1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Medgar and Myrlie Evers House

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 2332 Margaret Walker Alexander Drive Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Jackson Vicinity: N/A

State: MS County: Hinds Code: 049 Zip Code: 39213

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:	X	Building(s):	X
Public-Local:		District:	
Public-State:		Site:	
Public-Federal:		Structure:	
		Object:	

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

DRAFT

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	Domestic	Sub:	single dwelling
Current:	Recreation and Culture	Sub:	museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Other: Ranch style

MATERIALS:
Foundation: Brick
Walls: Asbestos shingles, brick veneer, board-and-batten
Roof: Built-up with gravel coating
Other: Wood

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Medgar and Myrlie Evers House, built in 1956, sits in the Elraine Subdivision, the first post-World War II subdivision created for middle-class African Americans in Mississippi.[1] Winston J. Thompson, a black entrepreneur, developed the subdivision, and Leroy Burnett, a black builder, built a majority of the houses. Many early residents were teachers or others engaged in professional and clerical employment that placed them in Jackson's growing African American middle class. The subdivision consists of thirty-six original lots developed from 1955 to 1957 along Guynes Street, and six additional lots later developed by Burnett in the early 1960s. Elraine covers approximately twelve acres and is located about 3 miles northwest of downtown Jackson. When it was built, the subdivision was directly adjacent to white working-class neighborhoods, along Missouri Street to the south and the large Green Fields subdivision to the north and west; working-class African American neighborhoods stretched east and north to the railroad. Smaller Minimal Traditional residences on narrower lots generally characterize these neighborhoods, both black and white.

Thompson, a Jackson native, and Leroy Burnett of nearby Terry, Mississippi, were World War II veterans, and they secured financing from the Veteran's Administration for Elraine Subdivision's development. It is not known whether they obtained the services of a local architect or used stock plans to build the 850 to 950 square foot houses along Guynes Street. They completed thirty-six similarly scaled homes with similar floorplans between 1955 and 1957. The Ranch form with Modern—rather than Colonial Revival—detailing was the predominate design, and the majority of the houses built (at least twenty-seven) followed the same three-bedroom plan as the Evers House. Thompson's firm was recognized as the largest African-American real estate business in the state. Between 1952 and 1956, Thompson was credited with building over 250 homes for African Americans in Jackson, Meridian, Greenwood and Forest. The firm was the first black-owned business authorized to originate and service FHA and GI loans.[2]

The Evers House underwent only minor alterations during the Evers' ownership, most significantly the installation of an air conditioning unit through the wall under the carport into the dining room. After Medgar Evers was killed, Mrs. Evers moved to California in the summer of 1964 and rented the house for the next thirty years before donating it to Tougaloo College in February 1993. Minor modifications during its rental period included the installation of a second air conditioning unit on the south façade, repainting, and installation of an asphalt shingle roof on top of the original built-up roofing. The house was designated a Mississippi Landmark by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) in November 1993; this designation requires all proposed alterations to be reviewed and approved by MDAH (Mississippi SHPO). A restoration funded by the Legislature through MDAH beginning in 1994 and completed in 1996 reversed most later changes to the house and repaired damage from several years of roof leaks. A second rehabilitation in 2013 made major repairs to the foundation and installed new mechanical systems.

The Medgar and Myrlie Evers House is a one-story wood-frame house facing south with its long elevation toward Guynes Street. Rectangular in massing, its low-pitched (2.5:12) hip roof highlights its low horizontal lines. The roof was originally built-up and covered with light-colored gravel—in 1995, the asphalt shingles that had replaced this were removed and this original treatment was restored. A metal furnace vent pierces the right side at the ridge. Eaves with exposed rafters extend three-feet out from the walls, with a 6" fascia and a 1" x 2" drip edge, and rectangular screens vent the attic. The original concrete driveway leads from the street to the

[1] This narrative description relies heavily upon and updates the historic structure report "Medgar Evers Home Renovation" (1995, WFT Architects), the "Medgar Evers House" National Register of Historic Places nomination form written by Deborah Wise Oakley (listed December 5, 2000), and the National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the "Medgar Evers Historic District" authored by William Gatlin and Victoria Myers and listed on September 18, 2013.

[2] "Negro Realty Firm Plans Huge Homes Development," *Jackson Advocate*, March 24, 1956.

carport. With the exception of the carport, the house is built on a conventional foundation where red-brick curtain walls fill the voids between brick piers.

A shallow planter outlined with Roman brick edging is under the main roof on the house's left side, carried on ornamental wrought iron supports. An undercut one-car carport with concrete deck fills the west end, with a storage room at the back. While asbestos shingles cover the east and north (rear) elevations, Roman brick veneer and plywood "board-and-batten" dress up the south façade and carport wall. The south façade has three steel-framed windows, asymmetrically composed: behind the planter is the three-part picture window opening from the living room with four-light casement sidelights; to the right are two twelve-light casement-and-fixed windows, each opening into bedrooms. A decorative wood panel is in between these bedroom windows. The bullet that killed Medgar Evers passed through the living room's picture window and the wall between the living room and kitchen before stopping in the kitchen. The hole in the living room/kitchen wall, patched after the assassination, was carefully reopened in the 2013 renovation work.

On the west elevation, under the carport, a 6-light steel window high up on the living room wall serves as a breeze window, and a low brick and concrete stoop leads to the house's primary entrance, a solid core flush wood door (this is a replacement in-kind of the original). A single light fixture with one socket and a globe is above the stoop. The carport ceiling is gypsum board panels with exposed seams. To the left of the door, a Roman-brick wing wall projects to the edge of the stoop—this wall, working in concert with the rectangular storage room on the carport's northwest corner funnels foot traffic through a narrow passage to the private back yard. An air conditioning unit, installed by the Evers, pierces the west elevation wall behind the wing wall, cooling the dining room and living room inside.

For this floorplan, Thompson and Burnett seem to have offered the option to have the primary entrance either on the front wall or on the side carport wall. The Evers chose to have their entrance from the carport as a security measure. Twenty-three of the other houses on the street with the same plan have a front door, while three others also chose the carport entrance option.

The five-bay rear (north) elevation has four windows spaced relatively evenly, and a door: the twelve-light steel casement-and-fixed unit to the left opens from a bedroom, while the two six-light windows open from the bathroom and kitchen respectively; the door is a kitchen exit, and the sixteen-light casement-and-fixed to the far right lights the dining room. The east elevation has two equally spaced eight-light casement-and-fixed windows located high on the wall as breeze windows. Mechanical units on a concrete pad have been added on this elevation.

The interior plan is typical for small houses of the period and for the subdivision, with the entrance directly into the living room/dining room area that fills the western third of the house, a kitchen opening into the dining room, and a narrow hallway leading from the living room to the bathroom and three bedrooms. Each bedroom has a small closet, and another closet (now used for HVAC ductwork) opens into the hallway. Floors are hardwood 2" tongue-and-groove (completely replaced in the 1995/96 renovation because they had buckled from long-term roof leaks), walls and ceilings are 3/8" gypsum boards finished with a textured skim coat. Shellacked flush hollow core doors open into the major rooms and into a hall closet and all are finished with "Colonial" type door casings. Some original hardware remains, but some has been replaced over the years. Window trim is uniform, consisting of a shallow 5/4" steel casing that is probably integral to the factory-built steel window units. Original casement window operators remain as do the brackets to hold the interior screens, but no original screens remain. One-inch aluminum venetian blinds provide sun-control in all windows, replicating the originals.

The living room is at the front of the large open space, while the dining room fills the back, and a wing wall extending on a line from the hallway creates a visual separation between the two. Stained pine cabinetry separates the dining room and the kitchen: a pass-through cabinet on the left, a door opening (missing its swinging door), and a book/display case—none of this cabinetry reaches the ceiling.

The small kitchen has appliances on the south wall and an L-shaped line of cabinets and countertop on the east and north walls. Original asphalt 9" x 9" tile had already been replaced in 1994; the current VCT flooring dates to 2013, and was cut down from the now-standard 12" x 12" size to mimic the original size. Countertops are finished in original green plastic laminate with metal edges, and the original porcelain sink (worn in places) remains, but with a replacement faucet. The bullet that killed Medgar Evers, having broken the living room window and passed through the wing wall between the dining and living room ricocheted off the refrigerator (now a replacement) and landed on the countertop.

The bathroom has had the most finish changes in the house. Containing a full bath, sink, toilet, gas wall heater, and built-in cabinet, the bathroom has a patchwork of tile, some original, some replacement, that carries on the original white, dusty blue, and pink pattern.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: _ Locally: _

Applicable National Register Criteria:	A X B X C _ D
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):	A _ B _ C _ D _ E _ F _ G
NHL Criteria:	1 and 2
NHL Criteria Exceptions:	N/A
NHL Theme(s):	II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements 2. Reform movements IV. Shaping the Political Landscape 1. Parties, protest, and movements
Areas of Significance:	Ethnic Heritage/black Social History
Period(s) of Significance:	1956-1964
Significant Dates:	June 12, 1963
Significant Person(s):	Medgar Wiley Evers Myrlie Beasley Evers
Cultural Affiliation:	N/A
Architect/Builder:	Winston J. Thompson, developer Leroy Burnett, builder
Historic Contexts:	XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements M. Civil Rights Movements

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Introduction

The Medgar and Myrlie Evers House is nationally significant under NHL Criteria 1 and 2. The first Mississippi field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Medgar Evers, and his wife Myrlie, made major contributions to advancing the goals of the civil rights movement on a national level, which makes the house eligible under NHL Criterion 2. Medgar Evers' assassination on June 12, 1963, in the carport of his home was the first murder of a nationally significant civil rights leader, focusing national attention on the necessity for civil rights legislation. His assassination forced Myrlie Evers into a more prominent, national role for the NAACP. It also became one of the catalysts for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The house is eligible under NHL Criterion 1 as the site of Evers' assassination.

The Everses accomplished their significant work in the civil rights movement while residing and often working from this suburban Ranch home. Medgar Wiley Evers was the first Mississippi field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). From 1955 until his assassination in 1963, he was involved in almost every significant civil rights event in Mississippi, the heart of the segregated Jim Crow system, during the most important period of the civil rights movement when the movement transformed from a few scattered regional voices to an organized national chorus. His leadership in the state known as the "deepest bastion of segregation" made him a significant figure on the national civil rights stage.[3] Evers' steady but passionate work for civil rights and his calm leadership abilities earned him a reputation as NAACP's "Man in Mississippi," someone who could be relied on to make good decisions in a crisis.

Evers' reports to his NAACP headquarters show that he led most public civil rights activities in the state, especially voter registration efforts and press releases to bring attention to the murders and lynchings of African Americans that normally did not get covered in the white press. He also helped organize local chapters of the NAACP around the state and the small but significant NAACP youth councils that developed the next generation of civil rights leaders. Medgar Evers' diplomatic sense and tactical vision for keeping the movement united led him to help Tom Gaither of CORE, Robert Moses of SNCC, and Aaron Henry, Mississippi's NAACP president, to create the Congress of Federated Organizations (COFO) in 1961 as a forum for the various civil rights groups in Mississippi to work together under a single umbrella and to speak with a unified voice to political leaders.

Working behind the scenes, Medgar Evers played a significant role in the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi. In a case that would make its way all the way to the Supreme Court, James Meredith became the first African American to enroll at the University of Mississippi, albeit under the protection of federal marshals (Lyceum-The Circle Historic District, NHL, 2008). Evers' patient and strategic thinking led in the early 1960s to "the NAACP's subtle but noticeable shift toward direct action" in Mississippi, according to Evers biographer Michael Vinson Williams. Direct action campaigns that he helped organize included the beach wade-ins on the Mississippi Coast beginning in 1959, the library read-in by nine Tougaloo College students in 1961, and the boycott of businesses in downtown Jackson that discriminated against African Americans.

Myrlie Evers was Medgar's partner in life and work—civil rights work was all-consuming and dangerous. The couple both faced threats and harassment because of Medgar's work around the state. Myrlie served as Medgar's secretary during his first two years as field secretary before the demands of being a wife and mother led to her decision (with resistance from Medgar) to stay home. A large part of her time at home was spent

[3] M. J. O'Brien, *We Shall Not Be Moved* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 13.

hosting civil rights leaders, often overnight, and also sheltering black victims of abuse and threats from the white power structure that controlled all levels of local and state government in Mississippi.

The assassination of Medgar Evers in the driveway of his carport in June 1963 was the first such murder of a national civil rights leader. It forced President John F. Kennedy to push forward with civil rights legislation that eventually passed, after Kennedy's own assassination, as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Further, her husband's assassination and public funeral propelled Myrlie Evers onto the national stage as a prominent civil rights leader and sought-after speaker for the NAACP, a career that culminated in the 1990s with a term as chair of the NAACP board of directors.

The period of significance for the property extends from 1956, when the Everses purchased their lot at 2332 Guynes Street (now Margaret Walker Alexander Street) and began building the house until the summer of 1964 when Myrlie Evers and the three Evers children moved to California. After maintaining the house as a rental for thirty years, Mrs. Evers donated it in 1993 to nearby Tougaloo College, a private historically black college that operates the house as a museum dedicated to the legacy of Medgar and Myrlie Evers.

Mississippi Monolith

Mississippi passed the first so-called Jim Crow state constitution in 1890, disenfranchising almost all of the black population. This constitution, along with the 1896 Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*, set the stage for "separate but equal" public services that developed by the early twentieth century into a strict racially segregated society, unequal treatment of African Americans in the justice system, and no representation in the political realm. By the 1940s, African-American civil rights activist Bob Moses called the state "the Mississippi monolith," referring to Mississippi's institutionalized white supremacy that reached from top to bottom of the state government bureaucracy and even included a spy agency, the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission.[4]

Early Years

Medgar Evers was born in Decatur, Mississippi, on July 2, 1925, the third of four children, to James and Jesse Evers. Medgar attended a one-room segregated school in Decatur and later attended the black high school in Newton. He left school and joined the United States Army in 1943, serving in segregated units in England, Belgium, and France. Myrlie Evers Williams, his wife, would write of Medgar's military service in her 1967 memoir *For Us, the Living*:

> The whole experience of the Army was a new one, a broadening one, and it opened up new worlds to a young Negro boy from rural Mississippi. . . . In France, he found a whole people-all of them white-who apparently saw no difference in a man simply because of his skin color, and this was perhaps the greatest revelation of all.[5]

It was also during his army service that Evers became aware of militant African independence movements such as that of Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya (Evers' first son, born in 1953, was named Darrell Kenyatta) and even "dreamed of arming his own band of Blackshirts and extracting an 'eye for an eye' from whites who mistreated their black brothers." But Evers later recounted, "It didn't take much reading of the Bible, though, to convince

[4] John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 199.
[5] Myrlie Evers-Williams with William Peters, *For Us, the Living*, rev. ed. (Jackson, MS : Banner Books, c1996), 24-25.

me that two wrongs would not make the situation any different, and that I couldn't hate the white man and at the same time hope to convert him."[6]

After his discharge in 1946, Evers began to put his newfound ideas of freedom to the test when he, his brother Charles, and four other African-American friends registered to vote in Decatur, "where there were 900 white voters and no Negroes even registered."[7] This initiated a series of intimidating visits by both white and black leaders to the Evers home to "tell your sons to take their names off the books." After US Senator Theodore Bilbo told a local crowd before the election that "the best way to keep a nixxxx from the polls on election day is to visit him the night before," the Evers brothers were met with a score of armed white men when they attempted to vote at the courthouse, and they were unable to vote. Evers recalled, "In a way we were whipped, I guess, but I made up my mind then that it would not be like that again—at least not for me."[8]

Medgar Evers completed high school at the Alcorn College laboratory school and later enrolled at Alcorn A&M University (now Alcorn State University). He excelled at sports, was editor-in-chief of the college annual, served as president of his junior class, and was named to *Who's Who among American Colleges and Universities*. He also met Myrlie Beasley, and they married in his senior year and her sophomore year, on Christmas Eve 1951.

Myrlie Beasley was born in 1933 in Vicksburg, Mississippi. She was raised by her paternal grandmother and aunt, both teachers, and these two women instilled a strong sense of independence in her. Myrlie graduated from the segregated Bowman High School in Vicksburg in 1950. She hoped to study music at a university outside Mississippi and sought state funds allocated for black students to pursue programs not offered at segregated state schools. However, Jackson State College president Jacob Reddix refused to write the required letter, leaving Myrlie no choice but to stay in Mississippi. Myrlie chose Alcorn College, where she met Medgar Evers.

After graduating from Alcorn A&M in 1952 with a degree in business administration and a minor in economics, Medgar Evers took a job as a salesman for the Magnolia Mutual Insurance Company in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, located in the Mississippi Delta region. Having completed only her sophomore year of college at that time, Myrlie moved with him and joined Medgar as a secretary with Magnolia Mutual. Medgar Evers' work required him to travel extensively throughout the Delta, where poverty and illiteracy were endemic, and in his three years there his dissatisfaction with the Jim Crow system grew into full-blown civil rights advocacy. Evers attended mass meetings organized by Magnolia Mutual's founder, Dr. T. R. M. Howard and became program director for the Regional Council of Negro Leadership, which Howard had founded in 1951 to encourage black voter registration and business ownership. In that capacity, Evers helped organize a boycott of white-owned gas stations, distributing an estimated 20,000 bumper stickers with the slogan, "Don't buy gas where you can't use the restroom." This campaign reached middle-class African Americans with enough money to own a car and buy gas, a key constituency in the struggle for civil rights. Evers also began organizing chapters of the NAACP to address conditions suffered by African-Americans in the Delta.

After meeting Thurgood Marshall, Evers recognized he could better help people if he had a law degree. He applied to the law school at the University of Mississippi in February 1954, but was denied admission,

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[6] Medgar Evers and Francis H. Mitchell, "Why I Live in Mississippi," *EBONY*, November 1958 (reprinted September 1963), 143-144.

[7] "Why I Live in Mississippi," 144.

[8] Ibid., 144.

ostensibly because his letters of recommendation came from Newton County residents, including two white men, rather than from Bolivar County, where Evers then resided.[9]

NAACP Field Secretary

In January 1955, the Everses moved to Jackson where Medgar became the field secretary of the Mississippi Conference of NAACP Branches, the organization's first salaried staff position in the state. For the next eight years, he traveled throughout Mississippi encouraging people to register to vote, and he investigated and documented cases of discrimination and violence against blacks. While the NAACP, with its long-view approach and its focus on ending discrimination through the justice system, became "marginalized" in most of the South during the civil rights era by the direct action tactics of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), Evers "made the NAACP the dominant organization in Mississippi," according to Evers biographer Michael Vinson Williams.[10]

In his ground-breaking book on the civil rights movement in Mississippi, historian John Dittmer notes that "Evers spent much of his time investigating racially motivated homicides. Between 1956 and 1959 at least ten black men were killed by whites, none of whom was convicted." Evers' investigations, according to Myrlie Evers, included filing complaints, taking witness statements, talking with families, "dragg[ing] reporters to the scenes of the crimes," sending out press releases, "seeking always to spread word beyond the state, involve the federal government, bring help from the outside."[11] Perhaps Evers' most significant work in this regard came early in his tenure as field secretary when he teamed up with T. R. M. Howard in the investigation of the murders of Emmett Till and George W. Lee of Belzoni, both in 1955. In fact, Evers may have influenced Mamie Till, Emmett's mother, to request an open-casket funeral in Chicago, revealing Till's beaten and disfigured body to world-wide attention.[12] Historians of the period credit Till's murder and the widely publicized images of his body in the open casket as the spark that ignited the modern civil rights movement.

Since the predominantly white press and media outlets in Mississippi often kept his voice from being heard in Mississippi, he broadened his scope by traveling out of the state, speaking to NAACP chapters and other interested groups all over the country, giving interviews to national publications, and appearing on radio and television news shows to spread the word about the true condition of African Americans in Mississippi.[13] Evers was featured at several NAACP mass meetings, including in Detroit, Michigan, just after the Emmett Till trial and its acquittal of the two white defendants.[14] In an October 5, 1955, memo, Gloster Current, Director of Branches for the NAACP, advised Evers about his public speaking goals: "Expound on the broader implications of what is happening in Mississippi, emphasizing what individual citizens can do. Do not be bitter, but factual as much as possible. Stress in the appeal the need for money to help NAACP fight injustice in Mississippi."[15]

A transcript of his address to the NAACP Los Angeles, California, Branch on May 31, 1959, demonstrates his maturation as a public speaker and "represents one of the most important expressions of Evers' political beliefs

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[9] Dittmer, *Local* People, 49.
[10] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 232.
[11] Dittmer, *Local People*, 79.
[12] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 126. Mrs. Till stated that she "was grateful for [Evers'] commitment and his compassion. He had been really moved by Emmett's murder. He was the one who had done the initial investigation to brief the NAACP head office."
[13] "Painful Progress," exhibit, Medgar Evers Home Museum, Jackson, MS.
[14] Devery S. Anderson. *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 169.
[15] Myrlie Evers-Williams and Manning Marable, eds., *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: A Hero's Life and Legacy Revealed through His Writings, Letters, and Speeches* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), 37.

and evolving protest ideology."[16] He began by tying his travels out of the region directly to his mission in Mississippi, like a general giving an eyewitness report of life on the front lines in order to generate aid and reinforcement:

> It is not my purpose here today to malign the state of my birth, but the many obnoxious bills passed by the state and local governments of Mississippi, for the obvious purpose of keeping me and my posterity second-class citizen, makes it compelling that I should, at this time, unfold the truth about the conditions under which Americans of African descent live here in this great country during the century of wonders—United Nations, sputniks, explorers, space, atoms—the twentieth century.
>
> Certainly, many of the incidents mentioned herein will doubtless appear to be fantasies, but I can assure you that I shall not falsify against the state of my birth. To enumerate all of the injustices against Negro Americans in Mississippi would be next to impossible, so I shall make mention of the injustices that are most prominent.[17]

His California speech was wide-ranging, from topics like the state's school Equalization program, designed to skirt the implications of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by equalizing school facilities, to the violent murders of African Americans such as Mack Charles Parker, Emmett Till, Rev. George Lee, and Lamar Smith. He particularly emphasized the state's tactics in denying the vote to African Americans through unfair poll tests and taxes, and when those approaches failed, outright intimidation. Evers noted that "out of a population of 495,653 Negro voters, there are less than 30,000 qualified Negro electors in the entire State of Mississippi." He called out white officials for their "gestapo like actions" but reserved little sympathy for blacks who through "apathy and reluctance" refused to even try to register to vote. He closed this like many of his speeches by quoting James Weldon Johnson's "God of Our Weary Years," a favorite civil rights hymn asking for God's grace, wisdom, and protection in difficult paths of life.

Because of Evers' frequent travel and statewide network, his work and his home life intertwined. Myrlie Evers wrote, "Sometimes Medgar would bring home . . . a fugitive from one of his trips—a witness, perhaps, who had to be protected from pressure until the time came to testify—and I would feed him and bed him down for the night."[18] Other times, the Everses entertained visiting NAACP officials and other dignitaries. Biloxi physician Dr. Gilbert Mason, who led the "wade-ins" of the segregated beaches on the Mississippi Coast, stayed at the Evers home when he was in Jackson, and Evers stayed at his home when he visited Biloxi.[19] Threatening and obscene phone calls streamed in to the Evers house daily. Myrlie Evers usually put down the receiver, but Medgar tried to reason with the callers.[20] While the Evers tried to keep their home as their refuge, it was clear they worried that it had been or would be invaded: in early 1963 Medgar Evers reported to the FBI that he believed the house may have been bugged by the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission "because of an unusual amount of static on telephone lines."[21]

Myrlie Evers worked as Evers' secretary for approximately two years, becoming an integral part of his NAACP work. Evers knew that Myrlie went far beyond her regular duties to help him—the two formed an effective team. She wrote: "the end of the working day generally meant simply that we moved our headquarters from the

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[16] Evers-Williams and Marable, *Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 134.

[17] "Address by Medgar W. Evers, NAACP Field Secretary of Mississippi, at a Mass Meeting of the Los Angeles, California Branch NAACP, Sunday, May 31, 1959, 3:00 p.m." Transcript in *Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 140-155.

[18] Myrlie Evers-Williams with William Peters, *For Us, the Living*, rev. ed. (Jackson, MS: Banner Books, c1996), 168.

[19] Michael Vinson Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 189-190.

[20] Evers-Williams and Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 246-248.

[21] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 285.

office to home, where the same people gathered, the same telephone calls came in, and the same problems were pursued." Though she eventually quit to care for the children Myrlie remained a supportive partner to Evers.[22] Civil rights work was all-consuming and dangerous, and although the strain became almost unbearable at times, the couple resolved to "work together as a team, both of us giving and taking as we grew together."[23]

By the late 1950s, Medgar Evers' travel and press releases began to bear fruit in increasing national press attention on Mississippi's segregated system, and he began to be seen as a national leader. A six-page feature article in *EBONY* magazine in November 1958, "Why I Live in Mississippi," introduced Evers to a national African-American audience:

> Since 1954, the tall (5 ft., 11 in.), stockily built Mississippian has roamed the state cajoling the frightened, counseling the troubled, smiling and shaking hands with some Negroes who view him as a Messiah for their troubled times, and with others who see him as an eager leper who would infect them with the same disease that makes him the object of the white man's hatred. . . .
>
> Like the horseflies that buzz violently into his car as he roars down his road to destiny, he means to sting the whites into making Mississippi right. "At the moment," he explains, "we don't have any suits pending. But we are doing our best to embarrass the whites to death. For a long time, they literally got away with murder. Now, when a Negro is mistreated, we try to tell the world about it."
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> For Mississippi's chief NAACP man, this means long hours on the road (his Olds logged 78,000 miles in the past two years), chasing down stories of brutality and civil rights abuses, and long sessions in the office examining and weighing valid and invalid complaints.[24]

In this article, Evers explained his decision to remain in his native state in the language of the soil and outdoors:

> [Evers is] a man who swears he "loves" the land that produced a Bilbo and exterminated an Emmett Till. Says Evers, "this is home. Mississippi is a part of the United States. And whether the whites like it or not, I don't plan to live here as a parasite. The things that I don't like I will try to change. And in the long run, I hope to make a positive contribution to the overall productivity of the South." . . .
>
> "It may sound funny, but I love the South. I don't choose to live anywhere else. There's land here, where a man can raise cattle, and I'm going to do that some day [*sic*]. There are lakes where a man can sink a hook and fight the bass (he has a four-pounder mounted on his wall). There is room here for my children to play, and grow, and become good citizens—if the white man will let them."[25]

Evers also laid out his principle of nonviolence:

> "Violence, certainly, is not the way. Returning physical harm for physical harm will not solve the problem. And one of our strongest appeals to the conscience of southern whites is that the NAACP has never been linked to violence. Not even the southern bigot has much ground to

[22] Evers-Williams and Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 186, 226.
[23] Williams, *Medgar* Evers, 190.
[24] *Why I Live in Mississippi*, 146-147.
[25] Ibid., 143, 147.

> stand on when he tries to rabble rouse about our winning court decisions. But give him a little Negro violence to point to, and he will have a good selling point for stirring up race hatred."[26]

Although the *EBONY* article made clear that Evers as a young man had rejected militant overthrow of the government, Mississippi's secretive segregationist agency, the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, used against Evers his admission that he had been inspired as a young man by Jomo Kenyatta's Mau Mau insurrection, mentioning the quote in multiple later press releases. In addition, Mississippi's black newspaper, the *Jackson Advocate*, led by Editor Percy Greene (who as it turned out later was on the payroll of the Sovereignty Commission at this time) railed that Evers had done himself no credit with the *EBONY* story, "having marked himself as a fanatic and a fool."[27]

Less than two weeks before Evers' death, the *New York Times* profiled him for its "Man in the News" sidebar to its coverage of the increasingly volatile situation in Jackson. Entitled "Quiet Integrationist: Medgar Wiley Evers," the story noted Evers' early flirtation with violent confrontation but emphasized his calm and professional demeanor:

> Whether speaking to rallies or arranging bail for N.A.A.C.P. members arrested for picketing downtown stores, Mr. Evers gives evidence of his college training in business administration. He talks quietly and attends to small details.
>
> But his strong feelings, like his unexpected smile, are never fully submerged by his methodical manner. . .
>
> The white officials who deal with Mr. Evers consider him an effective organizer. Although the name of his organization is anathema to them, they describe Mr. Evers as a reasonable and dependable man.
>
> This grudging respect has not protected him from police harassment, however.
>
> "During the first sit-ins here in 1961," he said, "I went to the trial and applauded the defendants. The police lunged in, and I was beaten over the head with a snub-noses revolver."[28]

Because of Evers' steady but passionate work for civil rights and his calm leadership abilities, he became known as the NAACP's "Man in Mississippi," one who could be relied on to make good decisions in a crisis.

Legislative and Judicial Activity

The NAACP's primary tactic in the civil rights struggle, one that it began in 1909, was to operate through the justice system to gain voting and equal rights for African Americans. Medgar Evers' travels around Mississippi made him the most experienced point man for the civil rights movement in the state, and he used his experience to assist numerous local NAACP branches with their petitions to desegregate public facilities, including schools, public restrooms, and courthouses. Evers had considered a legal career and was fully engaged in all of

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[26] Ibid., 148.

[27] Mississippi Sovereignty Commission memo, "Medgar Evers," November 10, 1958, http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=images/png/cd01/001487.png&otherstuff=1|23|0|2|1|1|1|1452. Percy Greene, publisher of the *Jackson Advocate*, was a postal worker who had been active in the NAACP in the 1940s and early 1950s. Later, he "grew increasingly reactionary as the black agenda expanded to include desegregation of schools and public accommodations [and] carried on a running feud with the NAACP," according to John Dittmer, *Local People*, 74.

[28] *New York Times*, June 1, 1963, 8.

the NAACP's legal actions in Mississippi during his tenure as field secretary. He also served as a lead plaintiff himself and assisted the U.S. Department of Justice in its civil rights cases.

On the Mississippi Coast, Evers was an integral part of the effort led by Dr. Gilbert Mason beginning in 1959 to desegregate Harrison County's 27-mile long man-made beach, which had been created with federal funds after World War II. The "Wade-In" effort was a two-pronged approach that used both legal filings and direct action, as when Mason and Dr. Felix Dunn of Gulfport at separate times led protesters onto designated white beaches. Evers assisted behind the scenes, helping to organize workers and collect affidavits, acted as an intermediary with the national NAACP office, helped Mason form the Biloxi NAACP branch, and then worked with African-American parents to file a school de-segregation petition. Evers and Mason became close friends, and stayed at each other's houses when they traveled back and forth.[29]

Perhaps Evers' most discouraging legal defeat was his involvement with the case of Clyde Kennard, an African American and seven-year Army veteran from Forrest County, near Hattiesburg. Kennard had attended the University of Chicago for three years and had been forced to move back home to care for his ailing stepfather. He applied to the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in 1959 (the last of several attempts) and was not only refused but was later arrested on trumped-up charges of stealing five bags of chicken feed. In a case that Sovereignty Commission records clearly show was manipulated from the start, Kennard was found guilty and sentenced to the maximum penalty, seven years at Parchman State Penitentiary. Evers was instrumental in bringing attention to the Kennard case and in obtaining NAACP legal assistance. He was also jailed for contempt of court in December 1960 for calling Kennard's guilty verdict "a mockery of judicial justice." Thurgood Marshall appealed the conviction all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, but eventually lost the appeal in 1961. Kennard died in 1963 of cancer at the age of thirty-six.[30]

Working behind the scenes, Evers played a significant role in the admission of James Meredith, a native of Kosciusko, Mississippi, and an Air Force veteran, to the University of Mississippi. According to Meredith, Evers "was the first person, outside of [Meredith's] In Group, to learn of my intentions to enroll" in early 1961. Evers, mindful of the legal weaponry the state would bring to bear on Meredith, brought the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Thurgood Marshall into the picture, even though the national NAACP office had not authorized expenditures for such litigation in Mississippi. In the first phone call between Evers, Meredith, and Marshall, made from the Evers home, Meredith took offense at Marshall's questions and hung up on him. Evers later mediated between Meredith, Marshall, and the NAACP, and Meredith has credited "Medgar Evers, his expert knowledge of human nature and his ability to deal with people, for the case moving" in a productive direction.[31] With NAACP help, Meredith filed suit for admission in May 1961 in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi. After several appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the lower court ruling that Meredith must be admitted to the University of Mississippi, and on October 1, 1962, protected by federal marshals from rioters on the university campus, Meredith became the first African American to enroll in the bastion of white power.

Evers also worked in a crucial background role with federal investigations of civil rights violations. When U.S. Assistant Attorney General John Doar came to Mississippi in April 1961 to investigate the denial of voter registration efforts, he and Evers met at the Everses home to avoid Sovereignty Commission spying. Doar had a list of people denied the right to vote. Evers knew most of the people and was able to give the investigators directions to their homes so they could be interviewed. Beginning in 1961, this door-to-door research bore fruit

[29] Williams, *Mississippi Martyr*, 183-186.
[30] Dittmer, *Local People*, 79-83. See also "NAACP Official Convicted for Contempt of Court," *Jackson Daily News*, December 2, 1960.
[31] As quoted in Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 223.

in the Civil Rights Division's increasing number of so-called "A-suits" in counties across the South that alleged racial discrimination based on tediously documented "patterns of discrimination" between white and black applicants.[32]

On March 4, 1963, Medgar and Myrlie Evers became plaintiffs, along with five other families, in a lawsuit requesting the Federal court "to order the first public school integration in Mississippi, on the Elementary and High School level." This was the first such lawsuit filed by parents in Mississippi and came after an unsuccessful petition, which both Everses had signed, to the city to desegregate voluntarily. The lawsuit requested the court to direct the Jackson school board "to present a complete plan, within a period of time to be determined by this court, for the reorganization of the Jackson municipal separate school system into a unitary nonracial system."[33]

Direct Action

Although the NAACP's approach had always consciously emphasized legal action and advocacy through publicity, Evers had also learned about the "direct action" approach during his time in the Delta in the early 1950s, and he was willing to take part in protests as much as he could without angering national NAACP leaders.

In 1958, while traveling back to Jackson by bus from a regional NAACP meeting in North Carolina, Evers changed buses in Meridian, Mississippi, and taking a front seat, "refused an order to move to the rear." Police took Evers to the station for questioning but let him go, whereupon he sat in the same place. When a taxi driver stopped the bus three blocks away and punched Evers in the face, he refused to fight back, and the bus continued after the driver ordered the taxi driver off. As Dittmer notes, "three years later other 'freedom riders' would travel that same road from Meridian to Jackson."[34]

In the last few years of his life, Evers became much more involved in direct action than he had ever been before, culminating in the beginning of the Jackson Movement in late 1962. Although the NAACP was slow to accept this new direction since it usually became responsible for raising bond money to bail protesters out of jail, Evers' patient and strategic thinking resulted in "the NAACP's subtle but noticeable shift toward direct action" in Mississippi in the early 1960s, according to Evers biographer Michael Vinson Williams.[35] This important shift also heightened the danger of retribution that Evers personally faced, leading to "a level of ostracism" from his own neighborhood and community, who felt he was putting them all in danger.[36]

Evers first leadership role in a direct action event, the library "read-in" by the Tougaloo Nine in March 1961, highlighted his methodical approach and his steady, but behind-the-scenes personality. Early in Evers' career

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[32] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1988), 410. "A-suits" got their name because they were filed under Section (a) of the 1957 Civil Rights Act. John Doar (1921-2014), deputy chief of the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Justice Department, was a key ally for Evers in the federal government. In addition to his meticulous work to document and prosecute voting discrimination, Doar accompanied James Meredith in his several attempts to register for classes at the University of Mississippi, prosecuted the 1964 murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner as federal civil rights violations, and acted as federal observer on the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. He later drafted the articles of impeachment against President Richard Nixon.

[33] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 229, 239. Lawsuit quoted in *New York Times*, March 5, 1963, 16. The U.S. Department of Justice had filed a school desegregation lawsuit in Gulfport and Biloxi in January 1963 because those two cities had received federal education aid connected to Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi.

[34] Dittmer, *Local People*, 79. See also Rev. Norman G. Kurland, "Medgar Evers and Mississippi: The Anatomy of Martyrdom," Medgar Evers subject file, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

[35] The NAACP Youth Council had been involved in direct action protests in the North since 1935.

[36] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 203, 261.

as field secretary, he had befriended A. D. Beittel, the president of the private Tougaloo College north of Jackson, and from that relationship he had built a small but dedicated NAACP chapter on campus. Beittel, who supported the effort, later recalled that "Mr. Evers was instrumental with this group of students in planning this [library read-in] and carefully planning it. . . . Behind the whole thing was Mr. Evers."[37] On March 27, 1961, nine Tougaloo students went to Carver Library, Jackson's public library for African Americans, and asked for books that they knew the library would not have. They then proceeded to the main public library for whites, located on North State Street, and quietly began searching the card catalogs, looking at the reference section, and sitting at reference tables reading. Jackson police came quickly and arrested them, leaving them in jail for thirty-two hours before allowing the NAACP lawyer to post bond. While they remained in jail, students at the public Jackson State College began demonstrating on campus, and then when they were disbursed there, initiated two marches downtown, on March 28 and March 29. Jackson police for the first time met them with police dogs, and many students were beaten. The violence of March 29, in which students were beaten, and Evers himself was hit in the head and back, caught the attention of national press, including the *New York Times*. While this three-day direct action did not immediately desegregate the city's libraries, Myrlie Evers later identified this event as "the change of tide in Mississippi . . . . [as] Negroes took the offensive in the struggle for full citizenship."[38]

In December 1962, the North Jackson NAACP youth council, with advice from white Tougaloo professor John Salter, undertook a Christmas-season boycott of Capitol Street, the premier commercial street in Jackson and its surrounding region. Medgar Evers fully supported the plan, but the national NAACP office refused to supply bond money, forcing Evers to secure it from other sources. The boycott was the beginning of the Jackson Movement, when first young people and then their more conservative adult leaders took a more public and confrontational approach to gaining equal rights, all under the auspices of the NAACP and Evers as field secretary. In May 1963, Jackson mayor Allen C. Thompson refused a list of Jackson Movement demands on a speech broadcast on local television station WLBT, and he criticized the NAACP as "outside agitators." In response, Evers petitioned WLBT for equal time to reply to Thompson's speech under the FCC's "Fairness Doctrine," which directed broadcasters to treat both sides of controversial issues equally. Although he had made the same request several times, as early as the 1957 Little Rock school desegregation battle, this time the station felt federal pressure to comply or lose its FCC license. With several days to prepare, Evers read versions of the speech to Myrlie Evers.[39] Evers' seventeen-minute televised speech on May 20, 1963, emphasized that most NAACP members in Mississippi were native to the state and ended:

> The Negro has been here in America since 1619, a total of 344 years. He is not going anywhere else; this country is his home. He wants to do his part to help make his city, state, and nation a better place for everyone, regardless of color and race. Let me appeal to the consciences of many silent, responsible citizens of the white community who know that a victory for democracy in Jackson will be a victory for democracy everywhere.

Evers' televised appeal for harmony and justice could be counted a long-term success, because it set a precedent for equal access to television news coverage, but Myrlie Evers maintains that it also introduced him into the homes of white Mississippians for the first time, and possibly led to his being targeted for assassination only a few weeks later.[40]

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[37] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 200.

[38] Evers-Williams and Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 235-236. See also, Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 200-203.

[39] Evers-Williams and Peters. *For Us, the Living*, 266.

[40] The FCC began investigating WLBT after formal complaints by Evers and others in Jackson, and in 1964, Rev. Everett Parker, Aaron Henry of the NAACP, and Rev. R. L. T. Smith filed a challenge against WLBT's FCC license. The case, which lasted sixteen years and included two appeals to federal court, was eventually settled in 1979, and a business group led by Aaron Henry took over operations in 1980. See Kay Mills, *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television* (Jackson, MS:

Now with full support from the NAACP's national office, Evers became physically involved in the Jackson Movement, resulting in his arrest on June 1, 1963, with NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins for picketing in front of the F. W. Woolworth store on Capitol Street.[41]

Role in Other Civil Rights Groups

Internal tensions within the NAACP, which favored legal action and voting rights legislation over direct actions like sit-ins and marches, forced Evers to keep his distance publicly from newer civil rights organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which took a more aggressive approach and brought in college students from outside the state. The NAACP leadership in New York was concerned that these "direct actions" would result in violence and retaliation against local African Americans.

Editor Sarah M. Harvey noted in the *Mississippi Enterprise* (June 15, 1963) that Evers' "pleasing" personality and gentlemanly demeanor allowed him to act as a mediator between passionate groups of people. "Some may not have seen 'eye to eye' with him at all times and on all issues, but all respected him for his courage, his devotion and his sincerity of purpose." His guiding principle was a "great belief in and his never ceasing desire to gain for his people, first class citizenship." This diplomatic sense and tactical vision for keeping the movement united led him to help Tom Gaither of CORE, Robert Moses of SNCC, and Aaron Henry, Mississippi's NAACP president, to create the Congress of Federated Organizations (COFO) in 1961. In fact, Henry later stated that COFO was Evers' idea. COFO acted as a forum for the various civil rights groups in Mississippi to work together under a single umbrella and to speak with a unified voice to political leaders, while also maintaining their individual identities and distinct approaches. Freedom Summer in 1964 was organized under the auspices of COFO, and COFO was instrumental in the founding of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In challenging the legitimacy of the all-white Mississippi delegation at the 1964 Atlantic City, New Jersey, Democratic convention, the MFDP struck the first blow to the long-established convention system and thereby brought about sweeping change to the national political system. A variety of issues led to COFO's disbandment in July 1965, but it seems clear that the organization missed Evers' mediating role that had made it possible in the first place.[42]

Historians J. Todd Moye and Michael Vinson Williams argue that perhaps as important as Evers' organization building skills was the legacy of young civil rights activists that he left in Mississippi. Growing up in the NAACP youth chapters that Evers established in the 1950s and early 1960s, cutting their teeth in voter registration drives and sit-ins, and even experiencing arrest and imprisonment as teenagers, many of these young people "fanned out across the state in the early 1960s" and were in position to step in as the second wave of integration after people like James Meredith graduated from the University of Mississippi. Like Evers, many of these young people felt a deep attachment to Mississippi and expressed it by remaining in the state when they could have sought easier opportunities elsewhere.[43]

University Press of Mississippi, 2004).

[41] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 260.

[42] Ibid., 208-209. During Freedom Summer in 1964, Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman worked for CORE, but had offices in the COFO building in Meridian, demonstrating the close relationship between the civil rights groups in Mississippi made possible because of COFO.

[43] J. Todd Moye, *Let the People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 90-91, quoted in Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 296-297.

The Assassination of Medgar Evers

Evers' assassination at his home also has an important place in national civil rights history. Evers was the first nationally known civil rights leader to be assassinated, and one observer noted that this method of political violence "would become all too familiar" in the next decade.[44] Further, John Lewis, President of SNCC and later a United States Congressman, believed the Evers assassination moved President John Kennedy to make a commitment to the civil rights movement, an issue he had straddled heretofore.[45] Myrlie Evers reflected on the significance of her husband's assassination in 2004:

> Someone said . . . that Medgar did more in death than he accomplished in life. Now, I don't know whether that's so. But his death did accomplish a lot. And when I met with President [John F.] Kennedy and the children and Charles [Evers] . . . the president signed a draft copy of the civil-rights bill . . . he said to me, "Your husband's death will make this possible."[46]

Even when they first bought the lot in the Elraine subdivision in 1956, Medgar and Myrlie Evers were thinking about an attack, rejecting an available corner lot that they considered too exposed. Unlike most of the other houses on the street, the Evers house lacked a front door, with a side entrance sheltered under the carport. This was almost certainly a security measure. Myrlie Evers would later write, "it may seem incredible to the average American homebuyer, but security from attack was a consideration we discussed at length."[47] This consideration also influenced the way the family lived in the home. The Everses placed seating away from windows and positioned the piano before the front window for protection. Evers instructed Myrlie to exit the car from the right—the side closest to the carport door—to avoid exposure.[48]

As his public stature grew and tension within Jackson began to boil, threats against Evers and his family increased. On May 28, 1963, a Molotov cocktail was hurled onto the carport of the Everses' Guynes Street home while Medgar Evers was at work. Myrlie Evers extinguished the flames with a garden hose. Although the police dismissed the incident as a "prank," Evers increased security measures. The Everses decided to teach their children how to seek cover in case of another attack. They discussed the possibility that he would be murdered.[49] In a June 1963 interview with the *New York Times* published after his assassination, Evers "said calmly: 'If I die, it will be in a good cause. I've been fighting for America just as much as the soldiers in Vietnam.'"[50]

On June 11, 1963, after Alabama Governor George Wallace symbolically blocked the door at the University of Alabama, attempting to deny admission to two African-American students, President John F. Kennedy went on national television to explain his decision to federalize the Alabama National Guard and admit the students. This speech, which became the framework for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, set forth Kennedy's ideas about equality in public accommodations, public education, and voter registration, all foundational issues for which Medgar Evers had been fighting.[51]

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[44] Susan Orr-Klopfer, Fred Klopfer, and Barry Klopfer, *Where Rebels Roost: Mississippi Civil Rights Revisited*, 2nd ed. (Fort Madison, IA: Orr Klopfer, 2006), 397.
[45] David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998), 444.
[46] Evers-Williams and Marable, *Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 292.
[47] Evers-Williams and Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 227.
[48] Ibid., 279, 286.
[49] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 254; Dittmer, *Local People*, 165. Evers-Williams and Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 274, 279.
[50] Emanuel Perlmutter, "Mississippi Victim Lived With Peril in His Job," *New York Times*, June 13, 1963, 12.
[51] For transcript see: "Address on Civil Rights (June 11, 1963) John F. Kennedy," University of Virginia, Miller Center, Charlottesville, accessed December 31, 2015, http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3375.

Medgar Evers watched the speech at his office on Lynch Street and then attended a mass meeting at the New Jerusalem Church where various civil rights groups were represented and the discussion focused on the direction of the Jackson Movement. Evers knew that his life was increasingly at risk. Friends had asked the NAACP to pay for a security escort, but their request was refused. After the meeting, Evers drove Aaron Henry of Clarksdale, the president of the NAACP Mississippi Chapter, to the Jackson airport, where he would fly out to Washington, DC to testify with Evers at the House Judiciary Committee. Evers was expected to fly out the next day.[52]

It was just after midnight when Medgar Evers returned to his Guynes Street home. Momentarily forgetting his own rule about exiting the car on the right side, he stepped out of his car, carrying a stack of T-shirts with the NAACP slogan "Jim Crow Must Go." Immediately, a sniper later identified as Byron de la Beckwith of Greenwood, Mississippi, located about 200 feet away, across Missouri Street in an undeveloped lot, fired a single shot that struck Evers in the back just below the shoulder blade.[53] The bullet traveled through the living room window of the house, coming to rest in the kitchen against the refrigerator. Mrs. Evers and the older children rushed to find him crawling covered in blood to the door under the carport. Neighbors and police officers, who had arrived by then, carried Evers on a mattress to a station wagon and drove him to the University of Mississippi Hospital. Although the hospital was a segregated facility, hospital officials attempted treatment, but Evers died as the result of trauma and blood loss around 1:14 a.m. on June 12, 1963.

More than 4,000 people attended Evers' funeral at the Masonic Temple on Lynch Street, including NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., James Meredith, U.S. Congressman Charles Diggs, and Ralph Bunche, undersecretary of the United Nations. Afterward, five thousand people marched almost two miles from the Masonic Temple to Collins Funeral Home on Farish Street where Evers' body was to be prepared to be sent by train for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. Later, several hundred mourners, mostly students, marched toward the white business district and encountered the armed force of the Jackson police. Battle lines began to form, and "for the first time," as historian John Dittmer has noted, "the angry blacks fought back, showering the police with bricks, bottles, and other available missiles." A violent confrontation was only averted through the active intervention of Justice Department attorney John Doar and Mississippi director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Dave Dennis, who walked between the lines and pleaded for calm.[54]

Evers was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on June 19, 1963. More than twenty-five thousand people viewed the procession and an estimated two thousand attended the graveside service. Following the funeral, President John F. Kennedy invited Mrs. Evers and her children, along with Charles Evers, Medgar's brother, to the White House.

From Los Angeles, to Chicago, Detroit, New York, and smaller cities, national press focused attention on Evers' murder. Vigils and memorial services were held around the country. Perhaps the largest of these occurred at the Metropolitan Community Church in Chicago's Bronzeville community (Emmett Till's neighborhood), where 1,000 people attended a service in Evers' honor and Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dr. T. R. M. Howard spoke of his martyrdom.[55] Condolences came to Mrs. Evers from John F. Kennedy and other national leaders. Martin Luther King, Jr. highlighted Evers' status as an American hero: "In the death of

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[52] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 281-284.

[53] The lot from which de la Beckwith took his shot is now occupied by a house that was built along with three other houses shortly after the assassination. These four lots were developed as an extension of the Elraine Subdivision by Winston J. Thompson.

[54] Dittmer, *Local People*, 166. For a detailed account of the week after Medgar Evers' death leading up to his Jackson funeral and Arlington interment, see M. J. O'Brien, *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Jackson Woolworth's Sit-in and the Movement It Inspired* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 201-230.

[55] "1,000 at Rites Here to Honor Medgar Evers," Chicago *Tribune*, June 17, 1963, 5.

Medgar Evers, America has lost one of those pure patriots whose most passionate desire was to be an American, and to be acknowledged as an American."[56]

A *New York Times* editorial titled "Racial Assassination" observed the political significance of the Evers murder:

> It is already plain that Mr. Evers' martyrdom has advanced the prospects for strong civil rights legislation. Congressmen who only a few days ago were pussyfooting on the need for new laws were loud in their pledges of swift action yesterday. The filibusterers were discreetly silent, but their hopes of obstruction have been as much a victim of the assassin's bullet as was the advocate of non-violence it slew. Out of the revulsion universally felt for this recourse to bestiality must come a firmer legal foundation for the human rights Mr. Evers dedicated his life to make secure.[57]

President Kennedy sent his bill to Congress on June 19, as Medgar Evers was being laid to rest in Arlington. Kennedy signed a copy of the draft bill for Myrlie Evers when she visited the White House, saying "Your husband's death will make this possible."[58] A year of debate and legislative maneuvering awaited it and Kennedy's own assassination in November 1963 moved it forward again. President Lyndon Johnson finally signed it into law on July 2, 1964. Considered a landmark in the civil rights movement, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 barred unequal voter registration requirements, whereby county clerks could give different tests to different voters; outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin in public accommodations such as hotels, restaurants, and theaters; prohibited state and local governments from denying access to public facilities on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin; and authorized the U.S. Attorney General to file suits to enforce desegregation of public schools.

The Act gave federal backing to many of the central tenets of the civil rights movement for which Evers had died fighting. Strengthened by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, it unleashed a flood of new African-American voters into the South's political system, with far-reaching and long-lasting results, as Evers and the NAACP had predicted. It also brought about a split in the Democratic Party, as old segregationists found themselves suddenly forced to appeal to these new voters or lose elections. Its effects on school desegregation are more ambiguous, as it often introduced bitter fights over bussing and school closures.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Medgar Evers' assassination, Congressman Charles B. Rangel rose on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives to acknowledge Evers' life and death, quoting an editorial from *The Progressive* (June 1973), "Lest We Forget.":

> It has been widely reported that the assassination of Evers spurred our lagging President, John F. Kennedy, to present in 1963 the omnibus civil rights bill which, ironically, did not become law until after he, too, was killed in November of that year. Evers' death also touched off a Dixie-wide black voter education drive and helped set the stage for the passage of the Voter Rights Act in 1965."[59]

Aftermath

After Medgar Evers' death, Myrlie Evers took up the cause and became a symbol of the civil rights struggle, speaking at NAACP events across the nation. In July 1963, she received the NAACP Spingarn Medal. "Two

[56] Williams, *Medgar Evers*, 287.
[57] "Racial Assassination," *New York Times*, June 13, 1963, 32.
[58] Evers-Williams and Marable, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 292.
[59] 93 Cong. Rec. S1,119 (1973), pt. 15: 19106-19107.

weeks later I began leaving Jackson, mostly on weekends, to fly to various parts of the country to talk about Medgar and the work in Mississippi," she wrote in her 1967 memoir, *For Us, the Living*. In the next year, Myrlie Evers became the public face of the NAACP and the civil rights movement in Mississippi, using her speaking engagements to encourage membership and fundraising. "I delighted in the feeling that I was involving new people in the struggle," she recalled. At the same time, she dreaded coming back to her Jackson home, "Walking into the house past the spot where Medgar had fallen became almost physical torture. Suddenly I would be Medgar, my back exposed to the unseen rifle, and the whole scene would spring to life again. I would reach the door, enter, and walk into the house filled with memories. Immediately I sank into despair."[60]

Byron de la Beckwith (1920-2001), a Marine veteran of World War II and a member of the White Citizens' Council chapter in Greenwood, was arrested weeks after Evers' assassination based on a fingerprint found on the 30-06 rifle left behind at the scene. He was brought to trial in Jackson's Hinds County Courthouse in January 1964 and again in April 1964, both with all-white, all-male juries that ended deadlocked, requiring the judge to declare mistrials. Myrlie Evers testified at both of these trials and again in May 1964 at the federal courthouse in the desegregation trial in which she and her husband were plaintiffs. De la Beckwith would finally be brought to justice in 1994, when he was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

Recalling her decision to leave Jackson and Mississippi in the summer of 1964, Myrlie Evers later described the stress of living in the place where her husband was murdered:

> I left Mississippi mainly because it was too difficult for my children and me to remain in our home. Our eldest son [Darrell] reached a point where he would barely talk. He did not eat well. His school fell off, his grades. Reena would cry a lot, and our youngest [James], who was 3, had this weird stare on his face. I had to go.[61]

Myrlie Evers moved to Claremont, California, in July 1964, where she re-entered college (she had only completed her sophomore year at Alcorn) at Pomona College, earning a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1968. Although she never lived in her Jackson home again, she maintained ownership, using it as a rental until donating it to Tougaloo College in 1993. She stayed committed to civil rights and to the NAACP at the local and national levels while also engaging in civic affairs such as serving as the first African-American female commissioner on the Los Angeles Board of Public Works. Her work with the NAACP culminated in her term from 1995 to 1998 as chair of the NAACP board of directors, guiding the organization through difficult times. In 2011, she returned to Mississippi to become distinguished scholar in residence at her alma mater, Alcorn State University. Myrlie Evers was the first female and the first non-clergy to present an inaugural invocation, on January 21, 2013, at the second inaugural of President Barack Obama.

Myrlie Evers founded the Medgar Evers Institute in 1998 to preserve and promote her husband's legacy and to work for civil and human rights. Reena Evers-Everette, the daughter of Medgar and Myrlie Evers, returned to Mississippi in 2012 to serve as executive director of that organization, which became the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Institute.[62]

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[60] Evers-Williams and Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 337-344.

[61] Laura Parker, "Q&A: Widow of Murdered Civil Rights Leader Medgar Evers Moves Beyond Hatred," *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 25, 2014, http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/06/140625-myrlie-evers-widow-medgar-evers-civil-rights-history/.

[62] Mississippi Department of Archives and History. "Legacy" panel in *This is Home: Medgar Evers, Mississippi, and the Movement*. Exhibit on display May 1-October 31, 2013. William F. Winter Archives and History Building, Jackson, MS.

The Medgar Evers House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2000 under Criterion A for its association with Ethnic Heritage/black and Social History and Criterion B for its association with Medgar Evers. In 1992, the City of Jackson honored him by renaming nearby Delta Drive as Medgar Evers Boulevard and designating the Elraine subdivision the "Medgar Evers Neighborhood Historic District." The city airport (2004) and the main Jackson Post Office also bear the Evers name. Evers has been recognized in other ways nationally, including the 2011 christening of the USNS *Medgar Evers*, and the City University of New York's Medgar Evers College, established in 1970.

Comparable Properties

The Medgar and Myrlie Evers House is the building most closely associated with the life and work of Medgar Evers. The Everses lived in the house for all but the first two years of Medgar's career as the NAACP Field Secretary.

In Mound Bayou, the Everses lived in a rented house at the corner of Fortune Avenue and Scott Street—this house is no longer extant. Likewise, the Magnolia Insurance Company building where the Everses worked with Dr. T. R. M. Howard, no longer stands.

Upon moving to Jackson in January 1955, Medgar and Myrlie Evers lived briefly in an apartment in a large complex at 1129 Maple Street (Apt. 16B) near Lanier High School, one of two African-American public high schools in Jackson. (This complex was demolished around 2007.) In 1956, the Everses bought the Elraine Subdivision lot on which they then had their house built; they moved into the house in early 1957.

Medgar Evers worked in two different buildings as field secretary, both of which still stand. A second-floor space in a brick-veneer commercial building (1949) at 507/509 Farish Street was the first field office from January 1955 until later that year. Myrlie Evers worked as the secretary in this office.[63] This building, which has not been previously evaluated by the National Park Service, may possess national significance as the first NAACP field office in the state of Mississippi, but because of Evers' brief tenure in the Farish Street building, it does not represent the full scope of his life and work in the civil rights movement. The Farish Street building has remained virtually unchanged, but it is in poor condition.

Late in 1955, the NAACP offices moved to a first-floor space in the large new Stringer Grand Lodge building at 1072 Lynch Street, near Jackson State College. The COFO building also stands nearby at 1017 Lynch Street. The Masonic Temple is of national significance as the site of numerous important activities during the civil rights era, including Evers' funeral and the founding convention of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964. It was included in the NHL Theme Study *Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights* (2007, rev. 2009), but because of façade alterations (ca. 1980) it was removed from consideration as a potential NHL due to architectural integrity issues.

[63] Evers-Williams and Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 184.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register. NR# 00001459, Medgar Evers House, Listed 12/05/00; Contributing resource to the Medgar Evers Historic District, NR #13000737, Listed 9/18/2013
__ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
__ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
__ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
__ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
__ Other State Agency
__ Federal Agency
__ Local Government
__ University
__ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approximately 3/20 of an acre

Latitude: 32.640910

Longitude: -90.212301

Verbal Boundary Description: The house is located on Lot Eleven (11) and the west half of Lot Fourteen (14), Elraine Resurvey Part Four (4), in Plat Book 5, page 16, on record at the Chancery Clerk of Hinds County, Mississippi.

Boundary Justification: The boundary includes the house and property occupied by Medgar and Myrlie Evers from 1956 to 1964, and which maintains historic integrity.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM
March 7, 2016

All photographs by Jennifer Baughn, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH).

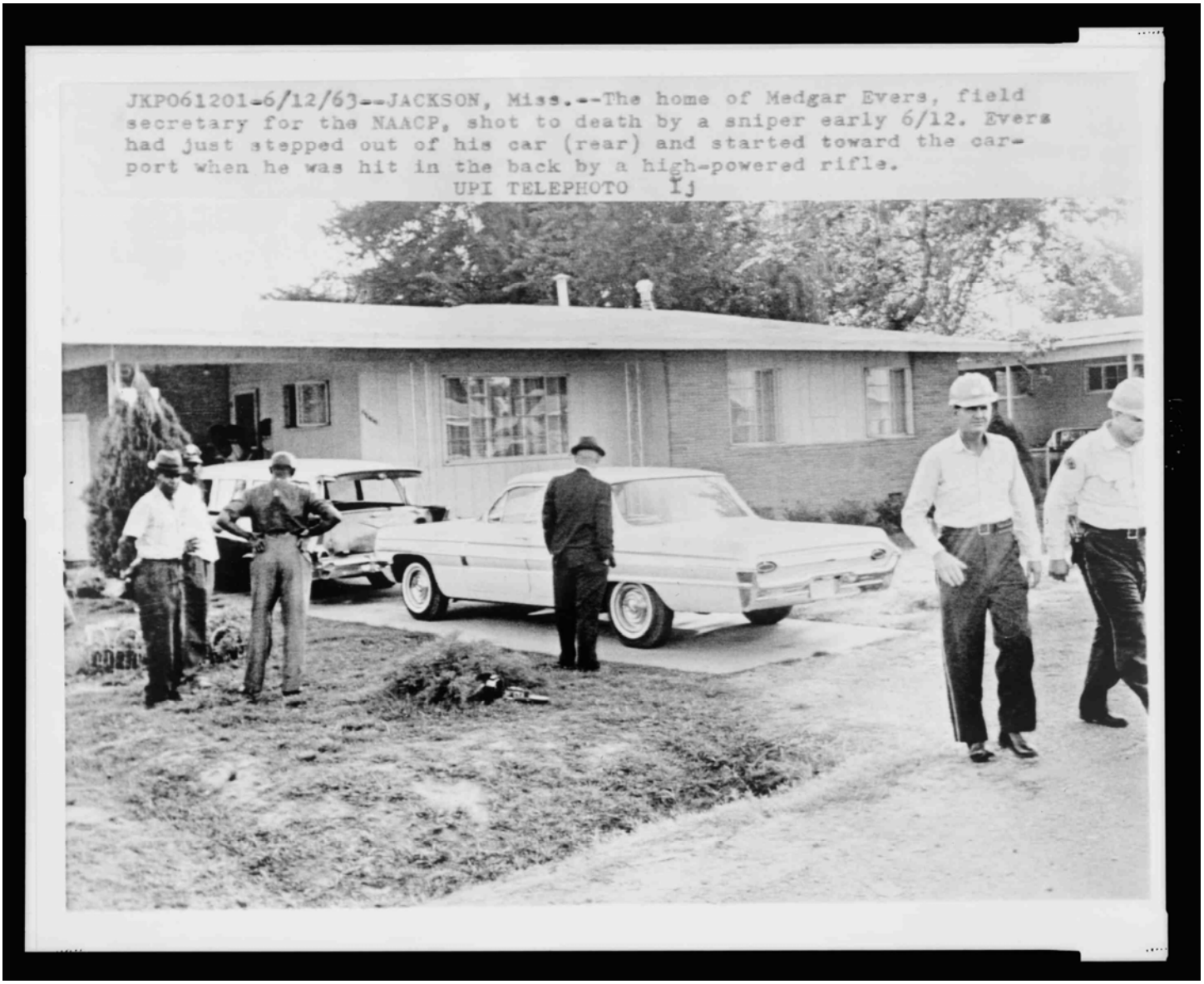
Front, south façade, view to north, September 7, 2008 (above).
South façade and west elevation, view to NE, September 7, 2008 (below).

W elevation, main entrance under carport, view toward backyard, May 22, 2014 (above). Living room, from dining room, with main entrance to far right and front window in background, view to SSW, April 30, 2015 (below).

Kitchen, view from hall entrance toward rear exit and dining room, to NW, April 30, 2015 (above). Living room (right) and dining room (left), view from main entrance, hallway and bedrooms in background, view to E, April 30, 2015 (below).

Hallway, view from living room toward bedrooms, with kitchen entrance to far left, view to E, April 30, 2015.

Master bedroom (SE room), view to NW, April 30, 2015 (above).
Children's bedroom (S central room), view to SSW, April 30, 2015 (below).



"The home of Medgar Evers, field secretary for the NAACP, shot to death by a sniper early 6/12." June 1963. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. *New York World-Telegram* and the *Sun* Newspaper Photograph Collection, NYWTS - BIOG--Evers, Medgar W.--Murder Case--Dead [item] [P&P]. **Digital Id:** cph 3c35504 http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c35504

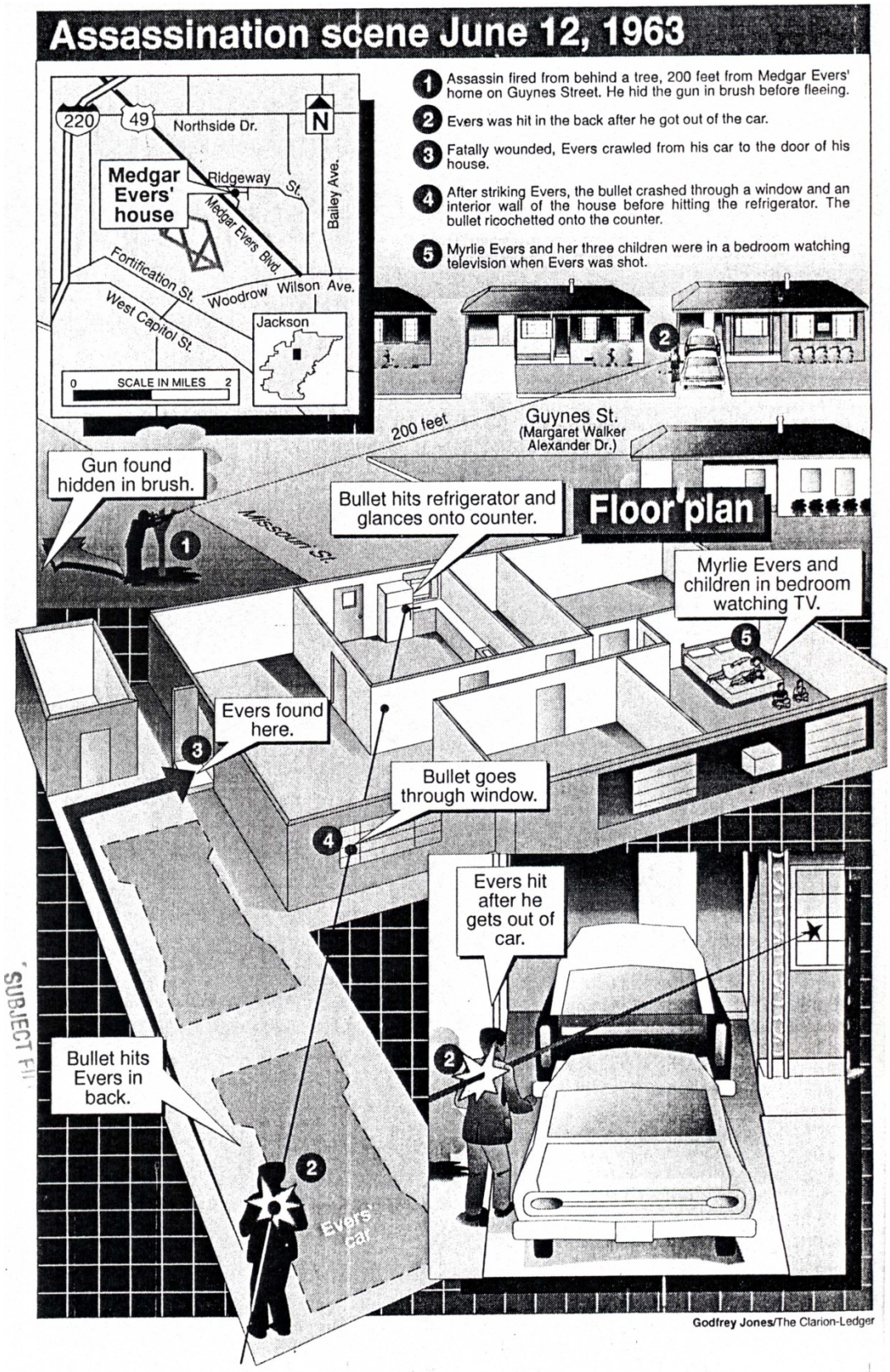
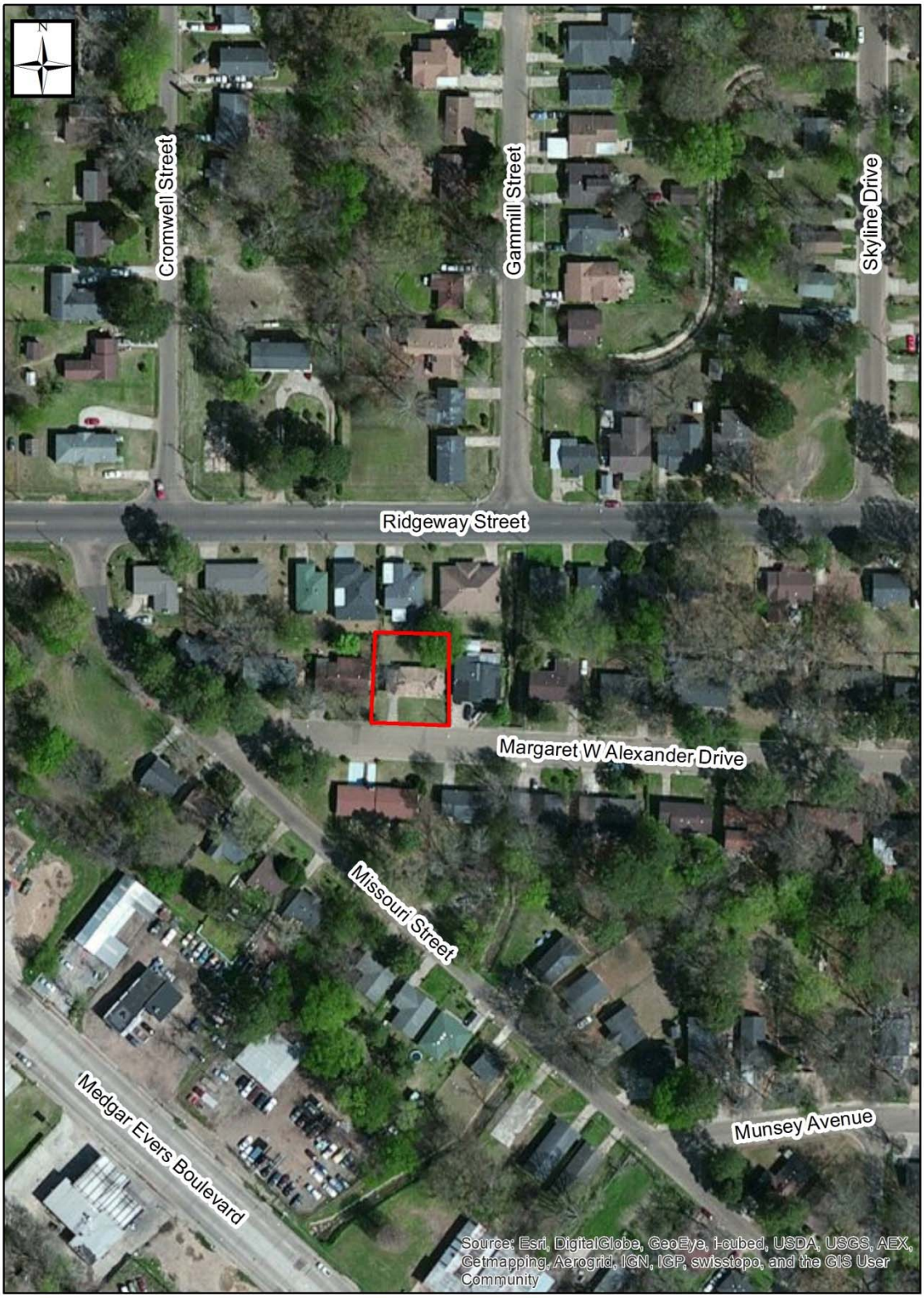


Figure 1: Illustration by Godfrey Jones, published in Jackson *Clarion-Ledger*, Sunday, June 6, 1993, p. 16A.

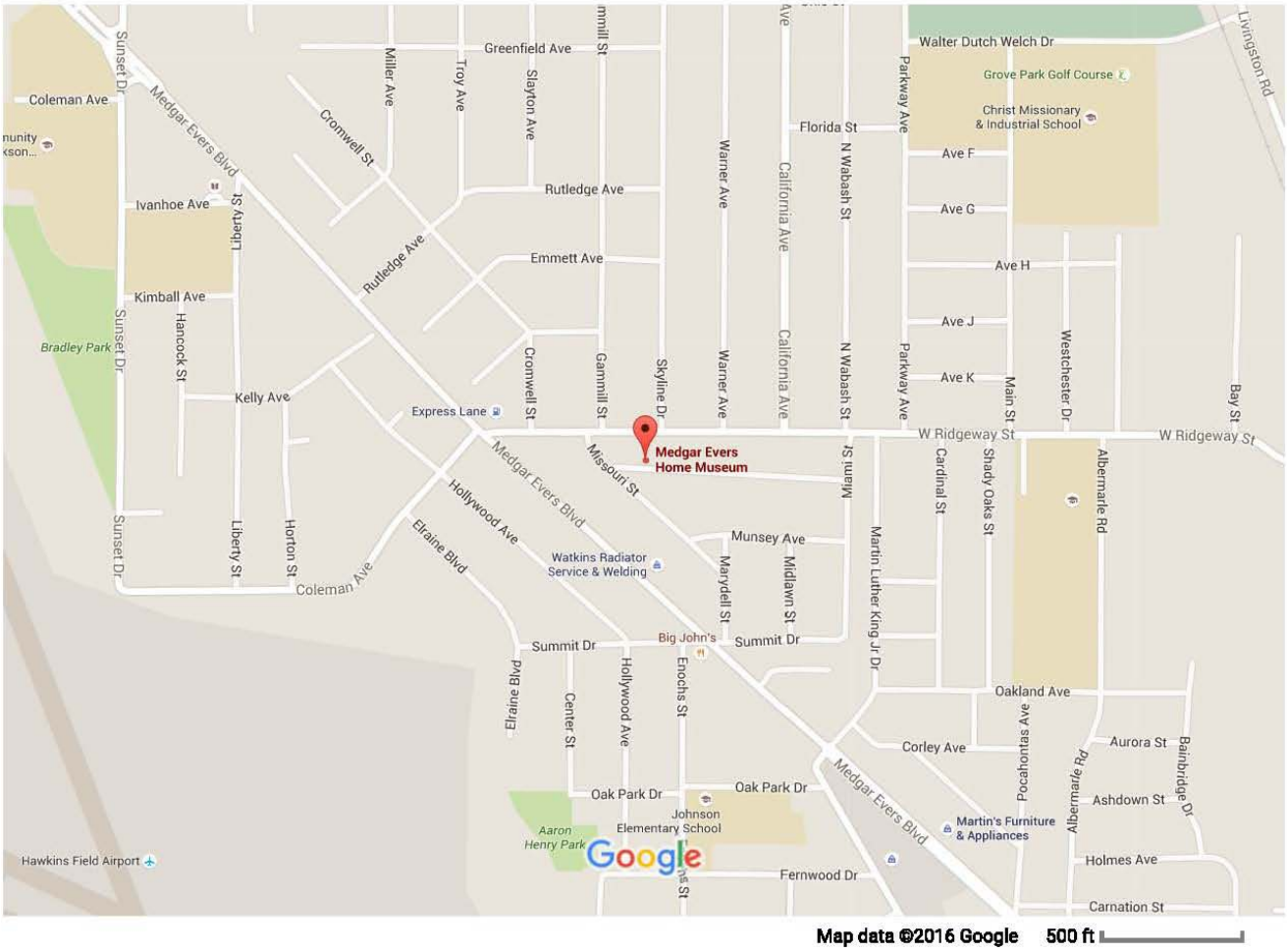


NHL Boundary Map

Google Maps

Medgar Evers Home Museum

Lat/Long: 32.340910, -90.212301; Datum: NAD83



Google Maps

Jackson, Mississippi

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