to provide employment opportunities and other community improvements since black empowerment.

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66 Founded in late 1969, the Medger Evers Fund began making its first grants to Fayette in 1970. Since then the Fund has expended almost $1 million for programs, most of it in the Fayette region. These program expenditures have, for the most part, provided the local matching funds enabling Fayette to receive much larger federal grants - roughly $9 million by the end of 1974. In addition, the Fund has financed a variety of technical assistance and training efforts, in order to assist Fayette in obtaining federal and state support and to improve and expand the municipality's services to its citizens. "Five Years of Progress in Fayette," (New York: Medgar Evers Fund, Inc., 1973).
The over dependence of black mayors on federal agencies and foundation monies suggests the limited utility of electoral politics for changing the socioeconomic status of blacks in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula or for changing the status of blacks in the United States in general. But at the same time, a healthy community environment is necessary for political development, as the reaction of federal agencies and foundations to the political struggle between the mayor and Board of Aldermen in Tchula has revealed. All federal and foundation monies were pulled out of Tchula as a result of internal politics; and the black community lost over one hundred jobs brought to Tchula during the first six months of black empowerment.\(^{67}\)

Mayoral initiatives to lure industry to Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula also reveal inconclusive results. The mayors of these town inherited poor infrastructures which hampered economic development. Though they have attempted to develop their own town infrastructures, including industrial parks, at the time of this writing, Fayette had the only completed industrial park. In 1969,

\(^{67}\)The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development withdrew funds for a weatherization project and monies for a Head Start program, while monies for a CETA grant were withdrawn by the United States Department of Labor. The Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) cancelled a grant which provided salaries for city employees.
a 230 acre industrial park, including modern water and sewage systems, and paved concrete access roads were developed by the Evers administration. As a result, Mayor Evers was able to attract a subsidiary of the telephone-telegraph company to Fayette in 1970, with the help of Senator Edward Kennedy. According to the mayor, the plant has the capacity to employ 150 workers but has not employed more than 50. Moreover, under the leadership of Mayor Evers, the town built its first shopping center and supermarket, its first bank, a vocational training center, and developed a career education program to train municipal employees.

These are indeed substantial improvements for the mayor of Fayette, however, economic development has not solved the high unemployment rate in the town. At the time of this writing, Fayette's unemployment rate was at 17 percent, the highest among municipalities in the state.

As previously mentioned, mayoral efforts to attract industries to Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula have been fruitless. In the case of Tchula, the mayor and two members

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69 Interview with Charles Evers, Mayor of Fayette, Mississippi, 10 April, 1980.
of the Board of Aldermen state that several industries were interested in locating in Tchula because of its proximity to Jackson, Mississippi, but when they learned of the internal community struggle, representatives for potential companies became disinterested in Tchula. 70 While the internal politics of Tchula may have had a chilling effect on economic development, Mayor Gray and former Mayor Thompson charge that companies have not located in their towns because of racism. To be sure, these findings tend to support research showing that industries are indeed avoiding areas with large black populations.

Thomas R. Till writes that industries have avoided heavy black areas because:

1. The probability of recruiting workers for black areas who meet the companies' hiring standards is less than it is for white areas.

2. Blacks tend to join unions more readily than whites; that the companies' personnel problems might be exacerbated by employment quota or "goals and timetables" affirmative action plans if they move to counties with very large black population majorities. 71

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70 Interview with Eddie Carthan, 3 March, 1980.

Concurring somewhat with the observations above, "but allowing industry to escape blame, is James Walker who writes that industries have avoided black areas because of the low quality of the black work force." However, these reasons seem to be suspect in light of the type of industries locating in the South and the relative equal educational levels among blacks and whites in the South. It is not within the purview of this study to test this assertion, however.

In the case of Mississippi, Brooks and Opello reveal that industrialization is taking place in the north-east region of the state. The contention of the study is that "manufacturing in Mississippi tends to be controlled in small factories in relatively small towns" and that counties with heavy black populations have relatively few industrial employment opportunities for residents. Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula are all located in counties with large concentrations of blacks, and consequently, are not a part of this industrialization.

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process taking place in Mississippi. Black mayors have charged that while, on the one hand, many industries have refused to come to their towns because of pressure from local white elites, on the other hand, they have not gotten support from county officials and regional bodies such as the local Economic Development Administration (EDA) which is given the responsibility for economic development in Mississippi.74

Housing

This house is not for parties:
No cake.
This house is not for dancin':
boards break.
This house is not for laughin':
walls shake.
This house is not for celebration',
that's for sure!
This house is not for livin'--
unless you're poor.75

The above quote by Richard J. Margolis underscores the housing condition for many southerners. In 1976 Marshal Hudgins indicated that 2.4 million southern residents live in substandard housing and that none of the present housing programs at the federal, state, and local

74 Interview with Bennie Thompson, 28 February, 1980.

and/or in the private sector are making a real dent in this area. Rural families are the ones most seriously affected by poor housing (66 percent of substandard houses are located in the rural South). A disproportionate number (36 percent) of rural blacks live in substandard housing while only 9 percent of non-blacks live in such housing. In three Deep South states, Mississippi, Arkansas, and South Carolina, 77 percent of all black families live in substandard housing. Thus the promise of a decent home and suitable living environment for "all Americans" has been, for the most part, an elusive dream. As noted, poor housing is one of the salient problems facing rural Americans and was one of the most desperate community problems facing black mayors at the time of black empowerment in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula. The housing problem in these towns has been compounded by over one hundred years of neglect under white mayorships.

Like most rural towns Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula have extremely limited resources. No funds are available for the purchase of land by black mayors and if funds were available, acquisition of land would have to be done through lengthy and costly eminent domain.

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
proceedings, due to the hostility of large land owners in these areas.\textsuperscript{78} Largely because of the depressed economic status of these towns, private developers do not see any economic benefits in building new housing units in towns such as Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula. At the same time, because the state government is completely inactive in the housing area, black mayors have turned to other public bodies for help, primarily the federal government. However, because of the urban focus of most federal housing programs, support for rural communities from these agencies has been slow in coming. On the other hand, when agencies are given the responsibility to address these problems, funds are not appropriated or agencies elect not to spend funds. Agencies such as the Farmers Home Administration give little aid to small rural towns.\textsuperscript{79} For example, black mayors charge that the Farmers Home Administration is given the responsibility for implementing the rural

\textsuperscript{78}Interview with Bennie Thompson, 28 February, 1980.

housing programs, yet when they have attempted to use these programs unnecessary obstacles have been placed in their way. Bennie Thompson, for instance, states that he was forced to by-pass a local HUD regional official in Jackson, Mississippi and contact HUD officials in Washington in order to get a half-million dollar municipal complex approved. 80 (The HUD office in Jackson refused to approve the grant for the complex.)

Thompson and other mayors from the Mississippi Conference of Black Mayors sued HUD in 1978 for trying to exclude cities with populations under 50,000 from participating in the Housing and Community Development Act in 1974. As a result of the suit, HUD reversed its regulations thereby enabling the towns to receive more than six million dollars in HUD funds. 81

The Farmers Home Administration has come under attack by black mayors trying to use the agency to address the housing problems in their communities. The attack manifested itself in the testimony of Bolton's former Mayor,


81 Ibid.
Bennie Thompson, at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Conference on Full Employment in Atlanta, Georgia, January 12, 1977. Thompson stated that:

While there may be programs that exist in the federal register that would seem to address a particular problem, by the time you get down to the local office of a federal agency it is a different story. For example, a program may not have any funds appropriated, or it may have appropriations but for some reason an agency elects not to expend the funds or there just may be a complete lack of sensitivity or competence at the local agency office. 82

In addition to the above, regional bodies will increasingly effect social development in the South. A paper written by Professors Boone and Willingham speaks of the changing political environment of the South. They write:

In order, then, to make the argument that the racial problem has been solved, contemporary growth advocates can point to the election of blacks to many offices and seemingly unobstructed participation in local politics. Yet, if newly acquired black political power is to prove beneficial and lasting, southern blacks will have to formulate strategies which address the new political realities and environment of the South. 83

82 Testimony of Mayor Bennie Thompson of Bolton, Mississippi on Small Town Housing Problems and Federal Response to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Conference on Full Employment, Atlanta, Georgia, January 12, 1977.

The expansion of regional bodies is a manifestation of the new political realities that black officeholders will have to become cognizant of and develop strategies to deal with if they are going to bring about social development to their communities. In Mississippi, for example, twenty-four of the eighty-two counties have a black majority population, yet, there is no black director of a Farmers Home Administration county office. The few blacks who are employed by the Administration are in the lowest level positions.

Notwithstanding the above, black mayors have sought to address the housing problem in their communities. In Fayette, for example, Mayor Evers is credited with building an eighty unit public housing project (and the town has also been approved for forty more public housing units) and five private subdivisions have been built since the election of Charles Evers in 1969. While Bennie Thompson, former mayor of Bolton, is credited with building forty units of public housing, Mayor Gray of Shelby is credited with building fifty units. Even though Mayor Carthan of Tchula has not been so successful in the

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84 Ibid.

85 Testimony of Mayor Bennie Thompson, 12 January, 1980.
housing area, he was successful in getting a weatherization grant large enough to weatherize twenty houses in the black community.

The mayors of Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula, unlike Mayor Evers of Fayette, have not been successful in getting private developers to build housing projects in their communities. Nevertheless, mayoral initiatives do indicate that they are sensitive to the salient housing problems in their towns.

Health Care and Social Services

Traditionally, the South has offered few health and social services for its citizens. There are few medical facilities and few medical services for southerners as compared to residents of the North; there is a shortage of health professionals, particularly in the medical and dental areas.86

Because of the South's racial disposition, health services for blacks and other racial minorities were impeded. Thus poor health care for the poor and blacks is still one of the salient problems in the South and was one of the problems faced by black mayors of Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula upon their ascendancy to office.

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86 "Increasing the Options," p. 40-49.
Health care and social services were non-existent for residents, hence these services ranked high on the list of outstanding community problems confronting black mayors upon their election to political office.  

Fayette, at the time of black empowerment, had no doctor and there was only one resident doctor for the entire county. The Evers administration requested a grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) in 1970 and was awarded $132,000 to set up a comprehensive health center. In June of the same year, the Evers administration was notified by HEW that it had been awarded an additional $682,000 to fund the first year of operation of the comprehensive health services in Jefferson and Copiah counties. In addition, the Evers administration opened a local Medgar Evers Clinic in Fayette with Dr. Humphrey, a black doctor from Port Gibson, Mississippi, appointed director of the clinic. Additional staff, for a period, was provided by Dr. Marshall Goldberg of Flint, Michigan. Dr. Goldberg,

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87 Social Services refers to such programs as day care centers, senior citizens programs and head start programs.

88 Jonas, "Two Years in Fayette," p. 15.

89 Ibid.
learning of Fayette's health needs when Mayor Evers spoke before an audience in Flint, Michigan, organized a team of doctors who contributed their medical services to Fayette on two-week intervals. These doctors (mostly white) worked both at the Medgar Evers Clinic and at the Jefferson County Hospital. The Medgar Evers Clinic provided medical services for over 6,000 patients in the first year of operation with patients paying a minimal fee--$3.00 or less per visit.  

Through the Medgar Evers Fund, a new ambulance was contributed by a white New Yorker, permitting the town to provide free full-time ambulance services for Fayette residents. Monies from the Fund were further used to purchase new equipment; pay for transportation of used equipment, including an x-ray machine donated by the widow of a New Jersey doctor; and provide money for the training of local black women as laboratory technicians. A $10,000 grant from the Evers Fund was established to cover emergency cases at the Jefferson County Hospital and in 1971, $40,000 from the Evers Fund was used to purchase a custom-made mobile medical unit. The United

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Auto Workers, through the Evers Fund, donated a mobile dental unit which served as the initial dental clinic until a permanent structure was built.\textsuperscript{92} In 1971, HEW authorized a five million dollar commitment to support the county's comprehensive health program. Thus, a permanent multi-purpose community center was constructed to house a variety of social and economic services, including: an economic development office, the Medgar Evers Health Clinic, the local Head Start program, a child day care center, and a senior citizens program.\textsuperscript{93}

These improvements by the Evers administration in health and social services are substantial indeed, however, they have not been matched by mayors of Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula; mayoral initiatives in these towns have not changed the health status for impoverished residents. In Tchula, for instance, the town's internal politics resulted in the closing of the local health clinic in 1978. Since then, however, the clinic reopened with the jurisdiction taken from under the control of the mayor's office and placed under the jurisdiction of an administrative board in Holmes County.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{92}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{93}Interview with Ken Cockrell, 10 April, 1980.

\textsuperscript{94}Interview with John E. Hayes, 8 April, 1980.
In the social services area, mayoral initiatives have brought minor results for residents of Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula. The mayor of Tchula was able to bring a number of social services programs to the town in the first six months of his administration; however, all social services programs, as previously mentioned, were pulled out of the town in the face of the intense political struggle between the mayor, members of the Board of Aldermen, and local political and economic elites.

The mayor of Shelby, on the other hand, has not been able to make improvements in this area; but the former mayor of Bolton, Bennie Thompson, received a grant from the Economic Development Administration which enabled the town to build a municipal complex, housing a number of social services programs, including a town sponsored day care center and a senior citizens program.

To sum up, the foregoing discussion reveals that mayors of Bolton, Shelby and Tchula have had limited success in the health and social services area. On the other hand, Charles Evers is credited with providing a wide range of health and social services for residents of Fayette during his tenure in office.
CHAPTER IV

BLACK POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN MISSISSIPPI'S JIM CROW POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT: THE CASE OF MOUND BAYOU, MISSISSIPPI

As mentioned previously, black empowerment has not brought a reordering of the socioeconomic status for blacks in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula. Nevertheless, this Chapter looks at black political empowerment in Mississippi's largest all-black town from its beginning through the summer of 1981 with the aim of understanding the impact Mound Bayou's officials have had on the socioeconomic status of its residents. But more importantly, the Chapter compares the socioeconomic status of blacks in Mound Bayou, a "traditional" black town, vis-à-vis that of Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula, "transitional towns." As noted earlier, this comparison will hopefully add to our theoretical understanding of black empowerment in Mississippi and the impact of black mayors on the socioeconomic status of blacks in these towns under study.

Mound Bayou was a novelty for many writers during the Jim Crow era in Mississippi, largely because of its unique history, the disposition of one of its founding fathers in
Mississippi politics, and its early economic history. Further, before 1969, Mound Bayou was the only town in Mississippi where all blacks voted and held all elected positions, and, to some degree, were shielded from Mississippi's oppressive political culture. However, the extent to which Mound Bayou residents were shielded from the oppressive political culture, as will be demonstrated later, was problematic.

Mound Bayou was founded by ex-slaves Isaiah T. Montgomery and his cousin Benjamin T. Green in 1887. Since then Mound Bayou has known black empowerment, while Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula have come to know black empowerment within the past twelve years. Such a comparison therefore must be cognizant of the unusual status of Mound Bayou's officials to the extent that they operated within the oppressive political culture of Mississippi and said political culture set the extent to which political development manifested itself in Mound Bayou. It is also ironic that one of Mound Bayou's founding fathers and leaders, Isaiah Montgomery, contributed, in part, to the feeble position of its town officials. It was Montgomery who endorsed a set of proposals at the 1890 Mississippi Constitutional Convention with the expressed intent to
disfranchise black voters with or without education, while at the same time, disfranchising no white voters.¹

The historical impetus for the all-black town began when the federal government gained control of several plantations at Davis Bend along the Mississippi River, including the property of Joseph Davis, brother of confederate President Jefferson Davis, and former owner of Benjamin Montgomery (father of Isaiah Montgomery).²

Meanwhile, Benjamin Montgomery purchased 200 acres from Joseph Davis and established a black colony. Benjamin and son Isaiah initiated a campaign to attract blacks to the colony by placing advertisements in newspapers. The following is an example of such advertisements:

    The undersigned (Montgomerys) having secured for a term of three years the Hurricane and Brierfield plantations propose to organize a community composed of colored people, to occupy and cultivate said plantations, and invite the cooperation of such as are recommended by honesty, industry, sobriety, and intelligence in the enterprise.³


²Community Development Plan, Mound Bayou, Mississippi, June, 1977.

A plantation-like system was set up under Benjamin Montgomery's leadership—Montgomery rented the land out to tenants for fifty cents per acre and provided loans and supplies for most colony residents. A formal government structure was set up with a community council as the government body. The community at-large elected members to the council. And the council was given the authority to make laws, to levy taxes for education, and to expel members who broke community laws.  

With the government structure in place, the colony officially began and was very successful for the first decade. However, the colony did not exist without problems. Colony residents were often stopped by white law enforcement officials from surrounding towns and often jailed on trumped up charges; and, aside from being jailed, their property was often mutilated by whites. The clinching blow came to the colony when Jefferson Davis sued and regained the title to the land, thereby contributing to the demise of the colony.

Benjamin Montgomery died shortly after the demise of the colony, but the idea of an all-black town did

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4 Ibid., p. 3.  
5 Ibid.
not die with him. The idea became a reality when Isaiah Montgomery, along with his cousin, Benjamin Green, purchased 840 acres of land at $7.00 per acre, paying $420 down with the balance due in annual payments to the Illinois Central Railroad. Saunders Redding observes that the land was basically wilderness and was cleared with hatchets and machetes. The philosophy of this venture was recapitulated in Montgomery's initial speech to the small band of men that arrived at the swampy wilderness in the fall of 1887:

Why stagger at the difficulties that confront you; have you not for centuries braved the miasma and hewn down forests like these at the behest of a master? Can you not do it for yourselves and your children unto successive generations that they may worship and develop under their own vine and fig tree.\footnote{Ibid.}

With the philosophy of self-determination recapitulated, Mound Bayou began its rocky course for economic and social survival in Mississippi's hostile political environment. For the first decade, economic survival was difficult. Many residents were self-employed and earned money by selling crossties to the railroad and

wood to surrounding whites, while others picked cotton and performed domestic work for whites.

The early 1900's, however, marked the beginning of a boom period, both in terms of economic growth and population. Data from Figure 1 disclose the extent to which Mound Bayou businesses grew and declined during the era of 1890-1960.\(^8\) The number of businesses rose sharply after 1920 and continued to rise until 1933, after which, Mound Bayou experienced a radical decline in the number of business enterprises.

Figure 1 further shows a correlation between the increase of business and the growth of Mound Bayou's population, particularly from 1920 to the latter part of the 1930's.\(^9\) This is a significant finding when it is considered that this was also the Depression era. The rise of white terrorist groups in Mississippi during this period may have been a contributing factor to this phenomenon, for Mound Bayou was a haven for blacks in

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\(^9\)Ibid.
FIGURE 1
GROWTH AND DECLINE OF THE NUMBER OF BUSINESSES OF MOUND BAYOU 1890-1960

FIGURE 2

POPULATION GROWTH OF MOUND BAYOU, MISSISSIPPI 1887-1970

This graph shows the increase and decline of the population of Mound Bayou over a period of 80 years.

conflict with Mississippi's oppressive political culture. Nevertheless, after 1937 Mound Bayou's population dropped radically. The population decline, in part, can be contributed to the inability of Mound Bayou to develop economically. The number of business enterprises dropped from 56 in 1933 to 21 in 1937.

Concurrent with the decline in business in Mound Bayou was also the decline in cotton prices. And in 1933, fifty percent of the town's business establishments dealt with some aspect of cotton enterprise. Yet, the extent to which Mound Bayou developed economically, to a large degree, hinged on the support and reaction of the largely white surrounding communities. This is an important variable that can not be overlooked, as a discussion of the white reaction to the economic institutions established by financial entrepreneur, Charles Banks, will later show.

When Banks moved to Mound Bayou in 1905, the economic as well as the political aspects of the community were dominated by the co-founding families. Therefore, however, economic development in the early 1900's was dominated by Banks; he established several economic institutions

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10 Ibid.
that were designed to reinforce Mound Bayou's cotton economy. Even though Banks' economic enterprises were tied to Mound Bayou's cotton economy, they went beyond the Ma and Pa enterprises that comprised Mound Bayou's business district.

Major enterprises founded by Banks were a bank, an insurance company, the Mississippi Negro Business League, and the Mound Bayou Oil Mill and Manufacturing Company. In addition to the Mound Bayou bank, Banks helped to establish several other black banks that existed in Mississippi during the early 1900's.

The oil mill, in particular, was predicted by Banks and others - including Booker T. Washington, the twentieth century protagonist of vocational education - as the largest employer for Mound Bayou and for the South in general. Thus it was fitting that Washington would be the keynote speaker at the opening of the oil mill. In his speech, Washington articulated that:

> You can occupy the soil for all time on one condition, and that is that through your brains, through your skilled hands, that you can prove to the world that you can get as much out of an acre of land as the people of any other race can get out of the acre. But

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the minute the world discovers that a man of some other race or color or religion can get more out of an acre than a black man, from that moment forward the black man will begin to lose his hold as a farmer. 12

It was ironic that Washington's speech postulated the adverse reaction of surrounding whites to the opening of the oil mill--whites boycotted the mill by refusing to bring their seeds to the mill. In an effort to break the boycott, Banks turned the mill over to two white men, one a financier from Memphis, Tennessee, who in turn leased the mill and became its first white manager. 13 The scheme backfired, however, when the white manager refused to submit a financial statement to Banks and subsequently took the mill's assets and left town. The mill reopened twice under the management of two whites; but the die was cast and the mill closed permanently in the mid-twenties.

The Mound Bayou Bank, another project of Charles Banks, was closed by the State Banking Commission because its securities represented "Negro properties." A local newspaper discussed the Commission's action as follows:

The bank ought not to have been closed in the opinion of the best bankers in the state. Not a single irregularity of even so slight a

13 Ibid., p. 88.
character was found on the books, and not a penny was out of place. The authorities were dissatisfied with the securities, we learn.14

In addition to closing the bank, the State Banking Commission made an effort to indict the bank officials, charging that the bank security was worthless, based upon "Negro properties in a Negro town."15

With the demise of the bank and oil mill, along with the Depression, many residents lost land and moved to northern cities seeking employment. At the same time, other residents were forced to seek loans from surrounding white merchants and bankers in order to farm. The white merchants raised their interest rates and some stipulated that the farmer's cotton had to be ginned outside of Mound Bayou. When the price of cotton dropped, bankers and merchants instituted foreclosure against many residents with outstanding loans. This action resulted in the loss of over 4,000 acres of land.16

Furthermore, in 1926 and 1941, fires destroyed the majority of the business district in Mound Bayou -

14 Ibid.


16 Williamson, "Mound Bayou History," p. 5.
signaling trouble for the already depressed economy. Thus, the promise of economic securities for blacks in Mound Bayou continued to be a promise, yet to be reached.

It should be noted that the early economic history of Mound Bayou, and particularly the experience of Charles Banks, typify the economic dilemma of black economic development in the United States. Blacks have not been successful in establishing durable economic institutions other than those designed to serve exclusively the needs of blacks, given their impetus, in part, because these services were not provided by the large business community, due to the Jim Crow policy of the United States and the manifestation of that policy. This is particularly true for the South, and to a large extent, for the North as well.

Mound Bayou's Early Political History

Mound Bayou's early political history is the legacy of Isaiah T. Montgomery, for it was the Montgomery clan that dominated Mound Bayou politics; it was Montgomery's action at the 1890 Constitutional Convention, in part, that established the political position for Mississippi blacks, a position that remained firmly entrenched for much of the twentieth century. According to Redding, Montgomery's action at the convention may have been
motivated by personal ambitions inasmuch as his behavior at the convention secured Montgomery undisturbed control of Mound Bayou and its people. Redding further surmises that:

For years he was the mayor, and he handpicked the three aldermen. Though the white sheriff of Bolivar County appointed the Negro deputy for Mound Bayou, Isaiah named him. Isaiah chose the town constable. He hired the first school teacher and guaranteed the salary of the first preacher. By 1895 there were four thousand Negroes in Mound Bayou and the colony spread over twenty thousand alluvial acres and was still growing. Isaiah owned either in whole or in part with his cousin Ben Green the cotton gin and the warehouse, the feed and fertilizer store, the lumberyard, the general merchandise emporium and burial business. He owned uncounted mortgages. He was turning a profit of eight thousand dollars a year on rough lumber alone, and he was reputed to be - and probably was - the only Negro in the United States who could put his hands on fifty thousand dollars "cash money" in an hour's notice.17

It was this political and economic domination by Montgomery that eventually led to a split between the founding fathers. An interview of Green's son in 1939 explained the extent of the Montgomery-Green relationship:

My father was a more practical man than (Montgomery), he said, "they were cousins, you know. My father didn't know very much about the principles upon which he was supposed

17 Redding, The Lonesome Road, pp. 119-120.
to act, and he didn't bother to learn. But he lived according to certain principles by instinct, and he lived in harmony with old (Montgomery's) idealism. Father made a little money for himself and a little for (Montgomery) too. But here's where they were worlds apart: Father just didn't like whites and thought that both races would get along better by separation. He used to boast that after he was free he never lifted an ax or a hoe for a white man. That was Father. 18

To be sure, Green played the primary role in the economic life of Mound Bayou and the economic fortunes of the Montgomery clan. Green was the town mechanic, thus, keeping the cotton gin and sawmill going, and for over thirty years did the bidding for Montgomery. Nevertheless, Green seems to have grown dissatisfied with their economic arrangements. Speculation would have it that, Montgomery benefited considerably more from the economic arrangement; thus, in 1892 Green dissolved the partnership, and "mistrust and enmity bred." 19 Four years later: Green was shot to death by an unknown assailant.

The intrablack conflict between Green and Montgomery was but a sign for what was to come in the intrablack conflict of Mound Bayou. In 1916 Mayor Cresswell failed to


19 Redding, The Lonesome Road, p. 20.
hold the city election and the Mayor and Board of Aldermen maintained their positions until January 23, 1917. On February 15, an election was held in which Mayor Cresswell and the incumbent Board were reelected. Meanwhile, in mid-January, 1917, Isaiah Montgomery, in the company of a white lawyer from Merigold, went to Jackson to see the "indomitable racist, Governor Bilbo." Bilbo responded by appointing an entirely new slate of town officials headed by E. P. Booze, Montgomery's son-in-law. However, Cresswell and members of the Board of Aldermen refused to relinquish their office. Thus, Mound Bayou, for nearly a year, had two separate governments. The conflict was finally resolved in 1918 by the fifth Circuit Court which ruled in favor of Cresswell and the Banks faction.

In 1919, Benjamin Green's son defeated E. P. Booze in the mayoral race. The Montgomery-Green faction continued to oppose each other for several years thereafter; however, B. A. Green was reelected as mayor in every race until his death in 1960.

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21 Ibid.

With the intrablack conflict monopolizing the life of Mound Bayou residents, very few organizational efforts were made to alter their disposition within Mississippi's political culture. The lack of such effort may be accounted for by the attitude that Mound Bayou residents had toward fellow Mississippi blacks. According to Milburn Crowe, Jr., a Mound Bayou historian, blacks in Mound Bayou viewed themselves differently from other blacks in the state. They considered themselves to be in a better position politically, educationally, economically, and socially, and thus a better class of blacks in the state.\textsuperscript{23} Another reason could have been the fact that they knew they could not change the situation statewide. In 1938, the reality of this impression came when the National Guard invaded Mound Bayou after the mysterious murders of E. P. Booze and Montgomery's daughter.

Notwithstanding Mound Bayou's unique political history, the period from 1940-1968 saw both an era of economic development and political organization. The impetus for economic development began when the Knights and Daughters of Tabor established the Taborian Hospital

\textsuperscript{23}Interview with Milburn Crowe, Jr., Mound Bayou, Mississippi, 12 March, 1980.
(today the hospital and health center are the largest employer in Mound Bayou). The economic development for the period culminated with the founding of the Magnolia Life Insurance Company, and the establishment of the Delta Community Health Center by Tufts University in 1967. In addition, the Mound Bayou Development Corporation was founded to promote economic development.²⁴

Concurrent with the economic development in Mound Bayou, there was also a growth in political activities. For a while during the 1950's and early 1960's, Mound Bayou was the center of the Civil Rights movement in Mississippi. The Mound Bayou Community Hospital (formerly the Taborian Hospital) was the health center for many civil rights workers injured by hostile whites.

Dr. Howard, a Mound Bayou physician, and other blacks throughout the state met in Cleveland, Mississippi and formed the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership. The organization's goals were clearly stated:

To guide our people in their civil responsibilities regarding health, education, religion, registration and voting, law enforcement, tax paying, the preservation of property, the value

"Mound Bayou 1973: City in Transition," Bureau of Governmental Research, University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi, March 22, 1972, p. 23.
of saving, and in all things which will make us stable, qualified, conscientious citizens.25

With the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership firmly established, Dr. Howard spearheaded several marches protesting the social, economic, and political disposition of black Mississippians. Several of these organizational meetings were held in Mound Bayou.

Thus, conflict which had traditionally plagued the prudent town, struck it once again. Some residents, fearful of the meeting, claimed that the "best residents did not want them."26 Eventually the organizer of these meetings, Dr. Howard, was forced to leave the state by the white Citizen's Council in 1963.27

Mound Bayou's Contemporary Politics

Mound Bayou's contemporary politics began with the election of Earl Lucas and four new members to the Board of Aldermen in the 1969 municipal election. It was also in 1969 when political subjugation of black Mississippians was moderated by the election of blacks throughout the state for the first time since the Reconstruction era.

26Ibid., p. 21
The 1969 election was seen by many as a radical break with the apolitical posture of prior administrations and a sign that aggressive leadership had at last captured the impoverished delta town. Before 1969, it was alleged that white elected officials from the county and surrounding towns exercised undue influence over the operation of town government. The city was divided into two police jurisdictions, with the northern half controlled by Shelby, while the southern half was under the jurisdiction of Merigold.28 Further, city records were housed in county offices and the offices of the city's white lawyers. These records were never recovered by the Lucas administration, however.

Before 1969, it is noteworthy to mention, few initiatives were advanced to address outstanding problems in Mound Bayou. However, it is problematic whether federal agencies would have responded to such initiatives, given the political environment in the nation and the manifestation of such an environment.

Notwithstanding, blacks in Mound Bayou had a degree of freedom, inasmuch as they voted for their officials and participated in community politics. As previously

28 Interview with Earl S. Lucas, mayor of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, 11 March, 1980.
noted, during the period from the late 1920's to the early 1960's, Mound Bayou served as a place of refuge for blacks from throughout the state who came into conflict with the political forces of the state; blacks were often shipped out of the state in coffins from Mound Bayou. Beyond this point, however, Mound Bayou residents too were subject to Mississippi's oppressive forces.

Historically, Mound Bayou was not able to provide employment for its residents; thus, they too were at the disposal of white employers from surrounding towns. Still, many residents are employed in factories in Shelby and Cleveland, Mississippi. At the same time, residents are employed by the Mound Bayou Community Hospital and the Delta Community Health Center, while others are employed by the city through a number of federally funded projects. The Mound Bayou Community Hospital and the Health Center, however, are Mound Bayou's largest employers. The town's business district, for the most part, consists of Ma and Pa establishments, consequently employing very few people.

Moreover, the city's master plan reveals that economically, Mound Bayou, like Fayette, Shelby, Bolton, and Tchula, is poor. According to the plan, over three-fifths

29Interview with Milburn Crowe, 10 March, 1980.
of all residents in Mound Bayou live below the poverty level; and 91.7 percent had an annual income of $5,000 or less in 1970.\textsuperscript{30} Largely because Mound Bayou's economy is service oriented, few high paying jobs exist.

\textbf{Recent Intrablack Conflict in Mound Bayou}

At this point, we can turn to the central question that this chapter hoped to answer. The extent to which the socioeconomic well being of Mound Bayou residents differs from that of blacks in the transition towns. As a prelude, however, a discussion of recent intrablack conflict in Mound Bayou is in order. Concurrent with the changes in leadership in 1969, intrablack conflict once again surfaced in the turbulent town.

The present conflict centers around the 1969 and 1973 municipal elections. In 1969, former Mayor Liddell unsuccessfully challenged the election results, and in 1973, filed suit in the Bolivar County Circuit Court in order to make changes in the ballots and the way in which the election was held. He was unsuccessful in this effort.

Also, in 1973, former Alderman Milburn Crowe sued the city, stating that city officials rigged the municipal

\textsuperscript{30}Rebecca Shaw and Wanda Stringer, "Community Development Plan," Mound Bayou, Mississippi, June, 1977, p. 16.
election. The Bolivar County Circuit Court concurred with Crowe and invalidated the city election results and ordered that a new election be held. The court ordered election was not held until a second order was issued in 1975. Nevertheless, Crowe continued to hold his position on the Board of Aldermen as required by state law. However, Crowe states that when he attempted to participate at Board meetings, he was arrested and jailed on three separate occasions and charged with disturbing the peace;\(^\text{31}\) the arrests were reportedly requested by Mayor Lucas.\(^\text{32}\) The scenario further unfolded with Crowe being arrested a fourth time on a warrant signed by municipal Judge Harold Ward, accusing Crowe of violating a city water ordinance (it should be noted that Ward defeated Crowe in the 1973 municipal election). Notwithstanding these arrests, Crowe was never brought to trial on any of these charges.\(^\text{33}\)

Crowe filed a second suit in the federal district court alleging that he was deprived of his civil rights by city officials, including: Mayor Lucas, Judge Ward, former Police Chief Alfred Thompson, and Assistant Police

\(^\text{31}\)Interview with Milburn Crowe, 10 March, 1980.

\(^\text{32}\)Ibid.

Chief Oliver Anderson. In May 1979, United States District Court Judge Orman R. Smith, Jr., awarded Crowe $10,000 in damages. And six months later Crowe was awarded $11,000 in attorney's fees and $1,363.97 in expenses for the suit he brought against city officials after he lost in the 1973 municipal election. A third case is pending in federal court alleging that Crowe was deprived of the right to be on the ballot in the 1977 city election, an election in which he ran for Alderman.

The current suit further alleges that Mound Bayou officials denied many residents the right to vote in the 1977 municipal election. In addition, the suit charges that officials rigged the city voting machines to reject ballots that were not marked for a slate of candidates controlled by Mayor Lucas; as a result over 1,100 votes were invalid.

The final intrablack conflict to be mentioned centers around a move to change the name of the local high school from John F. Kennedy Memorial High School back to its original name - Mound Bayou High School. In 1965, immediately after the death of President John F. Kennedy, the

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34 Ibid.
35 Interview with Milburn Crowe, 10 March, 1980.
school's name was changed as a memorial to his death. In 1980, however, several residents (two of whom worked for the city) were successful in getting the school board to change the school's name back to its original name. The action precipitated a three day boycott of classes by students and parents protesting the name change. The school board, nevertheless, stood firm on its decision to proceed with the name change. However, the conflict was very much evident when this writer visited the town in March, 1980.

The extent of present intrablack conflicts in Mound Bayou is further suggested in a letter written to the editor of a local newspaper by Sam Clifton, a local school teacher. Clifton writes:

It is one thing for elected officials, to make decisions concerning the operations, policies and proper protocol of the public institution in which they are elected to serve. But it is a horse of a different color to make decisions (those that concern the entire community) without consulting the owners of the institution first, (community, or should I say, "the tax payers").

That is exactly what happened when a precious few (a mole hill or a mountain) decided to change the name of "John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial High School" in Mound Bayou, Ms., to that of "Mound Bayou High School."36

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36Editorial taken from files of Sam Clifton during an interview, 10 March, 1980.
Clifton further charges that the issue of the school name change is not of primary importance but rather the actions of a few city officials who are becoming too powerful in the community. He calls upon concerned citizens to re-unite and become a strong political force in the community inorder to weed out those officials who are not concerned about the general community's welfare.37

The school conflict represented a deeper problem on the community intrablack conflicts, however, intrablack conflicts have not blocked mayoral initiatives from the Lucas administration. Concurrent with the intrablack conflicts; Mound Bayou continues to be subject to external pressures from traditional adversaries as will be discussed below.

A Comparison of the Socioeconomic Status of Blacks in a Traditional Black Town Vis-A-Vis Blacks in Four Transitional Towns

We are now in a position to compare the socioeconomic status of blacks in Mound Bayou with that of blacks in Fayette, Bolton, Shelby, and Tchula. The same indicators used earlier will be used here to measure the extent to which Mound Bayou's officials were successful in using their positions to alter outstanding community problems. As mentioned previously, any comparison must acknowledge

37Ibid.
the unique status of Mound Bayou officials in Mississippi's political environment and the extent to which this environment influenced social, economic, and political development in Mound Bayou.

Municipal Services

As noted, Mound Bayou, like its counterparts, provided few municipal services for blacks before 1970. The absence of municipal services for blacks in the four transitional towns was the product of discriminatory allocation of town resources. On the other hand, the lack of municipal services for Mound Bayou residents was the result of limited city resources, absence of mayoral initiatives to address these problems, and the discriminatory policy of the Bolivar County Board of Supervisors. The suit charged that the Board had helped historically white-governed municipalities in street construction while not providing the same benefits to Mound Bayou. Further, the suit alleged that the county had failed to provide the city with half of the ad valorem tax monies collected in Mound Bayou. Under state law, a town may request payment of half of the ad valorem taxes or it may allow the county

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38 Interview with Hermon Johnson, member of the Board of Aldermen, Mound Bayou, Mississippi, 12 March, 1980.
to keep the half and have the authority to do certain street work within the town's corporate limits.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, the suit asked the court to compel the Bolivar County Board of Supervisors to provide the following services to Mound Bayou:

(1) Cease discrimination and provide Mound Bayou "equal county facilities and services for the construction, paving, maintenance and repair" of streets entering or located in Mound Bayou.

(2) "Remedy...the effects of past patterns and practices of discrimination" in providing county services.

(3) Pave streets and roads with materials and workmanship comparable to those used in predominantly white municipalities in Bolivar County.

(4) Provide street lights, sewage, water facilities and all other facilities and amenities essential to the provision of streets and roads as provided in other Bolivar County municipalities.\textsuperscript{40}

On December 30, 1976 the suit was settled out of court by Mound Bayou and the Bolivar County Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors agreed to asphalt 2.46 miles of street in Mound Bayou.\textsuperscript{41}

Coupled with the above, it is interesting to note that Mound Bayou officials, before 1969, did not aggressively seek federal and foundation monies to address

\textsuperscript{39} Interview with Hermon Johnson, 12 March, 1980.


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
outstanding problems in the poverty stricken town. The extent to which these agencies would have responded to the initiatives of Mound Bayou officials is uncertain, however. The present administration has aggressively pursued federal and foundations monies to address these salient community problems. Mayor Lucas has built his administration on federal and foundation money; moreover, various municipal services and other social services have been provided to Mound Bayou residents since 1969 as a result of federal and foundation monies.

In 1969 there was only one paved street in Mound Bayou and the water and sewage systems were not providing enough water to cover residents' needs. There was also no organized police department, no fire protection, and no organized garbage collection system. Data from Table 1 show the areas in which the mayor of Mound Bayou, along with the mayors of the transitional towns, has made improvements. The data further show that mayors of Mound Bayou, Bolton, and Fayette have made municipal improvements in several areas. On the other hand, mayors of Shelby and Tchula have made few municipal improvements. In Chapter III we outlined in detail these municipal improvements made by the mayors of the transitional towns and need not recapitulate here. However, a discussion of
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+ Denotes progress has been made
- Denotes no progress has been made

Source: Data for this table were obtained from city records and interviews with mayors and community residents, and from the Mississippi Research and Development Center, Jackson, Mississippi.
municipal improvements made by Mound Bayou officials will complete the picture. Indeed, this will enable us to ascertain how Mound Bayou residents compared to residents of the transitional towns.

As noted earlier, few municipal services were provided for Mound Bayou residents before the election of Mayor Lucas in 1969. However, the Lucas administration is credited with building a water and sewage system which, in 1969, was not producing enough water for residents. The administration was successful in getting an emergency grant of $580,000 from the Economic Development Administration to build the systems.

Other accomplishments of the Lucas administration are: a new City Hall, an organized police department, a new police car, and fire and garbage trucks. Finally, the administration has paved most city streets; and as mentioned previously, the Bolivar County Board of Supervisors agreed to asphalt 2.46 miles of street in Mound Bayou.42 This project, however, was not completed when the writer visited Mound Bayou in March, 1980.

Municipal improvements in Mound Bayou, like those made by mayors of the transitional towns were the result

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42 Interview with Earl Lucas, March, 1980.
of federal and foundation monies. Thus, largely because all of the improvements made by the black mayors were achieved as a function of processes beyond their control, one can correctly assume that in time of scarcity, these processes will be closed to them. The adverse reaction from Mississippi’s state and local politicians to Mound Bayou’s $4.9 million grant from the Economic Development Administration in 1977 underlines this point.

Senator Eastland, Representative Cochran, and a number of state and municipal officials requested that the Economic Development Administration (EDA) withdraw the grant and spread the $4.9 million among cities and towns whose applications were rejected. Moreover, Representative Cochran asked for a congressional committee to investigate the circumstatnces surrounding the awarding of the grant to Mound Bayou, pointing out that the $4.9 million represented nearly half of the $10 million earmarked for Mississippi.43

Opponents further charged that Mound Bayou officials did not follow EDA guidelines when they bypassed Mississippi’s EDA director and used erroneous unemployment figures. Mayor Lucas defended his action, stating that he

bypassed Mississippi's EDA director and sent his application to EDA officials in Atlanta, Georgia because the Mississippi director did not respond favorably to former applications from mayors of black towns.44 In regard to the employment figures, Mayor Lucas states that they were obtained from the Mississippi Employment Commission (MEC). Opponents charged, however, that Lucas used the employment figures of 10.2 percent obtained from the MEC on October 18, and that September figures were released on October 20, in which Mound Bayou's combined unemployment rate was reduced to 8.7 percent. Yet, when application was submitted on October 26, Mound Bayou used the earlier unemployment figures.

Meanwhile, under political pressure, EDA national officials said that the grant would be cut by $2.1 million, stating that the grant was made in error and that Mound Bayou officials should accept $2.4 million instead.45 According to the Washington Post, Mayor Lucas "states that Mr. Eden, head of the national office of EDA, said that

44 Interview with Earl Lucas, March, 1980.
he was cutting the grant because of heavy pressure from the Mississippi Congressional Delegation."[^46] Thus, Mayor Lucas was asked by Eden to agree to the proposed cut of $2.1 million. However, the mayor offered Eden a counter proposal, stating that he would be willing to accept the $2.1 million cut if EDA officials would guarantee Mound Bayou a $3.6 million grant under its regular public works program—EDA officials, however, declined his proposal. Nevertheless, in late January, 1977, EDA officials stated that they found no errors and the $4.9 million grant would not be withdrawn.[^47]

Employment and Current Economic Development in Bound Bayou

Historically, Mound Bayou, like most rural towns, has not been successful in providing employment for its residents. And with the decline of the cotton economy and subsequent mechanization of the cotton industry, sustained mass unemployment evolved in towns such as Mound Bayou. Recent large programs such as Head Start, special grants to health facilities, and food subsidiary programs have only succeeded in stabilizing the economic decline of Mound Bayou.


Mayor Lucas states that the unemployment rate for Mound Bayou is around twenty-one percent. Furthermore, the town is dangerously dependent upon federal and foundation money for economic survival. Compounding Mound Bayou's economic dilemma is the inability to attract industry to the town. When the town has attempted to attract industry, company officials have contended that the town needed to improve its infrastructures. According to Alderman Johnson, now that they have corrected the infrastructures, companies have other excuses. It is the mayor's contention that his lack of political allies in the county has also hurt his efforts to attract industry to the town. Still another factor is that blacks hold so few countywide positions. At the same time, town officials charge that the state EDA has not lent its support to Mound Bayou's efforts to develop economically.\footnote{Interview with Hermon Johnson, 12 March, 1980.}

Largely because Mound Bayou has not been able to develop economically, Mound Bayou Hospital and the Delta Community Health Center remain Mound Bayou's major employers. However, some residents are employed by City Hall and several federally funded programs operated by
City Hall. Yet fifteen are employed by Mound Bayou's only industry - the Cycle Products, Inc., which manufactures bicycle spokes and assembles rims. The business district, as noted, is made up of Ma and Pa businesses, thus employing few residents.

Data from Table 2 reveal the number of industries in Mound Bayou along with the number of jobs provided by these industries. In addition, the data show the extent to which mayors from the transitional towns have been successful in attracting industries to their towns along with the number of jobs credited to each administration since black empowerment. The job column reveals that Mound Bayou officials are credited with bringing over 600 jobs to the town since 1969; while the number of jobs the mayors of the transitional towns are credited with ranges from a high of 500 for Fayette to a low of 20 for Shelby. But, as mentioned, because these jobs are the function of processes beyond their control, it is highly possible that the mayors will not be able to maintain a large percentage of these jobs, given the economic scarcity and the reaction of political elites to this scarcity. And as already discussed, the data reveal that black mayors' successes in attracting industry to their towns has been negligible. Finally, the distribution shows that all of the mayors, except the mayor of Tchula, have established industrial parks.
### TABLE 2

NUMBER OF NEW JOBS AND INDUSTRIES SINCE BLACK EMPOWERMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Development and Employment</th>
<th>Mound Bayou</th>
<th>Fayette</th>
<th>Bolton</th>
<th>Shelby</th>
<th>Tchula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of New Jobs</td>
<td>over 600</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>over 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of New Industries</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Parks</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ Denotes progress has been made
- Denotes no progress has been made

The data for Mound Bayou cover several administrations while data for Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula are limited to the first black administrations.

Note: Progress means that mayors have been successful in bringing new industries to their communities.

Source: Data obtained from city records and personal interviews of mayors and community residents.
Housing

In assessing the quality of housing in Mound Bayou, one finds that Mound Bayou, like the transitional towns, has inadequate housing in several respects. Two hundred forty-seven or 33 percent of the 743 occupied housing units in Mound Bayou are rated as standard, while 163 or 23 percent are rated as deteriorating and 331 or 44 percent of the total number are rated as dilapidated. These statistics indicate that Mound Bayou not only needs more housing as a result of its growing population, but that there is a tremendous need for replacement of dwellings in the municipality as well. Moreover, data taken from the Mound Bayou Labor and Housing Survey indicates that:

From a population of 275 (approximately 10% of the 1970 census total for Mound Bayou) randomly selected heads of households, only 12% reported annual incomes of over $10,000 in 1975, while 40% reported no income for the same year. Also significant is the fact that of the 40% reporting no income in 1975, only 4% anticipated sources of income for 1976.

Such findings indicate the extent to which Mound Bayou residents are in need of housing. At the same time, the

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49 Shaw and Stringer, "Community Development Plan," pp. 15-16.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
data reveal that residents are unable to provide adequate housing for themselves.

Mound Bayou officials have attempted to address the housing problem, however. Data from Table 3 reveal the extent to which they have been successful - as well as the success of mayors of the transitional towns. The data indicate inconclusive results.

The distribution reveals that the mayors of Mound Bayou, Fayette, and Bolton have been credited with building 50, 80 and 40 units of public housing, respectively. The mayor of Tchula, however, is not credited with building any public housing facilities. One further finds that only the mayors of Mound Bayou and Fayette have been successful in the private housing category. As the same time, the data reveal that the mayors of Mound Bayou and Tchula have rehabilitated 5 and 20 houses, respectively. Finally, the distribution indicates that the mayors of Mound Bayou and Fayette have been approved for additional public housing units. These achievements, however, have not seriously altered the housing problem.

Health Care and Social Services

As discussed previously, poor health care among blacks and the poor is a characteristics of the rural South. Compounding this predicament for Mississippi's
### TABLE 3

**HOUSING: THE STATUS AND NUMBER OF NEW HOUSING CONSTRUCTED SINCE BLACK EMPOWERMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Mound Bayou</th>
<th>Fayette</th>
<th>Bolton</th>
<th>Shelby</th>
<th>Tchula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>50 units</td>
<td>80 units</td>
<td>40 units</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>8 houses</td>
<td>5 subdivisions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>247/33%</td>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>DNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deteriorating</td>
<td>165/23%</td>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>DNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilapidated</td>
<td>331/44%</td>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>DNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Denotes no progress has been made
DNA - denotes data not available

**Source:** Data were obtained from city records, community development plans and personal interviews with mayors and community residents.
blacks was the state racist political structure. It was customary for white operated medical institutions to refuse medical treatment to blacks. This was particularly true for blacks in Mound Bayou. Thus, the Mound Bayou Hospital was founded in 1942 by the Knights and Dauthers of Tabor, an all-black fraternity, in order to provide health care for Mound Bayou residents.

Though the hospital originally served Mound Bayou residents, it immediately became the major health center for indigent blacks and the poor from surrounding towns. In 1967, the Tufts-Delta Health Center began operating in Mound Bayou under the auspices of the Tufts University School of Medicine, as a result of a $1.2 million grant from the United States Office of Economic Opportunity. 52

The health center was the product of Tufts University's medical commitment to produce services for the poor. The University's medical school was operating a health center in a Boston ghetto and was looking to establish a counterpart in the South. It needed a town in the South where it could have a formal working relationship; thus, Mound Bayou was chosen because of the

outstanding health needs in Bolivar County and because Mound Bayou officials were black and sensitive to the needs of the poor. The need for such an institution is revealed by the following data. In 1967, seventy-five percent of blacks in Bolivar County were unemployed and had an average annual family income of $1,000 per annum. Moreover, the infant mortality rate of blacks was 60 per 1,000 live births.\footnote{53} As stated, these problems were further compounded by the social, political, economic, and the racist climate of the state. Besides segregation, many Mississippi hospitals required a $50 deposit before admission, thus effectively precluding use by a great majority of blacks and many poor whites.

In 1972, the two institutions - the Mound Bayou Hospital and the Tufts-Delta Health Center - merged into a single institution called the Delta Community Hospital and Health Center. The consolidation was at the insistence of federal agencies that had funded the facilities for some time. Thus, with the consolidation of the two health facilities, it became the nation's largest and most highly acclaimed comprehensive health program and

\footnote{53}Ibid.
the only hospital in Mississippi that would accept indigent patients. Though the medical services are not free, the health complex has never refused medical services to any patient who could not pay for them.

The health complex is overly dependent on financial support from federal agencies, foundations, and private donations. Thus its financial history has been that of a long struggle to obtain funds from the sources mentioned. Moreover, the health complex, from time to time, has been attacked by state health officials and politicians. These attacks are rooted in the state's political culture and are therefore systematic extensions of that culture.

The most blatant assault on the health complex was launched in 1972 by then Mississippi Governor William Waller. Waller vetoed a federal Office of Economic Opportunity grant of $5.5 million to the complex, stating that: the facility had failed to meet certain state requirements in renovating its buildings; the two institutions merged were duplicating services; and the health center Board of Directors was illegally formed.


Owen H. Brooks, chairman of the Board and Richard Polk, project director charged that:

Governor Waller's veto was still standing because the Nixon administration was courting the Democratic Governor and trying to persuade him to become a Republican to help insure Mr. Nixon's carrying Mississippi in the November election.56

Mound Bayou officials and supporters further charged that Governor Waller was trying to organize a new governing board to run the facility, one that would operate under state government control. It is also their contention that the Governor opposed the leadership of the health facility and was trying to form a new Board of Directors made up of his "colored folk."57 The stalemate was settled when officials from the Office of Economic Opportunity overrode Waller's veto.

With the economic history of Mound Bayou's medical institutions behind us, we are now in a position to compare the nature and level of health and social services provided to Mound Bayou residents with those of residents of the transitional towns. Data from Table 4 indicate

56 Ibid.
57 Interview with Owen Brooks, Greenville, Mississippi, 16 April, 1980.
that Mound Bayou provided the most comprehensive health care for its residents--Mound Bayou has both a hospital and health clinic. Fayette, however, has a comprehensive health and dental program. Moreover, the data reveal that Mound Bayou, Fayette, and Bolton have child care centers and other social services programs, but few health services are provided to residents of Shelby and Tchula. Finally, the health complexes in Mound Bayou and Fayette serve as the largest employers in the respective towns.

The extent to which these health complexes will remain predominant in Mound Bayou's and Fayette's economies is an open question, given the ideology of the newly dominant forces in Washington. We must await, however, the announcement from the Reagan jury.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Health Centers</th>
<th>Mound Bayou</th>
<th>Fayette</th>
<th>Bolton</th>
<th>Shelby</th>
<th>Tchula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Health Facilities</strong></td>
<td>Hospital and Clinic</td>
<td>Clinic</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of New Doctors</strong></td>
<td>12 or more</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Care Centers</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senior Citizens Programs</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of People Served</strong></td>
<td>over 100,000</td>
<td>over 100,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dental Services</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family and Health Services</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ Denotes progress has been made  
- Denotes no progress has been made

Source: Data obtained from city records and personal interviews with mayors and community residents.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study was initiated because of the recent changes in the political status of blacks in Mississippi and the American South in general. It was also undertaken because we felt a need to question the findings of those social scientists who assume that equal access to formal government processes would alter the socioeconomic status for Blacks in the South. Indeed, most studies of black politics during and after the Jim Crow period in the United States were often journalistic and atheoretical, hence, adding little to our understanding of black politics in the American South. In discussing the impact of black mayoral initiatives designed to reorder the socioeconomic status of black community residents, we have attempted to move beyond such a symbolic discourse by assessing the impact of situational variables on the ability of black mayors to bring social development to their communities.

As we have noted, this study looks at black empowerment in five rural Mississippi towns with black mayors by analyzing the extent to which they have altered the socioeconomic status of blacks. While this focus is
limited to Mississippi in particular, the findings can be applied to the South in general. Thus, what follows are observations made from data collected during this study.

Conventional wisdom suggests that voting and office-holding are prior conditions for altering the socioeconomic status for blacks in the South. However, our study tends to support those social scientists who suggest that electoral politics will result in few changes in the socioeconomic makeup of the black community.

Notwithstanding, some studies show that some positive results can come from black empowerment. In the final analysis we can only expect these changes to have little impact on the socioeconomic status for blacks. Mack H. Jones has shown this to be the case for Atlanta, Georgia,


while Keech has found similar results in Durham, North Carolina and Tuskegee, Alabama.⁴ Observations during the course of this study tend to support Jones and Keech's findings.

There are several reasons why black empowerment will achieve few positive results for black constituents. Foremost on the list is the fact that social development in black communities is dependent on factors that are external to electoral politics. Secondly, black mayors inherited towns beset with a number of outstanding problems. In fact, many southern towns (including the five towns under study) are financially weak, have large concentrations of substandard housing, high unemployment, low tax bases, and inadequate public facilities and services. Under such conditions mass social development will not manifest itself in communities controlled by black officeholders.

In fact, our study reveals that, in spite of the fact that Mound Bayou has known black empowerment since its founding in 1887, the socioeconomic status of its residents was similar to blacks in the four transitional towns which were previously controlled by white mayors. We must keep in mind that social development in Mound Bayou was conditioned by Mississippi's political culture and the nation

⁴Jones, "Black Political Empowerment in Atlanta." See also Keech, The Impact of Negro Voting: The Role of the Vote in the Quest for Equality.
in general. Consequently, black political empowerment in Mound Bayou, for the most part, has not been an important resource for improving the socioeconomic status of the town's residents.

Nevertheless, our analysis has suggested that black mayors tend to be sensitive to salient problems in their communities and will at least attempt to address them. Moreover, in a community where black residents have traditionally been given unequal municipal services, a black mayor may be able to correct this inequality. Yet, if successful in securing federal and foundation monies, a mayor may be able to bring in, for example, a housing program along with a few other services and social programs. In such communities social development will tend to take place exclusively in the black community. In all five towns under study social development has been directed exclusively toward the black community.

The study reveals that black mayors in the four transitional towns have made considerable progress in the area where black empowerment has given them formal control; they have made a radical change in the distribution of municipal services to the black community. Beyond this point, however, the picture is not encouraging. While black mayors have played a major role in equalizing public services to the black community, they have played
a somewhat lesser role in the other three areas: employment and economic development, housing, and health care. While most of the initiatives by black mayors have been designed to increase the allocation of municipal services to the black community, Mayor Evers and Mayor Lucas have made significant progress in the four areas used to evaluate the political effectiveness of black mayors. One must, however, take into account these mayors' tenure in office, their roles in the state and national politics, and the success of these mayors in attracting monies from the federal government and foundations. Indeed, Mayor Lucas and Evers were among the first southern mayors seeking funds from the federal government; thus, they were able to tie into some grants that carried an automatic renewal for several years (many southern white mayors refused to solicit funds from the federal government because of civil rights requirements). Finally, we must not overlook the impact of the Medger Evers Fund on social development in Fayette.

Notwithstanding these successes of Mayor Lucas and Evers, they have not been successful in laying the groundwork for establishing stable economic institutions in their communities that would maintain the present wide range of municipal and social services presently provided
to residents of Mound Bayou and Fayette. The cause lies
in the absence of support from foundations and federal
agencies. Indeed, the attainment of monies from these
sources is a prior condition for social development in
towns such as these under study. Since 1969, Mound
Bayou and Fayette have become showplaces for those who
wish to romanticize about the virtues of black empower-
ment and economic development in political subdivisions
controlled by blacks in the rural South. On close
examination, however, one finds that this symbolic notion
does not reflect reality. In May, 1981, Mound Bayou and
Fayette had the highest unemployment rates among munici-
palities in Mississippi. This is not to negate the
impact of the Lucas and Evers administration on solving
outstanding community problems, but rather, to point to
the limited utility of electoral politics for improving
the socioeconomic status of blacks, given the historical
experience of blacks in the United States and the
present manifestations of that experience. Again the
Lucas and Evers administrations' success is remarkable
relative to the mayors of Bolton, Shelby and Tchula.
However, when one considers the semiprimitive status of
the black community in Bolton, Shelby and Tchula, the
limited resources with which to work, and the negative
response from regional, state, and local institutions, this is understandable.

Moreover, the Tchula experience has shown that some black elected officials are not aggressive in initiating programs to rid the black community of significant problems. Rather, they are willing to be integrated into the existing political order, thus, carrying the agenda of the status quo. This observation supports Mack H. Jones' findings which suggest that the black leadership class in Atlanta remains tied to white economic interests.5

Furthermore, we have offered two models for explaining intracommunity political behavior under black empowerment in the rural South. These models were referred to as the "withdrawal model" and the "subversive model." As noted, the former model suggests that whites will generally withdraw from the political process under black political empowerment or at best, their political participation will be limited mainly to voting. The white community will be quiescent on most policy initiatives from the black leadership class while the black rank-and-file and the black leadership class will give almost solid support to policy initiatives.

5 Jones, "Black Political Empowerment in Atlanta," p. 117.
By contrast, in black-controlled jurisdictions where the "subversive model" is functional, white resistance to black empowerment will be intense, while politics in the black community will be marked by a quiescent black rank-and-file and by competing interests among the black leadership class. Our data, along with the theoretical propositions tend to support the propositions inherent in these models. In addition, the election of black mayors to political subdivisions throughout the rural South will likely create unreasonably high expectations on the part of black constituents, expectations of performance which can not be fulfilled. Under such condition a prudent political adversary will have an opportunity to exploit the inability of black mayors to bring social development to black communities and black political empowerment may be threatened. In fact, even if black empowerment is a lasting phenomenon it will be no panacea for altering the socioeconomic status of black constituents, but rather, the economic plight of black constituents and the fiscal situations of the towns will, in many cases, worsen. Indeed, Reagan's new Federalism will have profound effect on social development in towns such as
Mound Bayou, Fayette, Bolton, Shelby and Tchula where social development is controlled by factors outside the community.\(^6\)

Thus, because mayoral initiatives are subject to be countermanded by processes beyond the control of black mayors, socioeconomic improvements in these towns is not the function of political power properly understood, but of the good will of the dominant political forces; consequently, black empowerment will prove to be a limited political resource for ameliorating the socioeconomic status for blacks in the South.

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