



**A Report
on the
TOWN MEETING:
Mississippi 200
Program**

Nov. 1978—June 1979

**Toward a national demonstration
of effective citizen participation**

From the Governor

My fellow Mississippians, I am delighted to present to you this report on the most effective citizen involvement program that I have witnessed. It has long been my belief that the key to a progressive growing state lies with that state's towns and neighborhoods, and in the active participation of citizens in the planning and building of their own community. This report of the TOWN MEETING MISSISSIPPI 200 Program is about the 200 Mississippi communities across the state who have held Town Meetings this year. It is a salute to their efforts to involve all our citizens in building toward a better future.



Town Meetings, as you know, began in Mississippi in 1976 as a part of the bicentennial celebration of our nation, when several towns, including Jackson, held initial Town Meetings. In 1977 and 1978, Town Meetings spread to the whole state, with one Town Meeting occurring in each county and a score of Town Meetings happening in the central Delta counties around Cleveland and Greenville. Based upon solid statewide affirmation of the program, the Governor's Office of Citizen Participation, directed by Mrs. Ruth D. Wilson, working with The Institute of Cultural Affairs of Pace, Mississippi, launched the TOWN MEETING: MISSISSIPPI 200 Program in October 1978. The results have been outstanding. Two hundred Mississippi communities of all sizes, types, and locations have held Town Meetings involving 8,526 Mississippi citizens. More than that, I have seen the excitement these events have generated, and I have heard about the many activities that have occurred following the Town Meetings. The community spirit and sense of commitment that I saw when I attended the North Bay Area Town Meeting in D'Iberville, when added to the same spirit and commitment in 199 other communities, clearly indicates that the people of Mississippi

are ready and willing to give anything that is required to make the future world a better world.

We in Mississippi know the job is not done. I truly believe that Mississippi is "leading the way" for our whole nation, and the key is our people and their active participation. In this report we salute the communities who have made a decision to be their own planners and builders. The challenge for all of us is to find a way for every community in our state to experience this same possibility. Other states are watching us, because Mississippi is demonstrating the productive harmony necessary for the future of this nation. I know we will meet this challenge and continue to build a great place for our children to live.

I want to thank everyone who helped in this statewide effort, especially those of you who worked to insure that your Town Meeting would be the best community meeting ever. I extend my deep appreciation to all of you, from Abbeville to Woodville, who decided that Mississippi will indeed lead the way. I look forward to the day when I hear about Town Meetings happening regularly in every single community and neighborhood.

With every best wish, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cliff Finch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

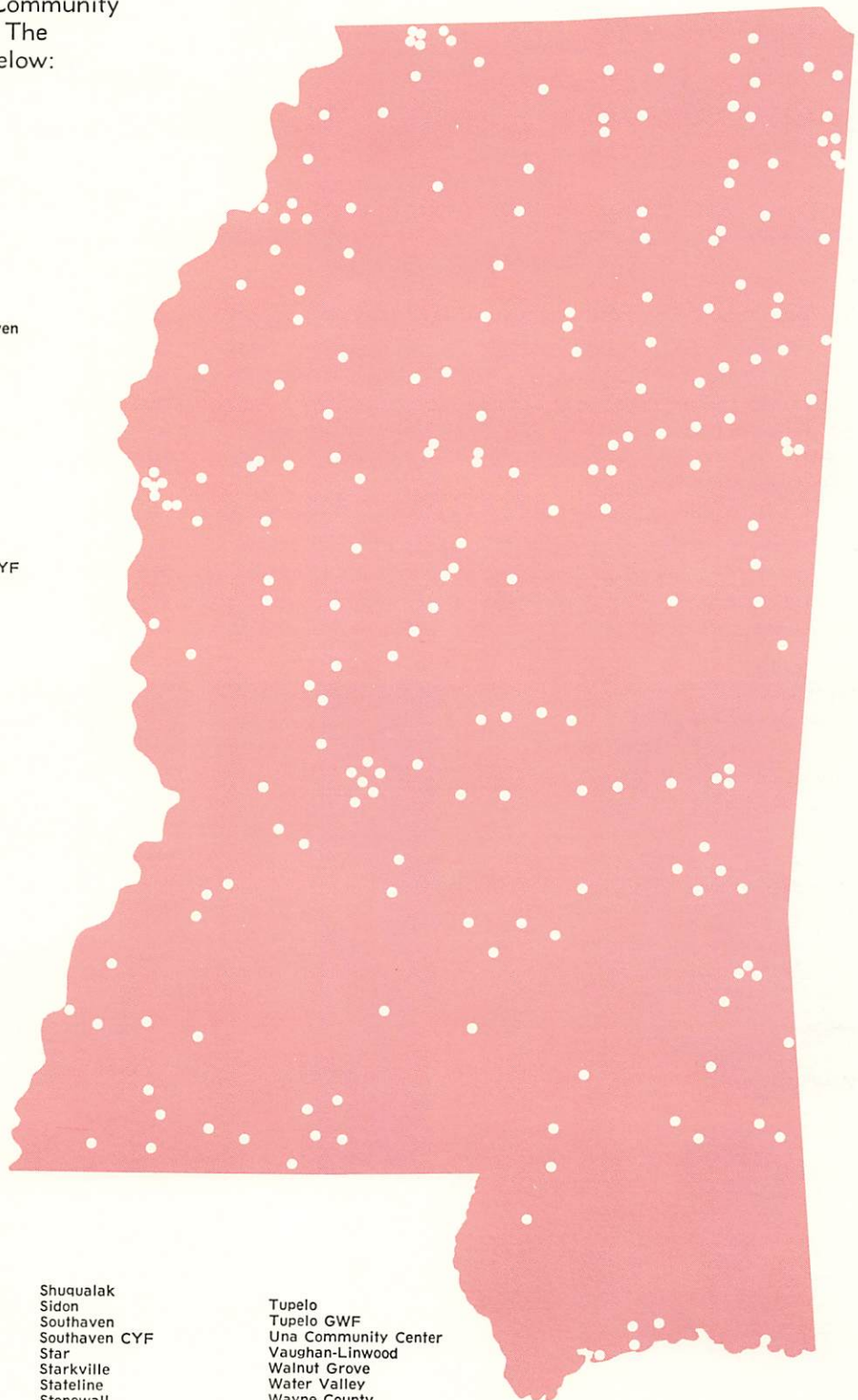
Cliff Finch
Governor

TOWN MEETING: Mississippi 200

Town Meeting: Mississippi 200 began in October 1978. By June 23, 1979, 203 Community events had been held across the state. The participating communities are listed below:

Abbeville
 Aberdeen
 Ackerman
 Alligator
 Amory
 Arcola
 Arkabutla
 Ashland
 Athens
 Baldwin
 Bassfield
 Bay Springs
 Beartown
 Beaumont
 Belmont
 Bentonia
 Blue Mountain
 Booneville
 Boswell-Sanitorium
 Brooksville
 Bruce
 Bude
 Burnsville
 Byhalia
 Caledonia
 Calhoun City
 Carrollton
 Cary
 Cedarbluff
 Centreville
 Chester
 Chunky
 Church Hill (Cannonsburg)
 Clara
 Clarksdale, Immaculate
 Conception High School CYF
 Coahoma
 Coffeetown
 Columbus
 Columbus, Caldwell High CYF
 Columbus GWF
 Corinth
 Crosby
 Crossroads
 Dennis
 Dublin
 Duck Hill
 Dundee
 Durant
 Durant CYF
 East Barnett
 Ecu
 Eden
 Edwards
 Elizabeth
 Falcon
 Falkner
 Fannin
 Farrell
 Freedom Village
 Freedom Village CYF
 French Camp
 Friars Point
 Gattman
 Glendora
 Gloster
 Golden
 Goodman
 Greenville
 Greenville CYF
 Greenville GWF
 Grenada
 Gulfport GWF
 Gulfport, North Gulfport
 Guntown
 Harrisville
 Hatley
 Hattiesburg
 Hermanville
 Hernando High CYF
 Hickory Flat
 Hickory Flat CYF
 Holcomb
 Holly Springs
 Horn Lake
 Horn Lake CYF
 Houston

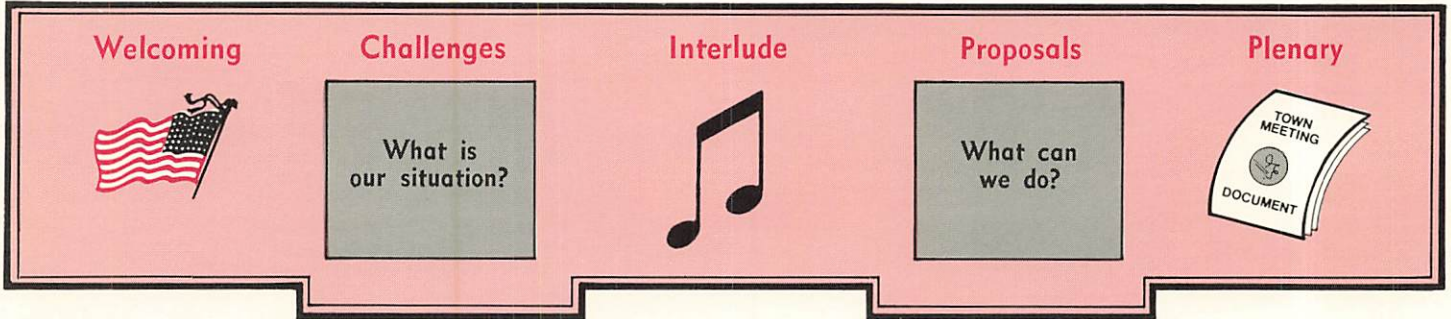
Indianola
 Indianola CYF
 Itta Bena
 Iuka
 Jackson GWF
 Jackson, Bel Air
 Jackson, Midtown
 Jackson, Pines
 Jackson, St. Joseph
 High School CYF
 Jackson, Woodlea-Woodhaven
 Jones Village
 Jonestown
 Jumpertown
 Kilmichael
 Knobtown
 Kosciusko
 LaGrange
 Lake
 Lambert
 Leakesville
 Learned
 Lena
 Liberty
 Louise
 Louisville, Nanih Waiya CYF
 Ludlow
 Lumberton
 Maben
 Macon
 Mantachie
 Mantee
 Marietta
 Mathiston
 Mayersville
 McLain
 Meridian
 Meridian GWF
 Metcalfe
 Midway
 Mineral Wells
 Mize
 Monticello
 Moorhead
 Morton
 Mount Olive
 Mt. Olive-Westview
 Natchez
 Nettleton
 New Houlka
 Newton
 North Bay Area
 North Carrollton
 Oil City
 Okolona
 Olive Branch High CYF
 Osyka
 Oxford
 Pace
 Pachuta
 Paden
 Pascagoula
 Pass Christian
 Pattison
 Pelahatchie
 Pheba
 Pickens
 Pittsboro
 Pleasant Grove
 Pleasant Valley
 Pontotoc
 Poplarville
 Prairie
 Purvis
 Quitman
 Reform
 Rienzi
 Riven Oak
 Rome
 Roxie
 Ruleville
 St. Mary's
 Sandhill High CYF
 Sardis
 Schlater
 Scooba
 Sebastopol



Shuqualak
 Sidon
 Southaven
 Southaven CYF
 Star
 Starkville
 Stalene
 Stonewall
 Taylorsville
 Tchula
 Tepper Center
 Thomas Grove
 Tickfaw-Bates
 Tishomingo
 Tremont
 Tri-County (Waynesboro)

Tupelo
 Tupelo GWF
 Una Community Center
 Vaughan-Linwood
 Walnut Grove
 Water Valley
 Wayne County
 Waynesboro
 West
 West Lauderdale County
 West Point
 White Oak Subdivision
 Winona
 Winona CYF
 Woodville

The Town Meeting Event



The Town Meeting is a community event designed to release citizen participation. It promotes a "we can" attitude by enabling a community's residents to plan realizable goals and visible activities they can do in their own town. The meetings provide an opportunity for communication between local citizens and their elected officials.

Each Town Meeting begins with a welcome by a community leader, singing and introduction of guests. A Town Meeting staff member presents an overview of the meeting. During the first workshop, the group discusses the community's actual situation and states

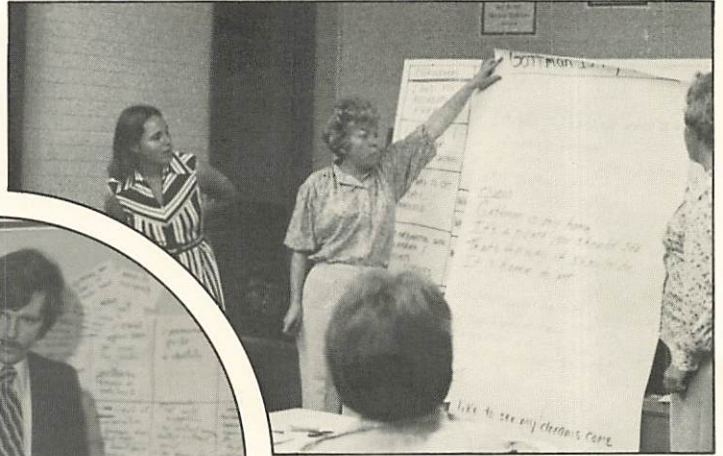
the challenges facing the town. During the interlude, refreshments are served and a small group presents their new song, story and symbol representing the history and future of the community. In the second workshop, the group lists suggestions of activities and then writes proposals of action they can do.

In the festive closing session, the proposals are reported, discussed and first implementing steps are planned. Documents containing the meeting's work are distributed. The citizens close the meeting by singing their new song, and leave with a new resolve to deal responsibly with their community.

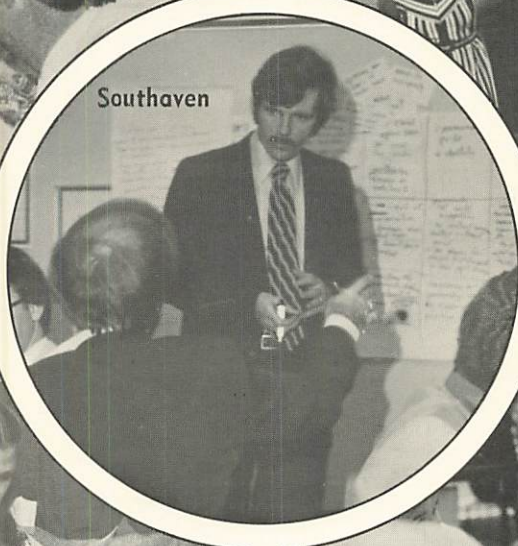
Starkville



Gattman



Southaven



4 Schlater

West Point

A Statewide Program



District by District, 8526 Mississippians Participated

Town Meeting: Mississippi 200 was a program designed to encourage citizen participation by conducting Town Meetings and Forums in towns and cities across the state. To assure maximum statewide participation, at least 20 meetings were held in each of the Planning and Development Districts from October 1978 to June 1979. The program offered three events to each community: Town Meeting, Global Women's Forum and Community Youth Forum.

The program had staff working in each district for approximately one month to set up and lead the meetings and forums. The first step in setting up the event was to contact the mayor and civic leaders. They invited a cross section of residents to a planning meeting to organize the Town Meeting for their community. Radio, newspapers, flyers and "word of mouth" announced the meeting. Civic organizations, churches, youth groups and schools became involved. Local officials, agency representatives and legislators were invited. Familiar places took on a new look as churches, firehalls, schools, courthouses, lodges and even an open pavilion became meeting places. And people came!

Town Meetings were held successfully in all types of communities. Men and women, youth and elders, residents of all ages and from every walk of life worked together, often for the first time.

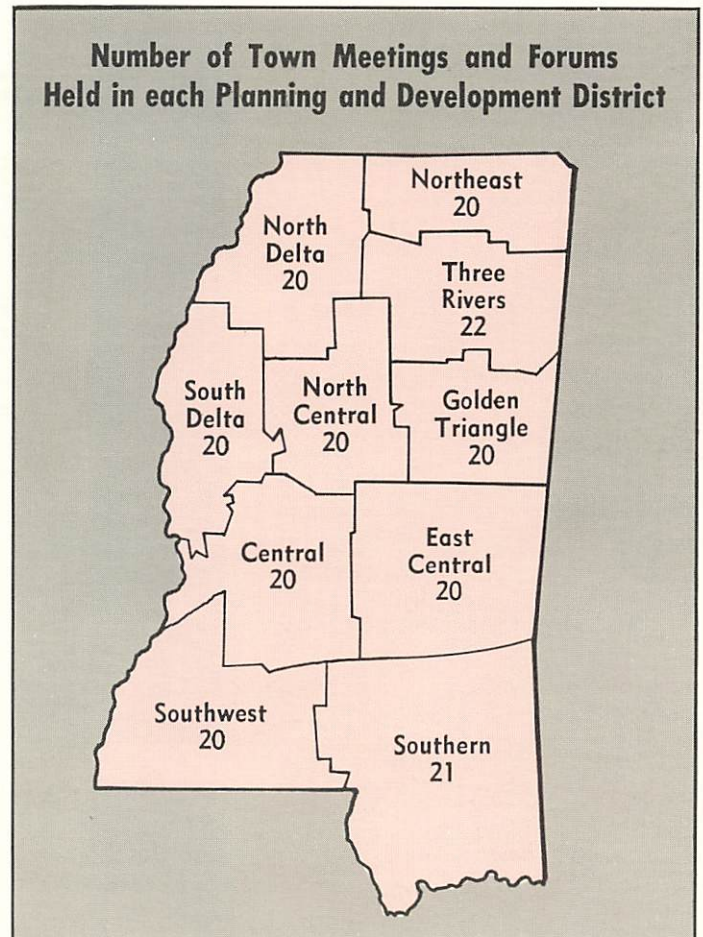
Special meetings were held which focused on the particular concerns of women. Global Women's Forum was first held in the Governor's Mansion for 127 women from across the state. Women of varied backgrounds discerned major issues of our society, addressed the challenges revealed and focused personal priorities for responding in their communities. They decided to re-invest their experience by encouraging similar programs. Five more forums brought the number of women involved to 319.

Fourteen Community Youth Forums involved 764 young people in the task of looking at the question of their meaningful participation in the society. They articulated their dreams for the future and created practical actions for responding to community needs.

Since the first meeting, held on April 10, 1976, in Jackson, 13,136 Mississippians have participated in 299 Town Meetings and Forums. Over half of the incorporated towns (167 of 288) and 69 unincorporated communities held at least one event.

On June 23, 1979, the TOWN MEETING: MISSISSIPPI 200 Program will officially end with the State Assembly held in Jackson. Citizens will report on what has happened since their Town Meeting, look forward to the coming year and celebrate the greatest resource Mississippi has — the creativity of the people.

TOWN MEETING: MISSISSIPPI 200 STATISTICAL PROFILE	
Town Meetings held	183
Global Women's Forum held	6
Community Youth Forums held ..	14
	203
Population of participating towns	Town Meetings and Forums held
0-999	114
1000-9999	61
over 10,000	28
	203
Total number of participants — 8526	
Analysis of Participants	
White	59%
Black	41%
Over 65	20%
Below poverty level	26%



Town by Town

What Mississippians are saying, thinking, deciding about their communities

It was pleasing to find that many of the suggestions made were items that could be accomplished without being expensive. This meeting helped us to realize that ideas that citizens have can be attained with cooperation of all.

Mrs. Annell R. Weed
Ruleville

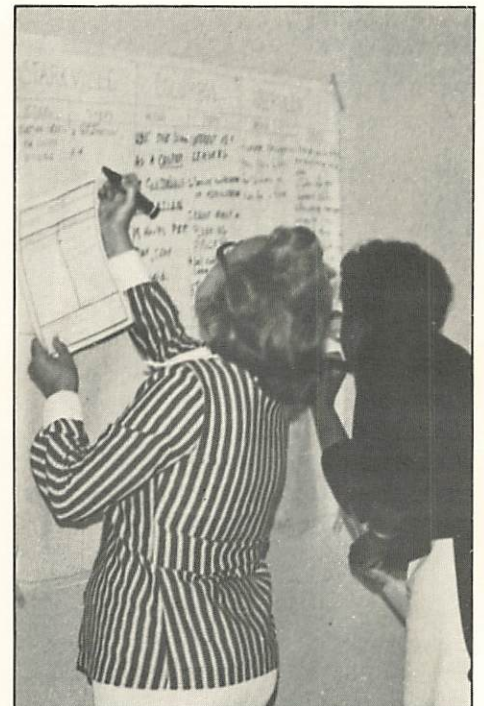
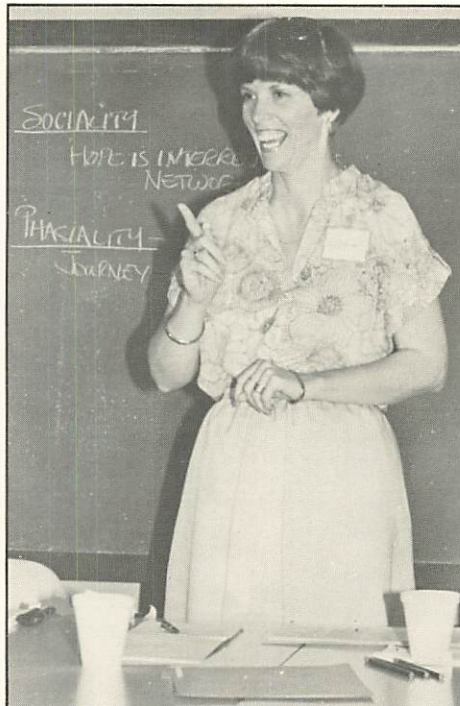
The Starkville Daily News headlines read "Spirited Town Meeting. . ." In the article, H. P. Davis, Mayor, stated, "It's people that make a city and I'm excited about the number of people who have come out tonight to show they care about Starkville."



a new unity

"Before the Town Meeting, people had talked about the issues among themselves in small groups, but never as a whole."

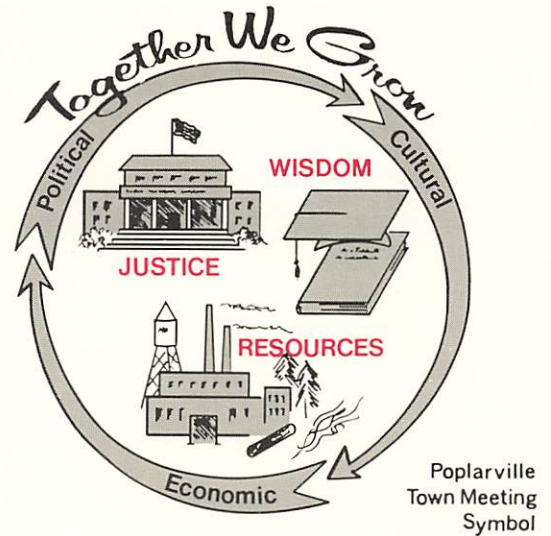
Mayor Charles Richardson
Mississippi Municipalities Magazine



An exchange of practical images and future directions for women characterizes Global Women's Forum. The opening talk provides a framework for the Forum. In Columbus, participants record their team's work—practical responses to challenges present in Starkville, Aberdeen and Columbus.

a new direction

Students from Winston County's Nanih Waiya High School work together in a Community Youth Forum. They discovered their hopes and dreams are tied to their participation in the community.



The Pontotoc Progress reported that Ecru citizens joined together and wrote a town song entitled "Marching to the Future." "If the town is to march into the future, it doesn't need its citizens watching the parade, but rather all of them getting into step."

MERIDIAN — WE'RE MOVIN' ON

(Tune: "Frankie & Johnnie")

Once we were burned by the Yankees
And blown away in nineteen-ought-six
We're now in the age of the 80's
Our concerns we plan to fix
We're movin' on—and we plan to stay strong.

We know there are things we are lacking,
We want to improve our domain,
We know that these projects need backing.
We'll change—we won't stay the same.
We're movin' on—and we plan to stay strong.

We'll work for our new civic center,
Historically restore the downtown,
Activities for the young people.
And for those who are falling down.
We're movin' on—and we plan to stay strong.

And when our work is ended,
And it's turned over to the young,
We hope we have left them a heritage
Of happiness, beauty and fun.
We're movin' on, and they will be strong.

"Meridian — We're Movin' On" a new song, written during the Town Meeting, celebrates that town's past, present and future.

During the West Point Town Meeting one of the concerns voiced was that residents had developed a defeatist attitude they didn't know how to overcome. A few weeks later the Commercial Dispatch displayed the headline, "West Point Folks 'Talking Up' the Town." The paper quoted the Chamber's executive director, Ben Rosenkrans, who remarked that an air of optimism has permeated West Point since the Town Meeting.

a new resolve

SMALL TOWN WITH HOPE

FOR TOMORROW Guntown

• QUITMAN NEVER QUILTS! Quitman

• BUILDING TOGETHER FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

Jumpertown •

CHARM OF THE PAST — CONFIDENCE OF THE FUTURE Aberdeen

• WE ARE ON THE MOVE FOR PROGRESS Glendora •

IT'S TIME TO MAKE A START Vaughan-Linwood • PEOPLE, OUR

GREATEST ASSET Calhoun City • A NEW DAY! Macon •

BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE FUTURE Burnsville

• UNITY WITH DIVERSITY Houston •

Challenges and Proposals

849 local statements bring focus to the major challenges facing Mississippi communities

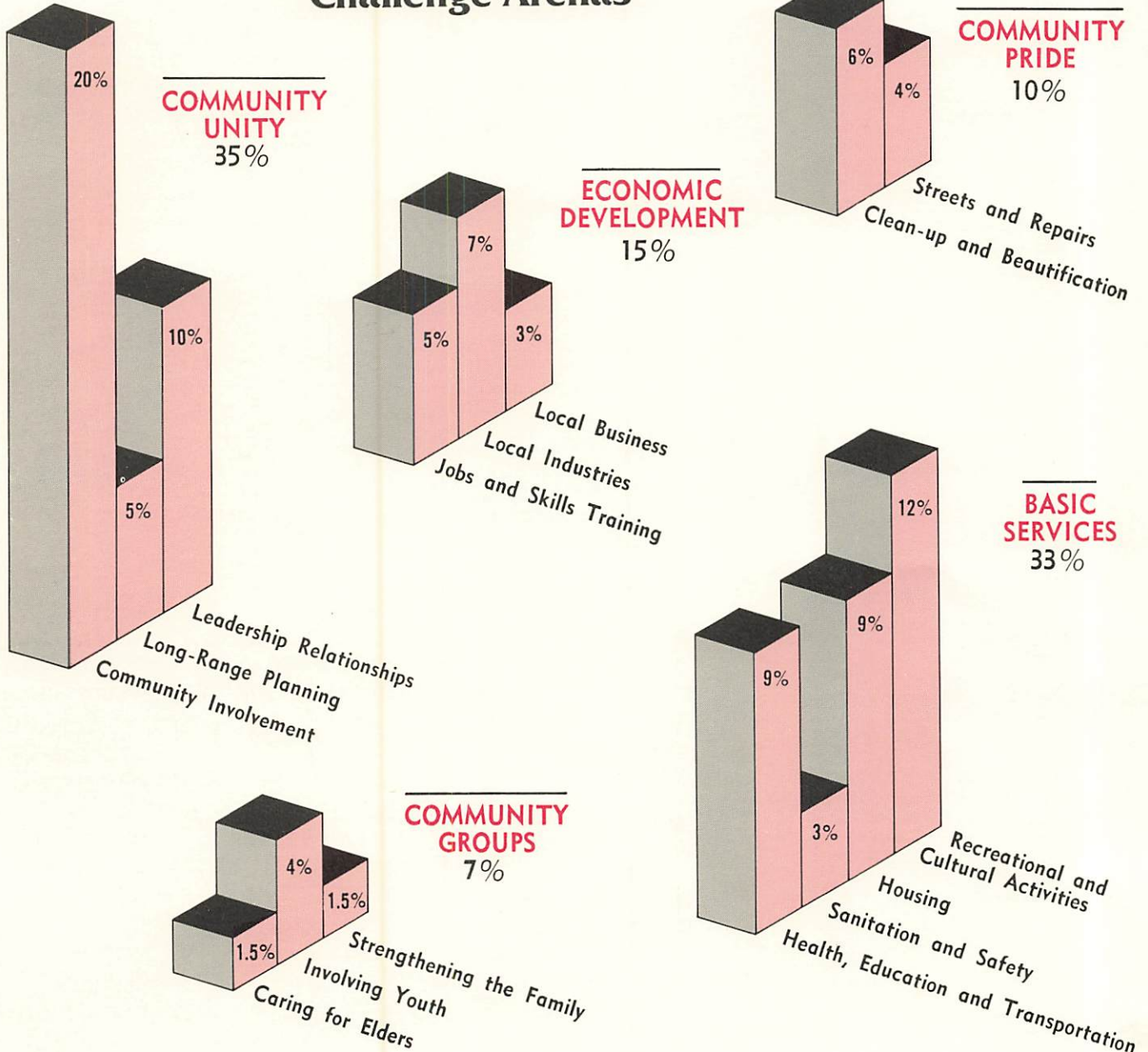
Local residents in the 203 Town Meetings and Forums in Mississippi wrote 894 challenge statements. These statements are descriptions of the areas of concern to which the people must respond in order to deal effectively with their community problems.

The graphs below represent a compiling of related challenges into major arenas. For example, the arena **Community Involvement** includes such challenges as

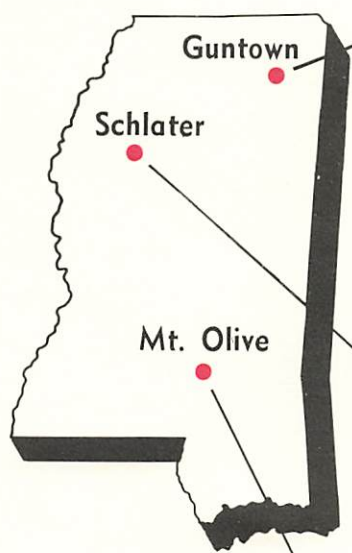
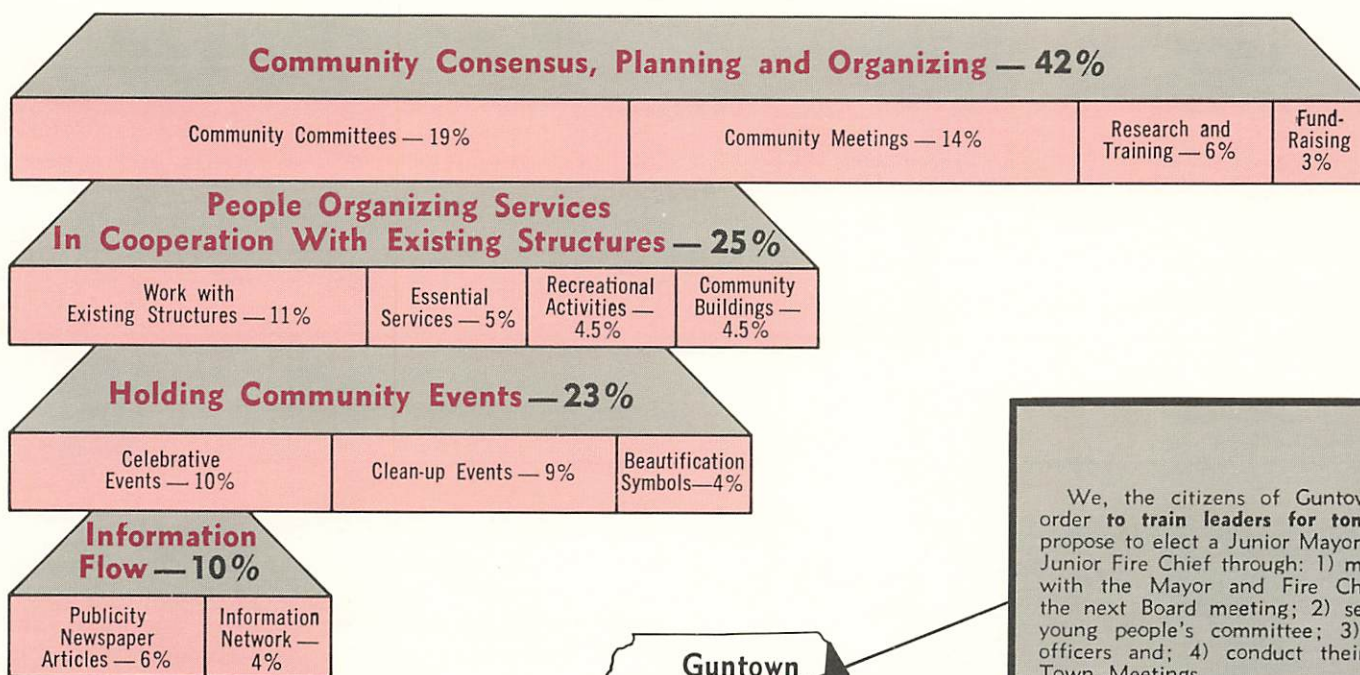
low voter turnouts, the "let George do it" attitude, and getting "everyone pulling together." Creating opportunities for more local volunteers and awakening residents to community needs are also included.

In the challenge workshops, the citizens became excited to see that they could create solutions to community problems.

Challenge Arenas



Proposal Arenas



We, the citizens of Guntown, in order to **train leaders for tomorrow** propose to elect a Junior Mayor and a Junior Fire Chief through: 1) meeting with the Mayor and Fire Chief at the next Board meeting; 2) select a young people's committee; 3) elect officers and; 4) conduct their own Town Meetings

Guntown Town Meeting

We the citizens of Schlater in order to **improve community participation and interest** propose continued town meetings to promote fellowship and organization. At the next town meeting each person from the first meeting is responsible for bringing another person. A flyer will be distributed to publicize the meeting. At that meeting reports from this first meeting will be given, and ideas for community projects will be presented. A committee will be appointed to set up the guidelines for the clean-up contest.

Schlater Town Meeting

We the citizens of Mt. Olive, in order to **get people involved in cleaning up the town**, propose to have a clean-up day through: 1) hold in April on a Saturday; 2) contest on who picks up the most garbage; 3) close off Main Street for a fish fry and dance; 4) morning pickup and afternoon celebration; 5) proceeds go to the recreation fund.

Mt. Olive Town Meeting

Local citizens formulate 701 practical proposals in response to challenges

In the second workshop, participants wrote practical proposals in response to the challenges facing that community. There were 701 proposal statements written during the 203 Town Meetings across Mississippi. In these, Mississippians declared what they, as citizens, will be doing during the next year.

Participants looked at their community's situation and listed possible activities. From this list they decided on particular actions which would simultaneously relate to several challenges. For example, a community clean-up day and celebration deals with community involvement, beautifying the environment, engaging the youth and raising funds for other projects.

Across the state, Mississippi citizens became excited about creating practical plans for local action and demonstrated their decision to work together to build the future in their local communities.

A question often asked about Town Meeting is, "What happens afterwards?" There is no single answer — each town is unique, therefore its response to the Town Meeting is not predictable. In some communities the meeting sparks new ideas about dealing with old problems. In others, new energy is injected into existing programs. Many towns discover a new awareness of their communities' situation. In practically every case, the proposals and the action taken to carry them out have aided and strengthened the structures which already existed.

Perhaps the best way to answer the question would be to allow the towns to speak for themselves. The accounts which follow give a brief picture of some of the towns in which Town Meetings were held. The stories feature towns of various sizes, towns from every portion of the state and towns of varied social and economic composition. Some of the towns started working on their proposals several months ago. Others have only worked a few weeks.

Among the variety of events which have happened in the towns, there is a common picture; citizens are actively engaged in developing their communities.

NORTH BAY AREA Harrison County



Biloxi - Gulfport Daily Herald photo

North Bay Area residents proudly inspect the fire department's newest acquisition.

During the last decade, the sprawling suburban area of North Bay, north of Biloxi, has experienced rapid economic and population growth. Residents are now facing the challenge of providing adequate public services and effective long-range planning. Responding to these needs, Vernon Simmons, Chamber of Commerce president, gathered citizens for a Town Meeting planning session. Citizens responded enthusiastically, and on Sunday, January 28, 100 attended the Town Meeting. "People were working and having a good time. I've never seen so many people so enthusiastic," Mr. Simmons commented. The Town Meeting brought citizen's concerns into common focus. One area of concern was for improved fire protection, which was underscored by the presence at the meeting of 30 firemen in full uniform.

Soon after the Town Meeting, the proposal to upgrade the firefighting equipment was carried out. Mr. Ernest Melvin, president of the Harrison County Board of Supervisors, arranged for the purchase of a new pumper truck for the Volunteer Fire Department. The firemen began raising the necessary funds to modernize their present equipment.

A proposal to create a citizen association has resulted in the St. Martin-D'Iberville Civic Improvement Society, Inc., which has been given the mandate of creating a plan for the development of the area, ensuring a feasibility study on development, planning for incorporation and coordinating all the plans with the county and state authorities. Progress has been rapid in all these areas. The Gulf Regional Planning and Development Commission is creating the feasibility study for the North Bay Area, and the community plans to begin raising its share of the funds through holding an "old-fashioned rally" in early July.

Incorporation plans are moving through the planning process. The name "North Bay" has been selected for the town, along with the Mayor-Alderman form of government.

With all the activity and community cooperation visible these days, North Bay citizens are fulfilling the claim Governor Finch made when he attended their Town Meeting, "People caring about their community is the best thing going!"



Governor Cliff Finch registers at the North Bay Area Town Meeting.

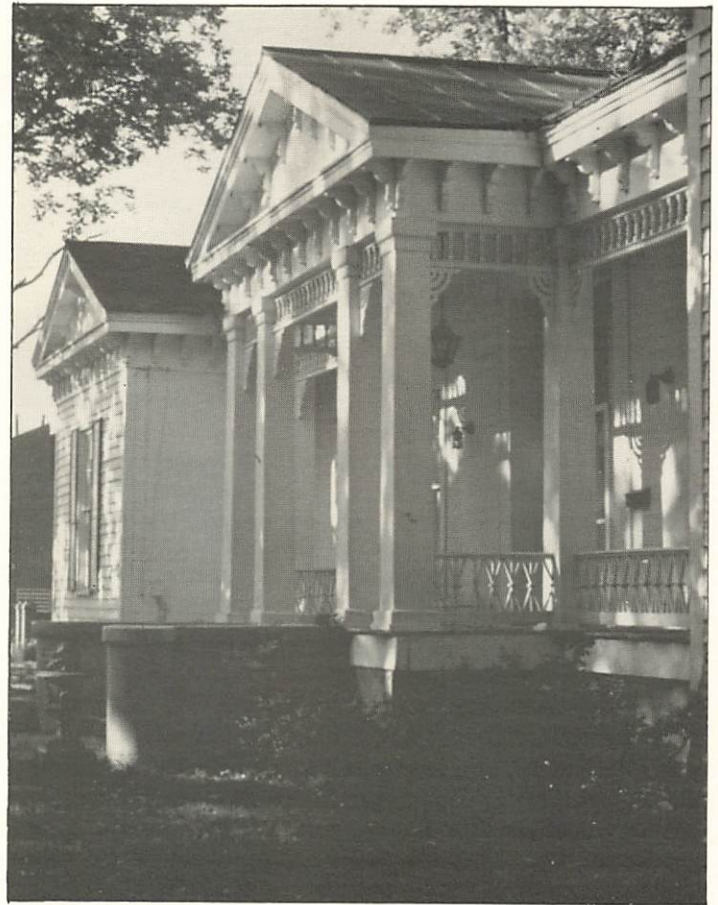
SARDIS Panola County



Sardis, located in the state's second largest tourist area, has witnessed a decline in the number of community events. The Mayor and Rotary Club decided to hold a Town Meeting. The turnout was surprising; "the same people who always show up" were not the only ones there! Many came to the city hall for the first time. At the March Town Meeting, Sardis citizens planned to create activities to promote the community for future growth.

Since then a group of 30 citizens, who work closely with the Town Council, have been meeting weekly. Tom Tate, one of its members, reports they have begun promoting Sardis at the Lake Sardis Fishing Tournaments. An information booth was erected on the lake to tell the tourists about the businesses and services available in Sardis. Pencils and key chains, donated by local businessmen, were handed out as promotional gifts. Soon there will be activities for the fishermen's wives.

An Integrated Citizens Committee has been organized to determine the location for the new school. A clean-up week has been held. Sardis will again be part of the state's pilgrimage circuit. "All of this happened here because of the Town Meeting," Mayor H. E. Dees stated.



Sardis once again will be part of the Mississippi pilgrimage.

LEAKESVILLE Greene County



"There needs to be a sense of renewed hope . . . We don't need rebellion in the future, but to face the challenges which lie ahead."

Leakesville Town Meeting Story

Ninety-five Greene County citizens gathered in Leakesville's only factory for their Town Meeting in January. The owners provided coffee and doughnuts, and door prizes added to the excitement.

Lack of jobs was a major concern. Nicole Sportswear employs 250 people, but many residents travel long distances to shipyards along the Gulf. Participants felt that commuting limits time for volunteering, keeping abreast of decisions being made in the town, and running for office. They realized there was poor communication. The highlight of the Town Meeting was the decision to gather an even larger group in two weeks to continue looking at various ways to improve the county, specifically the provision of jobs.

The meeting was scheduled and publicized. A Mobile TV station covered the meeting. The Agricultural and Industrial Board was invited. They arrived to find,

in spite of rain, 260 citizens gathered to express overwhelming support for the existing industry and to recruit new industry.

Building on the interest in local economic improvement, the Greene County Development Foundation, a non-profit organization, was formed to seek grants and improve the county's industrial base. At their first meeting, five members of the Board of Directors were chosen. The County Board of Supervisors and the Town Council were asked to appoint members. The organization also will focus on health care, beautification, and recreation. People can volunteer to work in their field of interest with smaller groups meeting and working as necessary. Every three to six months these groups will meet to report on accomplishments and future plans. The people of Greene County have begun the venture of getting people to work together and involving everyone in solving critical issues.



"You think about your concerns and think, maybe, someday years from now, people will look at an accomplishment and wonder how this project got started. It can start here."

Natchez Democrat

Momentum for the Town Meeting began in January, when the Chamber of Commerce gathered a group of 45 civic leaders including the Mayor. They had the cooperation of radio and newspapers, but they recognized that the best publicity would be the "talking it up" approach. Their united efforts paid off. Two hundred citizens gathered for the Town Meeting, making it one of the largest of all the Mississippi 200 meetings. A cross section of the city was represented, including young and old, rich and poor, local officials and industrial workers. Mayor Tony Byrne said, "Not only was it well attended, but those in attendance also participated." Tom Carter, Chamber of Commerce Director, reflected that the Town Meeting "brought people together who usually don't get their input into projects."

One concern which appeared in the challenges involved the planning for the proposed bridge across the Mississippi River. Because of various problems, this multi-million dollar project had become stalled. The Town Meeting gave the citizens the opportunity to restate their concern about the completion of this project and communicate this concern to the planning authorities. This expression of concern helped assure that this vital project will be completed in the near future.

Another proposal named in the Town Meeting suggested a clean-up campaign. Soon after the meeting, the Beautification Committee was reactivated and with the cooperation of the Garden Clubs and other civic groups, a campaign was scheduled for early March. On Saturday, March 3rd, people of all ages were seen cleaning the streets and carrying away bags of trash and litter. The campaign was the city's "spring cleaning" and prepared it for the annual historical pilgrimage. The enthusiasm and involvement of the citizens marks Natchez as a city on the move.

Town meeting draws 200



John Ballard, left, and Mrs. Annie Ruth Ogden play close attention to the proceedings at Monday's Town Meeting which drew participants of all ages.

By SUSAN WILLEY
Democrat Staff Writer

Democrat Photo by Dixie Rogers

Approximately 200 citizens attended the town meeting Monday, joined together in song and split into three groups to try and identify the challenges facing the community.

Terry McCabe, coordinator of the town meeting through the governor's office of citizen participation, said the turnout at the South Natchez cafeteria was "very good" and compared favorably with citizen participation in larger cities in the state.

After a chorus of "Yankee Doodle," McCabe asked the group to think about what they would like to have for their community in the next 20 years.

Participants voiced concern about various problems within Natchez such as the litter on the streets, a better organized recreational program, educational needs, better communication among the races, better transportation, adequate housing, more industry and making better use of the river.



Tchula, a town of 2,500, is typical of Delta towns. The community has a large population of elders and with a meager tax base, the town has found it difficult to provide basic services, such as street cleaning and up-keep. Forty citizens met for the Town Meeting and expressed concerns about law and order, low voter registration and community appearance.

Tchula residents got started working right away. They organized block clubs to patrol the streets, registered voters, cleaned ditches and public property. Prizes were given to the clubs doing the best job. Painting family homes was proposed to improve the community's appearance. Volunteers would do the painting for those unable to do it themselves.

Tchula is meeting the challenge stated in their Town Meeting song, "We'll do our best to make progress, Let's get started right away."

CROSSROADS Hinds County



"Let us become responsible for all the mournful cries, we hear them from the aged, the youth, the children . . ."—Crossroad Town Meeting song

Crossroads, comprised of six small rural settlements in Hinds County, shares a common identity and considers itself to be one community. Over 130 people of all ages crowded into the Crossroads old school house building for their Saturday Town Meeting. Families came — bringing the oldest and youngest members. Chairs had to be brought in from Jackson in order to seat the crowd. The day was highlighted by entertainment consisting of choirs, poetry readings, family singers, musicians and story tellers. A potluck dinner was provided as each participant brought their "family specialty."

The Crossroads community is characterized by a large population of elders. One challenge was the lack of services available for the aged, particularly transportation to medical facilities. The participants left the Town Meeting having decided to care for all the people of Crossroads in as many ways as possible.

STONEWALL Clarke County



The old school auditorium filled with laughter, loud voices and greetings as 139 citizens joined in Stonewall's February Town Meeting. Everyone expressed delight and surprise at the large attendance, an obvious demonstration of enthusiasm for Stonewall.

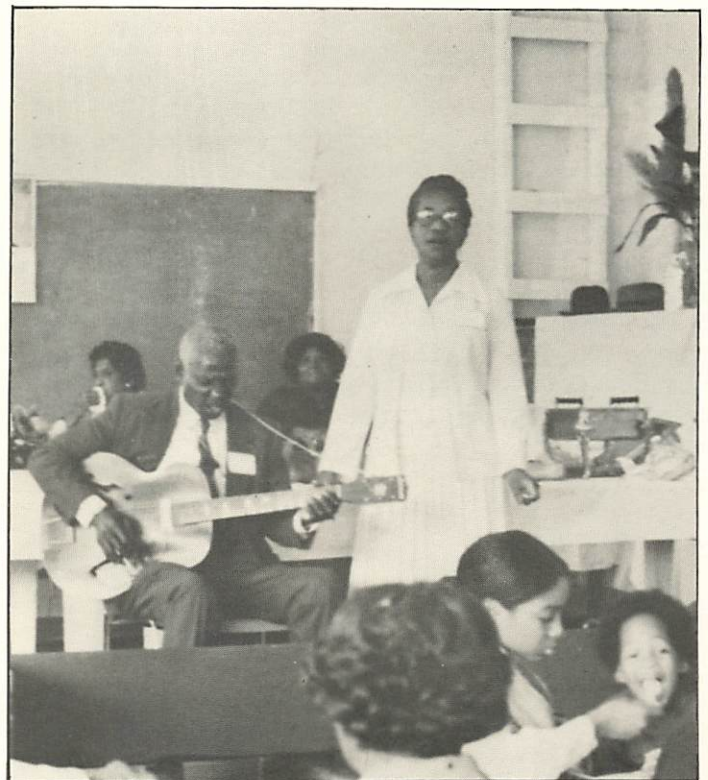
The participants wrote six challenges focused on the need for strong leadership, community involvement and youth activities. The town song written at the meeting declares, "The only way we can move is . . . Stonewall straight ahead."

After the Town Meeting, the Mayor and Board of Aldermen appointed a volunteer parks and recreation committee. The committee's job is to coordinate the city's recreational programs with those of the Jaycees and other groups.

Their first project is the establishment of a park. Organizations are being contacted for donations of equipment, and bids for land are being made. The park is seen as a crucial step in meeting the growing needs of Stonewall's youth. A clean-up campaign was organized and carried out by one neighborhood as a sign of community pride for all of Stonewall.

Things have happened since the Crossroads Town Meeting, such as the focusing on elder care. On May 12, Mr. Norman Harris, Director of the Mississippi Council on Aging, spoke to a large gathering of elders at a community luncheon. The Community is securing pledges to buy a bus to transport elders to medical facilities. The elders now know that Vista Volunteers are available to assist them. The community is closer because the elders are being cared for.

Another key event since the Town Meeting was a clean-up day. Thirty men, women and children organized from the six neighborhood committees spruced up front yards, highway and the church yard. A July 4th Community celebration is planned, a youth counselor is being selected and a dietician for those on fixed incomes will soon be available for the community. Crossroads is becoming responsible for all its residents. Recently, Ludia Ervin, a Vista Volunteer, stated: "The community has been aroused out of a state of apathy. People have become aware of caring."



Crossroads family entertains with gospel music during the Town Meeting.

What We've Learned

The Governor's Office of Citizen Participation and the staff of The Institute of Cultural Affairs in Mississippi have carefully monitored the progress of the TOWN MEETING: MISSISSIPPI 200 Program over the past nine months. Four learnings have come to light which we feel will be helpful to Mississippi and to other states as they work to develop programs of citizen involvement.



• Public Sector/Private Sector Partnership

The partnership between the Governor's Office of Citizen Participation and Town Meeting Program conducted by The Institute of Cultural Affairs has proven to be productive. From the standpoint of the Governor's Office of Citizen Participation, the Town Meeting Program brought an experienced staff trained in conducting citizen participation meetings in towns of varied sizes and social/economic composition. From the standpoint of the Town Meeting Program, the Governor's Office of Citizen Participation brought to the project the resources, scope and authorization of a state agency. The statewide sweep of the public agency, plus the local orientation of the private agency produced a team which was able to involve more citizens in their own communities than either could have alone.

• Local Delivery

The key to overcoming the "nothing ever happens in our town" attitude is staging a citizen participation event in the town. By delivering the program into the community and maximizing the number of citizens involved, the inertia in the community is directly addressed.

• Community Momentum

Not only must the citizen participation program be delivered into the community but there must be a sufficient number of communities involved in the program so that no single community experiences their meeting as an isolated happening. The momentum created by many events taking place enables communities to experience "things are happening in our part of the state." When things happen in other communities; "something can happen here." Creating the sense of momentum is primarily a product of planning and phasing of the program. The number of projected events should be slightly beyond what would generally be considered possible. Setting such a goal enables the creation of a program which catches the attention and imagination of communities across the state. When the events are concentrated in a specific portion of the state and held in a limited period of time there occurs a sense of excitement and anticipation as communities hear and read about the events happening around them.

• Community Oriented Method

The format of the event is constructed to ensure that the content of the meeting is the actual concerns and suggestions of that unique community. Thus the event becomes a time of building community consensus which is the key to local engagement. This consensus-building creates a foundation of citizen participation which carries far beyond the initial meeting.

Looking Toward The Future



Mrs. Ruth D. Wilson, Director of the Governor's Office of Citizen Participation, in her address, "Citizen Involvement—the Answer," to a national meeting of Town Meeting volunteers, indicated the future of citizen participation.

If there are answers, and there are, to the American dream of finding solutions to man's problems, the basic approach must be one of bringing together massive citizen resources throughout this country—material and human—to coincide with massive needs. Genuine citizen action must become the dominant method of helping people; maximum effective genuine involvement of all citizens must be the key concept.

The 203 Town Meetings and Forums held in the past nine months clearly indicate that citizens of Mississippi are ready and eager to engage in the building of their communities.

What does this mean for "citizen participation" in Mississippi next year? First, the Town Meetings which were held in the past months, plus the activities which followed these events have created a solid foundation of citizen engagement. This is only a beginning. In order to maintain the enthusiasm and local community action, programs which generate citizen engagement, such as Town Meetings, must be continued.

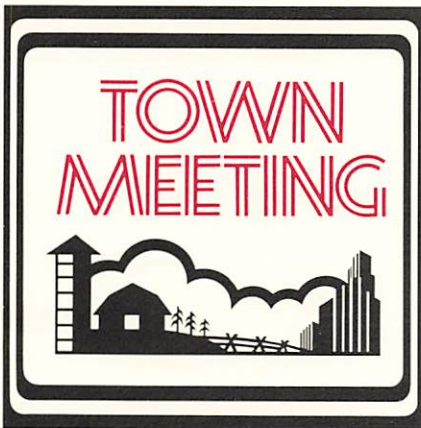
Second, citizens engaged in their communities need the opportunity to learn from each other. People need the opportunity to share their excitement about their

towns and what they have learned about working in community. Interchange of "ways that work," sharing of successes and learnings are part of using the wisdom resident in Mississippi communities. An example of an occasion for communities to "train" each other is the Mississippi Statewide Town Meeting Assembly.

Third, the Governor's Office of Citizen Participation faces a twofold challenge. Initially the challenge is to maintain and build on the foundation created by the TOWN MEETING: MISSISSIPPI 200 Program. Possibly a greater challenge is for the Office of Citizen Participation, in its functioning as a state agency, to be a demonstration of citizen participation. In order to be such a demonstration the Office of Citizen Participation would need to explore ways by which the citizens of Mississippi directly participate in creating the programs and plans for the future of the agency. This demonstration would show what practical citizen participation means, from the local to the state level, and would point the direction for similar agencies across the nation.

Once again, to quote from Mrs. Wilson's speech:

It is going to be a new day, a day that we have not experienced in the history of Mississippi. I think that it is going to be a new day for all the states, because I believe that we are going to be able to provide them with the models that will make it possible for other states to do what we are doing in Mississippi.



TOWN MEETING is offered under local sponsorship by a nationwide volunteer staff of specially trained community leaders. TOWN MEETING was developed by The Institute of Cultural Affairs, a not-for-profit research, demonstration and training group concerned with the human factor in world development. The ICA staff and consultants in 47 American cities work with local groups to coordinate program development and provide resources, training and follow-up services upon request.

Acknowledgements

The success of the Town Meeting: Mississippi 200 Program has depended on the broad base of support which has been present throughout the state. The Governor's Office of Citizen Participation and the Institute of Cultural Affairs would like to acknowledge the contributions of money, goods and services, and time which hundreds of Mississippians have made during the past year.

From the beginning this program has been the product of a public sector/private sector partnership. This partnership was obvious in the funding of the program. The State of Mississippi, the Community Services Administration through the Governor's Office of Human Resources and 70 participating communities accounted for 74% of the total budget. The remaining 26% came from the private sector. Businesses, public utilities and individuals gave generously.

These contributions included cash as well as goods and services such as use of automobiles, meals, motel rooms and office supplies. For example, Xerox Corporation supplied paper for the duplication of a large majority of the Town Meeting documents.

Finally, acknowledgement is given to the numerous people who have given of their time and energy in order that this program reach the communities across the state. Mayors, city aldermen, directors of Mississippi Planning and Development Districts, state legislators, executives of South Central Bell, Jackson businessmen, and hundreds of local Mississippians have worked on behalf of the Town Meeting Program. The Town Meeting: Mississippi 200 Program succeeded because people across the state invested their time, talents and resources to serve their state and its communities.

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