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"Not Just Whites in Appalachia": The Black Appalachian Commission, Regional Black Power Politics, and the War on Poverty, 1965-1975

Jillean McCommons
University of Kentucky, jilleanmc@gmail.com
Author ORCID Identifier:
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7893-1927
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“NOT JUST WHITES IN APPALACHIA”: THE BLACK APPALACHIAN COMMISSION, REGIONAL BLACK POWER POLITICS, AND THE WAR ON POVERTY, 1965-1975

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
Jillean Irene McCommons
Lexington, Kentucky
Director: Dr. Anastasia Curwood, Associate Professor of History
Lexington, Kentucky
2022

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7893-1927

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

"NOT JUST WHITES IN APPALACHIA": THE BLACK APPALACHIAN COMMISSION, REGIONAL BLACK POWER POLITICS, AND THE WAR ON POVERTY, 1965-1975

During the Black Power era of the late 1960s and 1970s, Black activists in Appalachia used the opening of the War on Poverty to wage a regional war against institutional and environmental racism. Through the Black Appalachian Commission, a grassroots organization created in 1969, Black activists worked to expose racism in local and federal policy as the root cause of poverty for Black Appalachians, who they argued were the poorest in the region. Their outward self-definition as Black and Appalachian was a political strategy to garner power over resources earmarked for Appalachians. The term "Black Appalachian" was more than a simple way of identifying African Americans in a region. It represents an historical moment in which the Black Power movement, part of the larger Black Freedom Struggle, coalesced with Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty in the Appalachian South. Created out of the Black campus movement at Berea College and the multiracial anti-poverty movement regionally, the BAC sought to raise a regional Black consciousness to unite Black Appalachians from thirteen states into a mass movement. They began by making the existence of Black people in Appalachia visible in order to build a basis for claims to structural changes. The BAC partnered with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to conduct the first statistical study on Black Appalachians, challenged regional policy at the federal level by demanding that the new Appalachian Regional Commission mandate affirmative action policies, organized Black communities on the ground against environmental racism after a climate disaster, uplifted Black Appalachian women as the key to building Black Appalachian power, and created the first regional publication to advance a Black Appalachian perspective. Although ultimately limited by the unwillingness of federal agencies to adopt their demands, the BAC harnessed the openings of the War on Poverty to challenge racism in the Appalachian region. Their radical vision of anti-poverty was to address it through anti-racism. Through grassroots organizing and institution building, local people challenged the federal government to address the needs of all Appalachians.

KEYWORDS: Appalachia, Black Power, African Americans, Institutional Racism, Environmental Racism, Civil Rights

Jillean Irene McCommons

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By
Jillean Irene McCommons

Anastasia Curwood
Director of Dissertation

Amy Murrell Taylor
Director of Graduate Studies

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Date

DEDICATION

To Mama, Nana, and Big Mama.

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I send deep gratitude to my ancestors for their survival and fortitude. May this work honor you. To Stacey, Nicole, and Leon, I love you. To DeAirre, Anthony, Antwan, and D'Avirex, remember to reach for the stars. Auntie Jillean loves you! To DeAgo and Harmony, may you go beyond all of us and continue our family's legacy for generations to come.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1972, Arbury Jack Guillebeaux, executive director of the Black Appalachian Commission (BAC), made a call for Black regional unity. In an article entitled "Not Just Whites in Appalachia" he wrote,

> Black Appalachians who are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder in Appalachia have limited power as long as their struggles are isolated in Asheville, N.C., Hazard, Ky., Starkville, Miss. and Steubenville, Ohio. But the vision that was born in 1969 has become a reality. Today black Appalachians are combining their resources and acting as one community to challenge their oppressors, continue the fight for justice in their villages and towns and carry the battle to the nation's capitol.[1]

Guillebeaux spoke explicitly about economic and political power and the potential for Black Appalachians to demand more by uniting across a thirteen-state region. Guillebeaux envisioned a type of Black regional nationhood. He emphasized the connection between lack of power and racial and economic marginalization. His use of "oppressors" and his emphasis on power were signposts to a larger social movement. This was a call for solidarity in the language of Black Power organizing. This was a call

[1] Jack Guillebeaux, "Not Just Whites in Appalachia," *South Today* (June 1972).

against institutions at the local, state, and federal levels that obstructed Black self-determination. This was a call for Black Appalachian power.

During the Black Power era of the late 1960s and 1970s, Black activists in Appalachia used the opening of the War on Poverty to wage a regional war against institutional and environmental racism. Through the Black Appalachian Commission, a grassroots organization created in 1969, Black activists worked to expose racism in local and federal policy as the root cause of poverty for Black Appalachians, who they argued were the poorest in the region. Their outward self-definition as Black and Appalachian was a political strategy to garner power over resources earmarked for Appalachians. The term “Black Appalachian" was more than a simple way of identifying African Americans in a region. It represents an historical moment in which the Black Power movement, part of the larger Black Freedom Struggle, coalesced with Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty in the Appalachian South. Created out of the Black campus movement at Berea College and the multiracial anti-poverty movement regionally, the BAC sought to raise a regional Black consciousness to unite Black Appalachians from thirteen states into a mass movement. They began by making the existence of Black people in Appalachia visible in order to build a basis for claims to structural changes. The BAC partnered with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to conduct the first statistical study on Black Appalachians, challenged regional policy at the federal level by demanding that the new Appalachian Regional Commission mandate affirmative action policies, organized Black communities on the ground against environmental racism after a climate disaster, uplifted Black Appalachian women as the key to building Black Appalachian power, and created the first regional publication to advance a Black Appalachian perspective. Although

ultimately limited by the unwillingness of federal agencies to adopt their demands, the BAC harnessed the openings of the War on Poverty to challenge racism in the Appalachian region. Their radical vision of anti-poverty was to address it through anti-racism. Through grassroots organizing and institution building, local people challenged the federal government to address the needs of all Appalachians.

By considering the intersections of these two social movements, this dissertation bridges the gap between Black history and Appalachian studies. It positions Black Appalachians in the broader genealogy of the Black Freedom Struggle and conveys how the history of Black activism in Appalachia changes what we know about Black Power. First, I show that the student activism that energized the Black Power movement nationally occurred in Appalachia and it led to regional activism specific to a time and place. In *The Black Revolution on Campus*, historian Martha Biondi identifies Black student activism in the late 1960s as part of the Black Power movement.[2] She writes that "Black Power emphasized the creation of Black-controlled institutions and racial solidarity and entailed vigorous emphasis on culture—both in celebrating African American culture and in seeing it as a catalyst for political action and the forging of a new Black consciousness."[3] Students on predominately white and historically Black college and university campuses across the country created Black student unions to challenge unequal institutional structures. Biondi asserts that "Black Power advocates

[2] Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). Other related histories on the formation of Black student unions on predominantly white or historically Black college and university campuses include Stefan M. Bradley's *Upending the Ivory Tower: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Ivy League* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), Ibram H. Rogers (Ibram X. Kendi), *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[3] Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, 4.

saw themselves as unmasking U.S. institutions—including liberal ones like universities—and exposing the whiteness disguised as universalism."[4] In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Black students at Berea College, an institution famous for its history of integrated education, attempted to unmask the facade of racial harmony at the college. With the history of abolition and the early matriculation of Black men and women, students in the 1960s compared the college's stated mission with their reality as a small percentage of the student body. This unmasking by Black Berea College students did not end on campus or out in the Berea community. They transferred their Black institution-building out into the wider Appalachian region. Therefore, the history of the Black Appalachian Commission is a local expression of Black Power.

Second, I show that the BAC was grounded in Black Power ideological roots that grew into locally-relevant activism. As a local expression of Black Power, the BAC belongs squarely within Black Power Studies. Here I engage with the work of historian Rhonda Y. Williams as she has delineated "the roots, routes, and expressions that comprise the search for Black Power politics in the 20th century." Williams's *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Century* presents "an ancestral and mapping project, paying particular attention to the emergent streams and forerunners of the Black Power phase of the liberation struggle." [5] Williams opens the doors for a more wide-ranging view of Black Power, one that acknowledges the contributions of everyday. This study follows Williams' lead by using her methodology in order to trace the

[4] Ibid.

[5] Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.

ideological roots of the founding of the BAC. It contextualizes the founding of the organization by mapping the ideas that led to its creation. As such, in addition to a social history, it is also an intellectual history of the BAC that seeks to put its history in conversation with other studies of Black Power nationally and globally.

This project also engages Williams's conceptualization of Black Power as "arguably a general and timeless goal." and demonstrates the malleable, adaptable, and versatile nature of Black Power. [6] Black Power is expansive, diverse, and comprises a search for power that crosses time yet still can be studied according to its temporal and physical bounds. In this way, Williams enables us to see the forest for the trees. Black Power is "a historically contextualized set of oppositional ideologies and politics" that is "undergirded by race consciousness, pride, nationhood, self-determination, and sovereignty."[7] Williams also posits that the search for Black Power did not always entail a challenge to overall systems. While Black people "demanded the authority to control decisions, as well as resources," their demands were not always about overturning undemocratic governments. She writes, "While this has often meant mounting efforts to challenge if not alter regimes of oppression, it has not always resulted in (or even necessitated) transforming oppressive regimes."[8] The BAC did not challenge the system overall, but its attempts to turn that system toward Black empowerment are a critical example of Black Power politics. This study analyzes Black activism in an Appalachian context taking into account preceding genealogies that fed ideas and actions. By doing so,

[6] Ibid, 4.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

it maps a particular stream of a racial consciousness based in a particular place in and through time.

This study of the Black Appalachian experience is grounded in twentieth-century Appalachian history and corrects the field's neglect of Black historical actors. The meaning of Appalachia and its geographical boundaries have changed over time but have persistently elided Blackness in the region. In *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in American Consciousness, 1870 - 1920*, Henry Shapiro argues that the idea of Appalachia, and the region itself, are constructions that have been in the making "for some two hundred years."[9] The area was shaped conceptually by the work of early travel writers and missionaries during the late nineteenth century who claimed mountainous communities had a certain otherness that needed uplift. Shapiro identifies this as the Progressive Era's so-called discovery of Appalachia, a period when travel writers produced enduring perceptions of otherness about the region. At that time, writers identified the region as five or six states. But few have examined the experiences of people of African descent there.

Historians of Appalachia have typically not included discussions of Black Appalachians even when discussing economic oppression and poverty. Ronald D. Eller's classic study *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*, "examines the politics of development in Appalachia since 1945 with an eye toward exploring the idea of progress as it has evolved in modern America itself."[10] But Eller does not incorporate Black

[9] Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), ix.

[10] Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 4.

people, race, or racism, even as he argues Appalachia "mirrored" national political and economic processes nationally. In documenting how Appalachia served as one of many testing grounds for economic development theories Eller shows that their successes and failures are less indicative of an exceptional Appalachian culture than of differences in ideas about what progress meant and who would have access to it in practice. Eller shows that capitalist theories relying on economic growth to address social inequality proved as problematic in the Appalachian context as they did in the national arena. Despite the centrality of race in national economic history it plays no role in his analysis, rendering all Appalachians and their experience of poverty the same. Eller does acknowledge gender differences and notes that "women and children carried the heaviest burden of poverty and income disparity."[11] But Eller does not specify the race of these men, women, and children, implying a default whiteness. His work, like other histories of Appalachia that leave racial differences among Appalachians out, reinforces ideas of Appalachia as monolithic and the experience of poverty as the same among all Appalachians. When Black people do appear, it is as African American migrants "from the Deep South" and not as multigenerational residents of the region with claims to Appalachian identity.[12] Black Appalachians are depicted as newcomers while white Appalachians are referred to as "indigenous," both erasing the history of Native Americans in the region and the history of Black people in the region prior to the twentieth century.

[11] Ibid., 234.

[12] Ibid., 20 and 25.

Scholarship on the War on Poverty, which elsewhere is concerned with Black people, tends to turn toward an exclusive focus on white people when it comes to Appalachia and thus misses important patterns. Historiographically, scholarship on the effects of the War on Poverty in the region is rich.[13] Thomas Kiffmeyer assesses the Appalachian experience of the War on Poverty by shifting the focus away from histories of "racial minorities in decaying urban cities" to "poor mountain whites."[14] By doing so, he sets up a racial distinction based on geography and urban versus rural spaces. Appalachia is presented as a white rural space and urban cities are presented as Black. This discounts the presence of Black people in Appalachia as well as cities within the region. Kiffmeyer argues that "looking at Appalachia creates a different interpretation of the War on Poverty from those that focus on cities."[15] He then goes on to write, "Poor mountain whites failed to harness--or, more properly, rejected--the possibilities presented by what they labeled 'other people's programs, instead channeling public and private monies into programs of their own.'"[16] It is unclear who Kiffmeyer refers to when he writes "other people's programs" and "of their own." It is especially unclear if his assessments include the views of Black people in the region. While Kiffmeyer does acknowledge the creation of the BAC as part of a radical shift in the regional

[13] See John M. Glen, "The War on Poverty in Appalachia - A Preliminary Report." *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* Vol. 87, No. 1 (Winter 1989), pp. 40-57; Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Thomas Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals: The Appalachian Volunteers and the War on Poverty* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

[14] Thomas Kiffmeyer, "Looking Back to the City in the Hills: The Council of the Southern Mountains and a Longer View of the War on Poverty in the Appalachian South, 1913-1970," in Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds. *The War on Poverty: A Grassroots History, 1964-1980*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 359.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

organization the Council of the Southern Mountains due to the 1960s social movements, he does not incorporate the BAC into his argument. Kiffmeyer writes that "the BAC sought to 'gain power to exercise meaningful influence and control of the resources that affect the Black community,'" but he does not tell the reader how and whether they did so, implying that the story is irrelevant.[17] As it turns out, Black activists worked with federal agencies in innovative ways. I demonstrate that they did not reject the War on Poverty, as poor white people did, but harnessed the opportunity to expand what federal aid would mean by pushing the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and the Nixon Administration to do more for Black Appalachians. They continued in the tradition of Black communities in the North and South seeking federal intervention when local manifestations of racism prevented them from exercising their rights. Their story raises the possibility that if the ARC had accepted their demands, democracy in the region would have been expanded for Black Appalachians as well as other communities.

Similarly, scholarship on women's anti-poverty activism has missed Black women's contributions, even in studies of grassroots organizations. In *To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice*, Jessie Wilkerson writes about the war on poverty period beyond the mid-1960s when local activism is taken into account.[18] She writes, "Most scholars date the top-down federal War on Poverty from 1964 to 1968, but the grassroots war on poverty reverberated for over a decade. Its legacies continue into the present."[19] Here, Wilkerson hearkens to

[17] Ibid., 379.

[18] Jessie Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019).

[19] Ibid., 4.

studies on grassroots organization and mobilization through the 1960s and beyond.[20] This research covers the period after 1968 during the aftermath of the legislative changes and new challenges during the Richard Nixon Administration. Wilkerson fills an important gap by focusing on working-class Appalachians. However, Wilkerson's study admittedly focuses on white women. She writes, "Most of the historical actors in this story are white women who lived and worked in poor and working-class communities, and who became part of an unfolding drama."[21] Like *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*, this dissertation also approaches the period from a bottom-up perspective. But in contrast, this study purposely approaches activism, organizing, and regional social movements from a Black Appalachian perspective. In particular, I have found that Black women's activism in Appalachia was home-grown but informed national antiracist, feminist, and antipoverty movements.

Black scholars of the past forty years have attempted to rectify historiographic neglect. In 1985, *Blacks in Appalachia*, edited by William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, began to fill this gap.[22] It was the first volume to include essays that consider the history of Black Appalachians in the context of the twentieth century and social movements. Although the volume includes essays from white and Black scholars, activists, and artists, it is the first publication to include the voices of Black Appalachians referring to themselves as "Black Appalachians." Noting the importance of the BAC, the

[20] Ibid. Also see Orleck, Annelise and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds. *The War on Poverty: A Grassroots History, 1964-1980*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011.

[21] Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*, 3.

[22] William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, eds. *Blacks in Appalachia*. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985).

volume included a reprint of Guillebeaux's "Not Just Whites in Appalachia" *South Today* article. That Turner and Cabbell included the BAC was a result of two decades of organizing to raise a racialized regional consciousness.[23]

The topic of race in Appalachia has gained more attention and critical study since Turner's and Cabbell's anthology. Joe William Trotter's 1990 classic on West Virginia coal miners set the standard for Black Appalachian labor studies. Covering an earlier period, a collection of essays edited by John Inscoe published in 2005 engaged slavery and emancipation in the region. The history of the Black communities in Eastern Kentucky in was recently updated by Karida Brown's sociological study of Black migration and concepts of home. These studies focused on the colonial and antebellum periods, the Civil War and early twentieth century. Instead, seeking to expand the number of narrative histories from Black Appalachian perspectives, this dissertation offers a narrative history of the late twentieth century with emphasis on Black activists who referred to themselves as Black Appalachians. This is the first narrative history of Black Appalachians regionally, through a regional organization.[24]

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[23] Cabbell wrote a brief history of the BAC in "Black Invisibility and Racism in Appalachia: An Informal Survey," *Appalachian Journal* Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn 1980), 48-54, reprinted in William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, eds. *Blacks in Appalachia*.

[24] Joe William Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990). Thomas E. Wagner and Phillip Obermiller *African American Miners and Migrants: The Eastern Kentucky Social Club* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004). John Inscoe, ed. *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), Hayden, Wilburn. *Appalachian Black People: Identity, Location and Racial Barriers*. (Toronto: 91 South, 2015). More recent works include Karida Brown *Gone Home: Race and Roots Through Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). John M. Coggeshall *Liberia, South Carolina: An African American Appalachian Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). Cicero M. Fain III *Black Huntington: An Appalachian Story* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019). Susan E. Keefe, ed. *Junaluska: Oral Histories of a Black Appalachian Community* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2020). William H. Turner, *The Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns* (Morgantown: West Virginia

To fully understand the influence of their ideas and position at the crossroads of regional and racial identity, this research uses theories of place from the field of geography. In *Place: An Introduction*, Tim Cresswell defines place as "a meaningful location." [25] In "Place: Encountering Geography as Philosophy," Cresswell identifies three aspects that differentiate place from space.[26] He writes that places have a "combination of location, landscape, and meaning" that is "both individual and shared."[27] Places are made meaningful by "sense of place" people and communities ascribe to it in the past and present. The discussion of race and place is a burgeoning subfield in geography. In *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place,* editors Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods state, "We take for granted the geographic knowledge that black subjects impart, as well as the long-standing spatial politics - from segregation to incarceration to emancipatory strategies - that inform black lives."[28] They present the anthology to "initiate a discussion of how we might begin to work through the dilemmas that continually come forth when race and space converge with one another and relegate black geographies to bodily, economic/historical materialist, or metaphoric categories of analysis."[29] McKittrick and Woods write about how the view of Hurricane Katrina as a natural disaster obscures racial power dynamics that determined where Black

University Press, 2021). Joe William Trotter *African American Workers and the Appalachian Coal Industry* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2022).

[25] Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 12.

[26] Tim Cresswell, "Place: Encountering Geography as Philosophy." *Geography* Vol. 93, No. 3 (Autumn 2008): 132-139.

[27] Ibid., 134

[28] Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 6.

[29] Ibid.

communities were located and how they received aid before and after the hurricane. They argue that New Orleans was a racialized space before the hurricane.

Building on the work of McKittrick and Woods, this dissertation considers Appalachia as a racialized landscape with uneven power dynamics between racial groups. For example, in 1972, an entire community of homes were destroyed in Cumberland, Kentucky, following heavy storms. Sanctified Hill was a historically Black community, the result of earlier periods of spatial segregation. The local and state governments considered the rains to be a result of nature and therefore not the responsibility of the local governments to address. Cumberland residents, many of whom owned their homes, organized the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee with the help of the BAC and they took their case all the way to Washington, D.C. seeking relief. By centering the Black history of the region, this study joins scholars working to write histories that engage environmental history. It ultimately seeks to address questions of identity, power, and place.

By centering Black Appalachian history, this dissertation changes the historiography of the region and on Black activism. While Appalachian historiographies mainly focus on rural communities in Central Appalachia, Black Appalachians in rural areas worked together with Black Appalachians in urban cities including Chattanooga and Knoxville, Tennessee, Birmingham, Alabama, as well as cities outside of Central Appalachia including Cincinnati, Louisville, and Pittsburgh. Their vision of place included Black people and places outside of how historians currently conceptualize Appalachia, conceptualizations based primarily on ARC definitions that are only as old as the 1960s. Centering Black history in the region changes how we discuss the region

and who gets included in those discussions. This research also expands the geographic scope of Black Power Studies to the Mountain South and continue the important work of writing the history of Black communities in Appalachia. Tying African American and Appalachian histories together amplifies the experience of Black people in the region who sit at the cross section of a racial and regional identity.

The 1964 legislative acts of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration provide the historical backdrop for this study. Johnson's Great Society reforms resulted from the demands and long-term mobilizations of grassroots activists who had been working to push the government to fulfill the promise of democracy in America since the founding of the country. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 signal a change in the federal legal support activists on the ground could claim against state and local inequality. The liberal policies of the Johnson Administration considered civil rights and inequality as government issues to address. Nineteen sixty-four was a year of reckoning and this national shift had consequences for Black people in Appalachia. Black Appalachians continued mobilizing into the 1970s.[30] By the mid-1960s, with the passing of the Appalachian Regional Development Act in 1965, part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs, Appalachia was redefined by the federal government. Though the size of the region had changed, the message that it needed to change had not. The Act stated,

[30] Julian E. Zelizer, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Lyndon Johnson, Congress, and the Battle for The Great Society*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2015). Michael L. Gillette *Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

> The Congress hereby finds and declares that the Appalachian region of the United States, while abundant in natural resources and rich in potential, lags behind the rest of the Nation in its economic growth and that its people have not shared properly in the Nation's prosperity. The region's uneven past development, with its historical reliance on a few basic industries and a marginal agriculture, has failed to provide the economic base that is a vital prerequisite for vigorous, self-sustaining growth.[31]

The Act created the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), a new federal-state partnership, and stated that its area of jurisdiction "includes all or part of 13 States: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia."[32] The Act identified the "ARC's primary function is to support development of Appalachia's economy and critical infrastructure to provide a climate for growth in business and industry that will create jobs."[33] The construction of Appalachia as a region composed of thirteen states, and the intention of the federal government to develop the region economically, translated into anti-poverty funds from the ARC to Appalachian communities. Who would get access to those funds, and who would be identified as Appalachian during this time, was one impetus for activism within Black communities

[31] Appalachian Regional Development ActS. 3 Public Law 89-4 (1965).

[32] Ibid. For the history of how Mississippi was added to the ARC's definition of Appalachia, see Justin M. Randolph, "The Making of Appalachian Mississippi," *Southern Cultures* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Winter 2020), https://www.southerncultures.org/article/the-making-of-appalachian-mississippi/ [accessed February 28, 2022].

[33] Ibid.

who used the time to purposely state their presence in the region. When the federal government used regionalism to try to solve the problem of poverty in the region, Black activists responded by trying to build a regional solidarity in order to make themselves and their needs visible. Black people in Appalachia had ideas about how to change their lives for the better, and they put those ideas into action within and against a system that marginalized them nationally and regionally.[34] The seed of their regional outlook and activism was planted on the campus of Berea College.

Chapter 2 identifies the origins of the Black Appalachian Commission (BAC) in the Black campus movements of the later 1960s. The Black Power movement on Berea College's campus merged with the movement for multiracial working-class power emanating from the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee. The two movements converged at the 1969 meeting of the Council of the Southern Mountains (CSM). There, idealistic Black college students and Appalachian anti-poverty activists, both Black and white, joined together to radically change a regional organization receiving government aid purportedly for poor communities. Grassroots activists shifted the levers of decision-making to their advantage. Black activists who first disrupted the idea of a harmonious interracial college, extended their battle for representation through Black organization from campus to the broader region. Their self-definition as Black and Appalachian culminated in the formation of a new identity, a regional Black

[34] In their introduction to *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition*, editors Keisha N. Blain, Christopher Cameron, and Ashley D. Farmer explain that "at its core the general field of intellectual history deals with the ideas and symbols that people use to make sense of the world." From "The Contours of Black Intellectual History" in *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019).

consciousness, and a new organization. Black Appalachians were an active part of the civil rights and Black Power movements of the second half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 3 documents the first two years of the BAC by tracing the people and organizations that contributed to the BAC's statistical report on Black Appalachian populations, the first report of its kind. I argue that the development of the BAC was made possible by alliances it developed with national Black organizations. The report and the groups involved in its creation, including the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, were critical to the BAC's transition from a campus-based organization led by Berea College students who were heavily influenced by white CSM leaders, to a community-centered organization led by veteran community activists who challenged the influence of white CSM leaders to ultimately found an independent organization. The history of the report shows the need for Black Appalachian activists in the 1970s to go outside of the region to find financial support even as they worked to build regional solidarity. In order to challenge internal racism, which the BAC cited as the cause of their economic conditions, Black Appalachians aligned with Black people and organizations outside of the region.

Chapter 4 examines the Black Appalachian Commission's fight for self-determination through their demands for changes to public policy. After the publication of its own statistical study that clearly identified Black people in the region and deduced their low economic condition from increased outmigration, the BAC was armed with numbers to back up their claims to proportional funding and representation. Organized into a new institution, the BAC put the fight against institutional racism in action by questioning the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Over the course of their exchanges with the ARC between 1971 and 1972, the BAC insisted on centering the

needs of working-class Black Appalachians. Doing so raised the issue of who mattered in anti-poverty programs and who would ultimately benefit from regional policy. By demanding changes to ARC staffing, direct funding for Black child development, and affirmative action in hiring, the BAC exposed institutional racism as the barrier to economic justice. They unmasked how policies created to address economic inequality were not race neutral or colorblind. To the BAC, any project to alleviate poverty had to address systemic racism on the local and federal level. Economic and racial justice were intertwined.

The fifth chapter follows the BAC from 1972 to 1973. As the organization became more institutionalized, its commitment to building power within Black Appalachian communities grew. Assisting the Sanctified Hill community after an environmental disaster was in line with the BAC's increased emphasis on power as the key to social change. The BAC and the Sanctified Hill residents organized to agitate for government intervention in the form of disaster relief, but there was more to their request than the dispersal of federal funds. They advocated for community control of those funds. This was their way of ensuring the funds went to the replacement of their homes and relocation of their community. That they did so came out of their and the BAC's view that poor Black people had leaders among them who were the best people to control and determine how those resources would be used. Community control was the foundation of self-determination and both fomented power.

The last chapter traces the BAC's last two years. It begins with its alliance with the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization and how that alliance culminated in the BAC's publication *Black Appalachian Viewpoints*. It then moves to a

discussion of the BAC's program plans for Black women as evidence of the organization's connection to Black feminist movements. Then the chapter discusses the $250,000 award and its aftermath, when internal contests over money and power and pressure to survive as a nonprofit institution ultimately caused the organization's collapse. The BAC disbanded sometime in late 1974 and early 1975.

I use oral histories, private collections from direct participants, government documents, and institutional records as primary sources. This included visits to meet with Jack Guillebeaux in Montgomery, Alabama, Almetor King in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Edward D. Smith in Berea, Kentucky. I consulted the Radicalism Collection in Special Collections at the Michigan State University Libraries in East Lansing, Michigan, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library in New York City. I also included local collections, including the Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection at the University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center and the Council of the Southern Mountains records at Berea College.

The history of the BAC demonstrates how a grassroots movement of Black people from across a wide region spoke truth to power. They challenged racism within institutions and within governments responses to disaster. On the question of who an Appalachian is, they made it clear that the answer had to include Black people.

CHAPTER 2. BLACK POWER AND THE ORIGINS OF THE BLACK APPALACHIAN COMMISSION, 1965-1969

On April 10, 1969, Edward D. Smith, a Black Berea College student from Spartanburg County, South Carolina, made a motion to create a Black Appalachian Commission. He was at the 57th Annual Meeting of the Council of the Southern Mountains (CSM) at Fontana Village, North Carolina, and had secured twenty-five signatures from people who supported the creation of the new organization. His motion read as follows:

> Whereas the Council of the Southern Mountains is supposedly concerned with the problems facing the people of Appalachia, black and white alike,
>
> Whereas, since the birth of this Council, 57 years ago, very little can be seen as to what the Council has done for the black people of Appalachia,
>
> Whereas the main emphasis of the Council is put on white Appalachians, thus very few black[s] are even aware of the existence of the Council,
>
> Therefore, be it resolved that this Council create a Black Appalachian Commission, and this commission be created to study the problems of the Black Appalachians so that the presence of the Council can be felt within the Black community of Appalachia.[35]

[35] Annual Conference Records, Series 3, Box 145, Folder 6, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives, Berea, Kentucky.

Homer Williams, a Black fellow Berea College student from Stuarts Draft, Virginia, seconded Smith's proposal. Their motion carried and the commission was approved. Thus, in the spring of 1969, the Black Appalachian Commission (BAC) was founded.

The creation of the BAC was part of a larger history of social movements in Appalachia and provides an example of how African American history and Appalachian Studies intersect. The story of the BAC's founding reveals how the Black Power movement on Berea College's campus merged with a larger movement for working-class power in the region. The two movements converged at the 1969 meeting of the CSM. There, idealistic Black college students and Appalachian anti-poverty activists radically changed a regional organization receiving government aid that was purportedly for poor communities. Grassroots activists shifted the levers of decision-making to their advantage. In particular, Black student activists who had earlier demanded a share of decision-making power at Berea college extended their battle for Black-led representation from campus to the broader region. Their self-definition as Black and Appalachian culminated in the formation of a new identity and a regional Black consciousness. Black Appalachians were a part of the civil rights and Black Power movements of the second half of the twentieth century. Their activism offers a Black perspective on life in Appalachia, both the life they endured and the lives they were actively trying to create.

The founding of the BAC in 1969 marked the beginning of an important attempt by Black activists to build a regional Black consciousness. Although there had been Black members of the CSM previously, this was the first formation based on race in the

CSM. Moreover, the name of the commission is the first use of the term "Black Appalachian" I have found in the historical record. The term is more than a descriptive way of referring to African American residents of the region. It represents a historical moment in which the Black Power movement aligned with a multiracial movement for working-class economic power in Appalachia. These two movements in response to government action and inaction on civil and economic rights converged in 1969 with the founding of the BAC. During that time, Black activists from and living in Appalachia purposely and outwardly defined themselves as Black and Appalachian. Theirs was a self-definition based on race and place, a definition they used in order to build Black power. As they identified with a growing Black consciousness nationally, they fostered a specific Black regional consciousness locally. Ultimately, their self-definition was a movement strategy to dislodge the material consequences of the idea of Appalachia as an all-white region and what they viewed as the inaction by predominantly white regional organizations on behalf of Black residents. The history of this convergence is an important example of Black Appalachian attempts at self-determination, and their activism is a lens through which to consider the intersections of social movements in the 20th century.

The two movements that enabled the creation of the BAC were both steeped in a commitment to building power from the bottom up. One site of the Black Power movement in Appalachia can be traced to the campus of Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, and the founding of the college's first Black student union in 1968. Members of the Black Student Union (BSU) challenged the college administration to live up to the college's radical abolitionist past by increasing the number of Black students, hiring

Black faculty members, teaching Black Appalachian history, and holding campus-wide Black cultural events. On a campus famous for its mission of offering an interracial education, Black activist students challenged the idea of a harmonious interracial community. They also demanded the right to meet separately to form their own campus organization. Their separation and organization-building moved from the campus into the larger region through the founding of the BAC. At the same time, a broader multiracial working-class movement for economic rights grew out of the educational mission and activist tradition of the Highlander Research and Education Center in East Tennessee. Over its almost one-hundred-year history, Highlander's approach to education as a vehicle for social change has included supporting labor unions in the 1930s and 1940s, fighting for racial integration and voting rights in the South as part of the civil rights movement, and in the late 1960s, the organization and mobilization of the Appalachian poor in an attempt to build economic power. In 1969, at the 57th CSM meeting where the BAC was founded, Highlander staff orchestrated a pivotal push for poor people to hold a majority in the organization. Doing so made them decision-makers on policies and practices that affected them. Both the Black Power movement on Berea College's campus and the movement for working-class economic power initiated by Highlander challenged the top-down structure of power in the CSM and internal racial power dynamics regionally. Consequently, this chapter is a social history that examines the meanings of power from a bottom-up perspective.

Berea College and Black Power

Berea College was founded in Kentucky in 1855 as a private coeducational and interracial college based on the Christian motto, "God has made of one blood all the peoples of the earth."[36] Its founder, John G. Fee, a minister and abolitionist from the state, "declared, in 1856, that pro-slavery laws must not be obeyed."[37] To demonstrate his commitment to immediate abolition over gradual emancipation, Fee organized a Kentucky chapter of the Radical Abolitionist Party, and continued preaching sermons even while under vigorous threat by anti-abolitionists. The college was an extension of his radicalism as one of few higher education institutions in the country to offer an interracial education. It did so until 1904, when the Kentucky legislature passed the Day Law prohibiting integrated education, a direct challenge to the college by segregationist legislators.

When the Day Law was passed, Fee was still active as a trustee, but the new college president, William Goddell Frost, differed from Fee in his commitment to interracial education. "Immediately [Frost] began to bend his efforts to increasing the number of white Appalachians in the school. In 1892, when he arrived at Berea, total enrollment had been 254, of whom 184 were Negro. By 1903, there were 961 students in attendance, but only 157 were black."[38] When the college faced the choice to educate

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[36] See Shannon H. Wilson's *Berea College: An Illustrated History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

[37] Richard Day, Roger Cleveland, June O. Hyndman, and Don C. Offutt, "Berea College—Coeducationally and Racially Integrated: An Unlikely Contingency in the 1850s," *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol 82, No. 1 (Winter 2013): 36.

[38] Paul David Nelson, "Experiment in Interracial Education at Berea College, 1858-1908," *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jan. 1974): 19. It was also during this time that Frost declared his discovery of a unique mountain people who he called "Appalachian American." His shift from focusing on interracial education to Appalachians, by which he interpreted as white people, greatly influenced perceptions of the region throughout the twentieth century. See Frost, *Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1899). Frost's view of the mountain south and education differed

Black or white students on Berea College's campus, a space that had been a haven for radical abolitionists both Black and white, Frost chose to devote the campus to white Appalachian students. Although the college opened an institute near Louisville to educate Black students, the president's choice to make Berea College an all-white school was controversial. Indeed, the choice was protested at the time. In a pamphlet entitled, "President Frost's Betrayal of the Colored People in his Administration of Berea College," a group that included a former Black Berea College student, wrote, "It would seem that in the name of justice, to say nothing of humanity, [the school] should have been given to the colored people. Had it not been for colored people, there would have been no Berea College . . . We feel . . . they have been robbed of their birthright."[39] Despite their protests, Berea College remained an all-white institution until the Day Law was overruled in 1954 by *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

Ten years after the pivotal supreme court decision that prohibited states from mandating segregated schools, white students still vastly outnumbered Black students at Berea. Out of fourteen hundred students on campus in 1964, only thirty-five were Black.[40] The college was integrated, but only barely. Although small in number, by 1965, Black Berea College students were fully immersed in the civil rights movement and agitating on campus. When an interracial group of students and faculty requested official college support to join the march from Selma to Montgomery on March 24, 1965, the

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greatly from his contemporary John C. Campbell. See Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921).

[39] Ibid., 24.

[40] Dwayne Mack, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around: Berea College's Participation in the Selma to Montgomery March." *Ohio Valley History*, (Fall 2005), 44.

college refused. Berea College students from Birmingham, including Ann Beard, a Black music major from Birmingham, Alabama, were vocal about pushing the college to outwardly show support for civil rights. Other Alabama students did so too. Historian Dwayne Mack has written that they "took particular exception to the mistreatment of African Americans in their home state, vigorously opposing voter discrimination in Selma when their own family members had voted elsewhere in the state."[41] When Berea's administration refused to support the voting rights march trip, a group of Black students marched to the home of college president Francis S. Hutchins where Beard led freedom songs in protest. Then, despite low numbers and the lack of official financial sponsorship from Berea College, Beard along with an interracial group of students and faculty left for Alabama in time to join the other marchers. They did so carrying a banner with the Berea College motto.

Beard knew the dangers involved in protesting voter suppression. Beard had attended A. H. Parker High School in Birmingham where she crossed paths with Angela Y. Davis who was two years ahead of her and a fellow girl scout. Beard's father, Reverend Luke Beard, served as pastor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church prior to the white supremacist bombing that killed Addie Mae Collins, Carol Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley on September 15, 1963. The church had been a meeting place for civil rights activists prior to the bombing. Beard remembered, "My father pastored Sixteenth Street church, which was the movement church in the state of Alabama; and so anything and everything that was going to happen in terms of the

[41] Dwayne Mack, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around," 45.

struggle had something to do with that church."[42] Beard was well aware of the risks of traveling to Alabama to answer the call by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in support of the right for Black people to vote, but she would make the trip home in support of the movement despite them. Reflecting on the experience fifty years later, Beard remarked, "Berea's motto is 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men.' Why did they ever tell us that? It became our weapon. We hammered them across the head to let us go."[43]

Their protest at the home of the college president and subsequent participation in the march are some examples of the many instances between 1965 and 1968 when Black students at Berea College pushed the college to live up to its radical abolitionist roots. To Black student activists in 1965, this meant officially supporting the civil rights movement. Beard remembered that Black students in particular returned from Alabama with a fervor to change the college campus. "Coming back from that trip we were definitely fired up. We really kicked in with the organization of the Black Student Union and started pressing Berea for black faculty, black staff, more students, more black coursework."[44] Three years after the trip, Beard was one of a group of students who founded Berea College's first Black Student Union (BSU) in 1968.

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[42] "Oral History Interview with Ann Beard Grundy," Interview by Betsy Brinson, February 17, 1999, Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky Oral History Project, Kentucky Oral History Commission Collection 1999OH01.8, Kentucky Historical Society. Online: https://www.kyhistory.com/digital/collection/Ohist/id/2776/rec/6 (Accessed December 30, 2020).

[43] As quoted in Tom Eblen, "50 Years After Selma: Berea Alumni Recall How March Changed Their Lives" (*Lexington Herald-Leader* February 16, 2015).

[44] Eblen, "50 Years After Selma."

The founding of the BSU marks the beginning of what historian Rhonda Y. Williams would term the expansive Black Power period at Berea College. Beard recalled, "Things had started to roll then. That was about the time period most BSUs around the country were rolling . . . At the heart of it was a sense of we wanted to have an organization that met our needs as African people, cultural needs. That was the first part. The second part was we wanted to change Berea College."[45] Beard also arrived in Berea with a sense of race consciousness that was at the heart of her activism. "When I grew up, it was spoken and unspoken that what you did was not just for self. That what you did was about uplifting the human race and the uplifting the race, meaning the African population where it may be on the face of this earth."[46] Beard came to Berea College with this ethic and it infused her activism on campus and leadership in founding the BSU. In telling the story of how the BSU started, Beard remembered, "We wanted black students to get together for something, and one of us went up in the student union there, in Berea, and put up a sign: 'All Blacks' -- and by this time we were using the word 'black' --- 'all black students meet in such and such a room at 6:30 this evening."[47] After Kenneth Miller, a student from Louisville, posted the sign, Beard remembered that a white college administrator saw the sign and promptly took it down. "Well, one of the people who saw it was the dean of women, Ann Marshall, who came along, saw that sign, 'Oh, why God hath made of one blood all nations and men. We can't have separate meetings and stuff like that. So, she did what we say was the most profound thing she could do. She ripped

[45] Ibid.

[46] "Interview with Msiba Ann Beard." Interview by Margaret Brown. *Appalachian Oral History Project*. June 5, 1991 (Accessed December 6, 2018). https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/catalog/xt7rbn9x2j0p

[47] Catherine Fosl and Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 195.

our sign down." The students' response to the removal of the sign was to quickly post another one. Ultimately, Beard viewed the removal of the sign as confirmation that the students need to start an all-Black organization to gather support from one another. Beard remarked, "Thank you, Ann Marshall, because that just lit us up. How dare you tell us that we can't see ourselves as a community within a community!"[48] The founding of the BSU was a way for Black Berea College students to build Black community and reinforce Black culture through organization. When the all-white faculty and administration at Berea College actively worked to thwart their efforts, Black students organized anyway.

Edward D. Smith, BAC co-founder, was also a founding member of the BSU. The removal of the sign had such an impact on him that he entitled his 2017 memoir, *All Black Students Meet: The Rise of the Black Student Union at Berea College, 1968-1970*, after the pivotal moment in which the Black students called each other together.[49] He also recalled that the sign was taken down, but also that some Black students were warned by a white faculty member that "'all hell' would break loose" if they met separately.[50] On a college campus famous for early racial integration and seeming racial harmony, he found it troubling that Black students were actively discouraged from meeting separately. Despite the warnings, the students persisted and met to form a BSU in the spring of 1968.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Edward D. Smith, *All Black Students Meet: The Rise of the Black Student Union at Berea College, 1968-1970: A Memoir*. (Edward D. Smith, 2017).

[50] Ibid., 8.

As in the case with Ann Beard, Smith came from a Black Appalachian community and came to Berea with a sense of race consciousness. His home community influenced his ideas about Black Power later on. For example, Smith grew up in what he called "our little hamlet of Dobson Heights," an area named after a Black family that owned property, located outside of Clifton, a village in Spartanburg County, South Carolina.[51] Smith described it as a textile town full of white and Black families. His family had lived in the area for generations, and it was there that Smith remembered singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," while surrounded by Black neighborhood schools named after Ralph J. Bunche and Benjamin E. Mays. When a white insurance agent tried to discourage his family from school integration with the threat of violence, Smith's father replied that he had "four boys, a shotgun, and a rifle."[52] In other words, they were ready for self-defense. Smith remembers a pride in Blackness that preceded his entry to college. "There was a strong sense that we were colored, we're proud. We were Negroes. Those were the two terms that were used . . . So, there was a sense of, I guess what later on became Blackness, pride in your community, pride in yourself, pride in your separate institutions. Yeah, that was very strong."[53] Like Beard, Smith arrived with a race consciousness cultivated in Black Appalachian communities. It was this sort of background that encouraged them to come together and try to create the same at Berea. Their organizing is an example of what historian Earl Lewis referred to as making congregation from segregation.[54] Smith remembered that Black students "felt that they

[51] Edward D. Smith interview by author. August 15, 2018, Berea, Kentucky.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), quoted in Robin D.G. Kelley, "We Are Not What We

needed a distinct organization that would address the social-cultural needs of the black students and challenge the seeming hypocrisy of the college with its all-white faculty and its failure to fully acknowledge its Afro-American past."[55] He also noted specific grievances, including the college president's way of referring to a Black person as 'Niggra.'"[56] It was this grievance and more that students challenged with their creation of the first campus BSU.

The new campus organization also pushed for Black faculty and higher Black student enrollment. At the time of the BSU's founding, Berea College had no Black faculty members. The students pointed to the college's abolitionist roots and the fact that it had Black faculty in its earlier years as impetus for the college to live up to its stated mission of an interracial education that included Black faculty and an equal number of Black students to white students. An equal number of Black students, Black faculty, Black Studies and Black cultural programming would go beyond simply integrating a few Black students into a predominantly white atmosphere to cultivating a truly interracial college experience. Nevertheless, April 1969 Berea College faculty voted down a proposal to increase the Black student population. Willis D. Weatherford, president of the college at the time, was in accord with the decision. "President Weatherford stated his reservations. He was afraid that both the Faculty and Trustees might react negatively to

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Seem: Re-thinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South. *Journal of American History* Vol. 8 No. 1 (June 1993), 79. Also used by Derrick E. White in *The Challenge of Blackness: The Institute of the Black World and Political Activism in the 1970s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011). The works above concentrate on the Jim Crow period. This research offers a view in a context post *Brown v. Board* where Black students still saw the need to create a community they had in previously segregated spaces.

[55] Smith, *All Black Students Meet,* 8.

[56] Ibid., 10.

'the words quota or goal in connection with our commitment to interracial education, as we have done with your Appalachian commitment."[57] Weatherford's assumption was that Appalachian meant white students even though Smith and Beard were Appalachian. The number of Black students at Berea would not change until Black students pushed it to change. The BSU undertook its own recruiting effort and, by the fall of 1969, "the black student population of Berea more than doubled, increasing from 57 to 125 students."[58] The BSU had addressed one its main complaints, "the paltry number of black students" on campus.[59]

The BSU also worked to promote Black cultural programming on an otherwise white-centered campus. It organized beauty contests to promote and celebrate natural hairstyles, and men proudly wore handmade dashikis to events. Revealing the gendered dynamics of the movement, Smith noted that the dashikis wear sewn by women. He wrote, "The women, led by senior Geneva Isom, sewed dashikis for all of the men" for Osun Dudu, an event they named after a Yoruba deity in line with the growing sense of what Molefe Kete Asante would later call Afrocentricity.[60] They performed plays written by black playwrights and sang gospel music from their home churches in the mountains.

In addition to cultural programs and efforts to change the Black presence on campus, the BSU supported political causes. In 1968, Bobby Seale, co-founder of the

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[57] Ibid., 52.

[58] Ibid., 66.

[59] Ibid., 10.

[60] Smith, *All Black Students Meet*, 56. For more on fashion and Black Power see Tanisha C. Ford *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2015). On Afrocentricity, see Molefi Kete Asante *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, 1989).

Black Panther Party, was bound to a chair and gagged during his trial as part of the Chicago 8 case. Smith organized a petition in protest of Seale's treatment.[61] A handful of white professors supported Black student activists by offering them the chance to interact with Black Power activists. When the college sponsored speakers including Fannie Lou Hamer and John Lewis for campus convocations in 1968, James Holloway, a white professor of philosophy and religion, held private meetings with them at his home. In 1969 he hosted Julius Lester, author of the book *Look Out Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama* and photographer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.[62] Beard also remembered support from other white faculty members. "Among the faculty and staff, there were some old socialists" who were in favor of antiracist activism, she recalled.[63] She also talked about the radicalism of the Berea Friends' Meeting she regularly attended. She remembered,

> I look back on that in the sense that it really was my hook-up to whatever one might call, in the context of Berea, a radical kind of underground thing. These were little old white men and women who in their day were pretty feisty. So even though race was maybe a little tricky for them, the whole idea of upsetting the status quo did not bother them at all. So, in a way, I had the blessings of these old, retired Berea workers; and they were not only there in terms of support and

[61] Ibid., 74.

[62] Ibid., 23. *Julius Lester, Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon Get Your Mama* (New York: Dial, 1968).

[63] "Oral History Interview with Ann Grundy," Interview by Betsy Brinson, June 23, 1999, Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky Oral History Project, Kentucky Oral History Commission Collection 1999OH01.7, Kentucky Historical Society. Online: https://www.kyhistory.com/digital/collection/Ohist/id/3204/rec/2 (Accessed December 30, 2020).

encouragement, but a lot of times we just needed money to go to this rally or that. They did it. They helped us out.[64]

Some white faculty, staff, and local residents supported Black student organizing at Berea, but it was the students who planned and led BSU activities during the organization's early years. Many of the students involved were from Appalachia. Ann Beard was from Birmingham and Edward D. Smith hailed from northwestern South Carolina. Their background, together with their Black Power activism, led to the creation of the BAC. The next year, the students expanded their activism and identity as Appalachians and transformed their campus activism into a region-wide effort. They did so due to an opening created in a regional organization by another social movement; a multiracial movement for working-class power in Appalachia led by the Highlander Research and Education Center.

Highlander and Working-Class Power in Appalachia

Beard and Smith were part of a long tradition of activism in Appalachia. While they worked to change the campus in Kentucky, activists at the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee were putting together a plan to build a regional poor people's movement. Founded in 1932 as Highlander Folk School, Highlander uses education as a tool to build political power for the masses. Frank Adams, former director

[64] Ibid.

of Highlander, wrote about his predecessor Myles Horton, one of the founders of the school and its longtime director in *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: The Idea of Highlander*.[65] Adams described Horton's approach, "Education, Horton thought, should help people work in harmony to fulfill common needs, not lead small groups of individuals to better themselves at the expense of others . . . Horton wanted to find educational ventures that would challenge society as people found it."[66] Horton's idea that education should be a benefit to all and that it could lead to social change was the force driving Highlander's work throughout the twentieth century. To Highlander, empowering the working class was the formula. Indeed, Horton sought to build solidarity and a sense of common bond when he declared, "Our task is to make class-conscious workers."[67] Horton, and Highlander more broadly, sought to change society from the bottom up.

Through the 1930s and 1940s, Highlander worked to build and support union movements throughout the South. While the school was successful in helping to advance unionization in the midst of attacks by state and federal governments, after the 1940s, Highlander shifted its focus from labor to civil rights. The decision came after Highlander staff identified racism among white workers as the hindrance to building class consciousness. Adams wrote, "Ultimately, however, the decisive barrier to unionism in the South was racism, raw and naked."[68] He continued, "Highlander and Horton had finally to acknowledge what they were reluctant to face: that whites, themselves included,

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[65] Frank C. Adams with Myles Horton, *Unearthing Seeds of Highlander: The Idea of Highlander* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1975).

[66] Ibid., 15.

[67] Ibid., 35.

[68] Ibid., 106.

had failed painfully to end white domination of black people."[69] In light of this realization, in the 1950s, Highlander shifted its focus to civil rights and the needs of Black communities.

To support Black-led movements, Highlander's staff learned from Black activists in South Carolina. Activists there, including Septima Clark, Esau Jenkins, and Bernice Robinson, were teaching Black people to read enough to pass literacy tests in order to vote and thus push back against voter suppression so embedded in the Jim Crow system. The training Highlander staff received from them was foundational for Highlander's subsequent work training generations of Black and white activists throughout the 1950s and 1960s, including members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.[70]

Highlander had been a target during its work with labor unions but became even more so for its racially integrated gatherings seeking to empower Black people. In *Highlander: No Ordinary School*, historian John M. Glen writes that the Highlander was particularly targeted from 1965 to 1968. He writes, "Staff members endured a storm of adverse publicity in the *Knoxville Journal*, a KKK parade past the center, repeated vandalism, firebombs, burglaries, gunshots, and taped telephone messages branding Highlander as a 'malignant organization' whose 'red spiders' taught 'hate, violence and riots."[71] Glen shows that these attacks, fueled by white supremacy and red baiting, did

[69] Ibid., 107.

[70] For more on St. John's Island and citizenship schools see Katherine Mellen Charron's *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

[71] John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 257.

not stop the school from trying to fulfill its mission. It did, however, shift its focus from civil rights to Appalachian rights around this time. “Even before the attacks on Highlander subsided, the staff was moving beyond its work in the civil rights movement to the more formidable task of organizing the poor in southern Appalachia as part of a new multiracial poor people’s coalition in America.”[72] Highlander kept the idea of a mass movement in mind but shifted to try a new strategy: a regional working-class movement.

As the civil rights movement took hold nationally, Highlander turned to thinking about Appalachia. This was undoubtedly due in part to the declaration of a War on Poverty by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. In response to the regionalism of the federal government, Highlander identified building regional working-class solidarity as a way to build a mass movement. By shifting its focus to communities within Appalachia, the center tried to build an “Appalachia-wide movement” that would be “guided by the presumption that its historic ‘bottom-up’ approach to community organizing would work in Appalachia.”[73] Glen posited that “Staff members were taking a calculated risk in adopting this strategy, reckoning that while there were few signs of unity among the dozens of organizations struggling in the mountains, Appalachia faced issues of such crisis proportions that its people, for all their diversity, would have to forge a regional movement for their own survival.”[74] Among Highlander staff during this period was Almetor King, a Black Appalachian woman who also doubted the viability of a regional movement but helped to try to build it anyway.

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[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 260.

[74] Ibid., 265.

Almetor King was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee and raised in Harlan County, Kentucky, then moved to Knoxville in her teens to complete school and find work to support herself. By 1962, she was working for what was now called the Highlander Research and Education Center, first as a cook but then as an organizer. King remembered her arrival in Knoxville and the start of her work at Highlander. “When I first came to Knoxville, it was to go to school, and then I started working for the Highlander Research and Education Center. I worked there for 12 years, during the civil rights movement. And then as it was petering out, Myles Horton had said, "Well, we now need an Appalachian movement."[75] King was skeptical about the feasibility of a movement across such a diverse region. “I did not think there was going to be an Appalachian movement, but that's what Horton wanted, and I thought, okay.” Despite what she considered to be an insurmountable task, King and other Highlander staff began to gather people from around the region into this new movement. She remembered, “So we recruited people that had been in the civil rights movement that lived all around different places. Some were poor people, some weren't. But we had a lot of poor people that showed up that had come to Highlander Center over the past years.”[76] This recruitment would lead to a higher number of attendees at the 1969 CSM meeting and radically change the organization. This change opened the door for the founding of the BAC.

[75] Almetor King interview with author. April 7, 2018, Knoxville, Tennessee.

[76] Ibid.

Power and the Council of the Southern Mountains

Black student activism and the growing Highlander Appalachian movement met in 1969 at the Council of the Southern Mountains annual meeting. Founded in 1913 as the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, the CSM was created to cultivate "a spirit of cooperation among competing agencies at work in the southern mountains."[77] To do so, its founder John C. Campbell tried to establish "an interdenominational federation of mountain workers."[78] In her dissertation entitled "Leading the Field of Mountain Work: The Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, 1913 - 1950," Penny Messinger contextualizes the history of the CSM in the reformism of the Progressive Era.[79] Messinger clarified what the original name meant in the context of reform by its founder John C. Campbell. "As used by Campbell and his associates, the term 'mountain worker' did not refer to industrial or wage workers, or to members of the working class at all, but rather to secular and religious reformers active in the region who pursued professional and semi-professional occupations."[80] Campbell organized an annual conference where missionaries and representatives from federal and private organizations could meet and share strategies on how to uplift the poor, a project they believed was dependent on changing culture and not economic structures. Messinger demonstrates that the professionalization of mountain work developed out of these meetings.

[77] Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 196.

[78] David E. Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 4.

[79] Penny Messinger, "Leading the Field of Mountain Work: The Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, 1913-1950" Ph.D. diss., (Ohio State University, 1998), 539.

[80] Ibid., 30.

By the 1960s, the spirit of reform through top-down intervention was still evident through the presence of coal company board members, Tennessee Valley Authority representatives, and some state and local politicians in the CSM. According to Appalachian Studies scholar David Whisnant, the leadership of the CSM itself hindered the organization's potential for enacting an economic change in the region that would benefit working-class and poor Appalachians. Whisnant recounts how CSM executive director Perley Ayer touted a message of political neutrality, and as a result, corporate membership and funding to the Council grew in the 1950s and 1960s.[81]

Activists of the 1960s challenged this official stance and sought to wrest control of decision-making surrounding the War on Poverty, specifically Community Action Program funds sent through the Office of Economic Opportunity to the CSM. In addition to funds, working-class people at the meeting sought control over decision-making more broadly. They believed that they were the ones who should determine the direction of anti-poverty activism in the region and not the middle-class professionals who had run the CSM since the organization's founding. Black and white activists pushed the CSM to take a side on shifting power relations in the region and Highlander staff were pivotal in initiating this task by pushing for representation and power from within the Council. Their actions convey what the people considered to be real meaning and implementation of "maximum feasible participation."[82]

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[81] Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*, 20.

[82] Historian Crystal R. Sanders offers a synopsis of the "maximum feasible participation" concept during the War on Poverty in *A Chance for Change: Head Start and Mississippi's Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

According to Almetor King, Highlander recruited attendees for the 57th annual meeting to help shift the power dynamic from middle-class professionals working for poor people, to poor people working and making decisions for themselves. During the 1969 annual meeting, the board of directors, of which Myles Horton was a part, discussed "the prospect for an attendance of between 500 to 700" attendees, a dramatic increase from previous years.[83] The increased number of attendees, along with important changes to the bylaws, changed the Council structure and opened the door to the creation of the BAC. Almetor King was already involved with the CSM, and Myles Horton was a board member. King remembered, "We would just spread out all over Appalachia, getting people to come to workshops and things like that to see what they were actually interested in, what they could work on together. We need an Appalachian movement. We had a civil rights movement. Now we need an Appalachian movement."[84] This was one of the strategies Highlander used to try and build self-determination among the Appalachian poor, both Black and white. Horton used the strategies he learned from the civil rights movement to try and organize a larger class struggle. Their push against the CSM's professed nonpartisanship in an era of increased mobilization was a planned strategy.

Led in part by Highlander staff, the changes in internal power relations within the council in 1969 were intentional and consequential. At the conference business meeting on April 10, 1969, the Youth Commission at the business meeting the day before led to a

[83] Annual Conference Records, Series 3, Box 145, Folder 6, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives, Berea, Kentucky.

[84] Almetor King interview with author. April 7, 2018, Knoxville, Tennessee.

change in the voting structure of the CSM. Previously, only paying members could vote. The Youth Commission, citing that "some people, especially youth, are unable to pay the fees" proposed that all people attending the Conference be allowed to vote regardless of their ability to pay.[85] The next day, the Poor People's Commission for Self-Help proposed an amendment to CSM bylaws. According to the meeting minutes, the commission asked that Article VI be amended "to provide for 51% representation of the poor on the Board of Commissioners, this to be done within the next three years."[86] The proposal to change the bylaws in favor of increased representation by the poor was approved. This was yet another aspect of the changing atmosphere of representation within the CSM surrounding the issues of money, specifically class representation. Poor people sought representation within a regional organization. Smith and Williams were not members of the Council prior to the pivotal 1969 meeting.

As a result of the important change proposed by the Youth Commission, Smith and Williams were able to propose a new commission as first-time attendees. They proposed a commission specifically for Black Appalachians.

Founding the Black Appalachian Commission

An important aspect of the Berea College experience is work study. In lieu of tuition, students work a number of hours on various jobs approved by the college. In the

[85] Annual Conference Records, Series 3, Box 145, Folder 6, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives, Berea, Kentucky.

[86] Ibid.

spring of 1969, Homer Williams' work study assignment was the college's Upward Bound program. When assigned to chaperone a group of Appalachian high school students to the annual meeting of the CSM in the spring of 1969, Williams invited his college roommate and friend Edward D. Smith. Williams and Smith were both founding members of the Berea College BSU. When they arrived at the CSM meeting, they were already student activists with a grounding in Black organizing. Here was another contest over power, not unlike the struggle they waged for a Black organization on campus. However, the 57th Annual CSM meeting in 1969 was a contest over power in the region. Smith and Williams transferred their struggle for Black Power on campus to a regional context.

Since the CSM headquarters were on the Berea College campus, it is highly likely that Smith and Williams interacted with members of the CSM previously, some of whom were also Berea college faculty, and had some knowledge of the CSM structure which had been heavily influenced by the college. This previous experience may have enabled their ability to influence the turn of events at the meeting.

At the meeting in Fontana, Smith and Williams quickly gained the ability to vote, due to the changes initiated by the Youth Commission, the Poor People's Self-Help Commission, both enabled by the recruiting efforts of Highlander staff. Their new capacity to vote permitted them to advocate for the creation of a new commission, one that specifically addressed the needs of Black people. The BAC, enabled by the new atmosphere, tasked itself with "attempting to start where the CSM never started in the black community. In our efforts to get to the blacks of Appalachia we will be introducing to them information about CSM, an organization which claims to be a helping hand for

them, although they have never even heard of it."[87] Smith and Williams could claim that Black people in Appalachia had not heard of the CSM because they were both Black students who had been born and raised in the region. They were both Black and Appalachian. The name of the new organization and the organization itself grew out of their experience and this specific historical moment when two social movements intersected.

The New Organization

The founding of the BAC at this particular CSM in 1969 represents the intersection of two movements, one for Black Power and the other for working-class power in Appalachia, and it is indicative of an historical moment in which place was used to determine who would get a stake in government aid. This made the need for Black activists in Appalachia to convey their presence and identity as Black Appalachians an imperative. The naming of the BAC within this context is significant. The word "black" together with "Appalachian" implies a distinct identity. Though Black people had been in the region and probably identified as Appalachians long before this time, this period required them to make themselves visible for the purpose of building power. They began with self-definition. Years later, Smith explained that using the word instead of "negro" was part of "overcoming the stigma" of the term,

[87] Black Appalachian Commission, Series 6, Subseries 4, Box 173, Folder 17, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives.

> Normally you didn't call a black person "black" because that wasn't polite. That was derogatory. That was degrading. I think when Stokely Carmichael was part of the civil rights movement, when he yelled 'Black Power," I think that among young people, young college people, I think they grasped it and they embraced it. That's what we did here, I think too. It was a psychological struggle for some of the people coming in, particularly some of the people coming in from small communities who had been used to referring to themselves as colored or as negroes, but it was kind of a struggle for them, but it caught on.[88]

In addition to purposely using the word "black" in the name of the commission, an addendum to Smith's proposal submitted to the CSM reveals that Smith and Williams were thinking about identity in 1969. Smith composed the purpose of the commission, which read, "We, the members of the Black Commission of Appalachia are dedicated to developing self-help within the black community of Appalachia, and the promotion of the search for black identity within the black community."[89] Smith and Williams could have said "blacks in Appalachia" or "blacks of Appalachia" but they, influenced by their participation in the newly formed Black Student Union and as natives of the region, used "black Appalachian." The word "black" literally and figuratively modified the term "Appalachian." Smith and Williams sought to convey the reality of the existence of black people in the region and this began with what they decided to call themselves.

[88] Edward D. Smith with author. August 15, 2018, Berea, Kentucky.

[89] Black Appalachian Commission, Series 6, Subseries 4, Box 173, Folder 17, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives.

After the pivotal CSM meeting in April 1969, Smith and Williams finished their sophomore year at Berea College the next month, then returned to campus in the fall of 1969 to build the BAC. With CSM headquarters on the Berea College campus, they began the work of creating an organization with the influence of CSM administrators. They began by clarifying the organization's purpose. Smith composed the purpose of the commission, which read, "We, the members of the Black Commission of Appalachia are dedicated to developing self-help within the black community of Appalachia, and the promotion of the search for black identity within the black community."[90] The goal, from the onset of its creation, was to coalesce black communities within the thirteen states that comprised Appalachia into a shared and unified black Appalachian identity. Smith listed four areas of promotion for the organization:

> 1. The power of blacks within our own communities so that they become effective decision makers and so that decisions will affect their lives as blacks.
>
> 2. The awareness of black heritage and culture that still exists.
>
> 3. A better relationship between the white and black of the region. As it stands now, the Appalachian white thinks of the blacks only in terms of percentage.
>
> 4. The teaching of the black man's contribution to the region as well as this country as a whole.[91]

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

Power in the form of control over decision-making was the new organization's main concern. Smith called out the CSM for its lack of service to Black Appalachians. He wrote, "In the past, the CSM has put most of its emphasis on the Appalachian white, omitting entirely the plight of the Appalachian blacks."[92] This was much like what Berea College administrators and faculty had done by focusing mainly on white Appalachian students in enrollment. Like the BSU that had filled the cultural and political gap for students on campus, the BAC sought to fill the gap for Black Appalachians regionally. One way to do so was to shift the levers of power into the hands of Black Appalachians.

Smith and Williams' idea was a profound vision amongst other profound visions at the meeting. In addition to new commissions, the CSM as a whole, enlarged by working-class anti-poverty activists, "called for 1) a guaranteed income, 2) immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam, 3) rechanneling of military spending into domestic programs, and 4) opposition to the proposed antiballistic-missile system."[93] These resolutions represented a radical shift in the CSM's stated political neutrality. Indeed, in its report on the meeting, *Mountain Life and Work*, a monthly journal published by the CSM, the editors wrote that the 57th meeting was "in the annals of Appalachia, a unique event."[94] It continued with an article entitled "Fontana: Coup, Chaos, Commitment?" with entries written by conference attendees either for or against

[92] Ibid.

[93] "Fontana: The Formal Record," *Mountain Life and Work* Volume XLV, Number 5 (May 1969), 4.

[94] "Fontana: Coup, Chaos, Commitment?" *Mountain Life and Work* Volume XLV, Number 5, (May 1969), 5.

what occurred at the meeting. One attendee, a Black activist from Berea named Mary Farris wrote that the council "has grown '10 feet tall' in the eyes of the poor, the black, the youth and other interested parties. The Black Commission, the Poor Commission and the Youth Commission were not asked for favored treatment but for equal treatment and the right to work with the people of Appalachia."[95]

The students who created the BAC continued their activism on campus. On the night of Sunday, March 1, 1970, three Black Berea College students were arrested in downtown Berea and held overnight.[96] Wayne E. Summerville and Glen L. Gore, both freshmen from Mount Hope, West Virginia, were charged with carrying deadly weapons. On their trip to the downtown grocery store, Summerville took a revolver and Gore carried a wooden club. A third student, William M. Turpin, who accompanied Summerville and Gore, was unarmed but still charged with disorderly conduct. On the walk to the store, the students reported that they had been harassed by a carload of white residents who were later found but released. Homer Williams, treasurer of the BSU and co-founder of the BAC, stated that "The police brought in the white boys, and the blacks identified them, and they were told to go home. But the blacks were kept in the cell."[97] The next morning, fifty members of the BSU marched to city hall in protest of the arrests and what they cited as mistreatment by the police. Williams reported that the three students were "stopped by the police on the street and searched without a warrant. They

[95] Ibid., 27.

[96] *The Corbin Times-Tribune*, "Blacks Occupy Office of Berea President," March 3, 1970

[97] Ibid.

were thrown in a car, taken to a jail and booked."[98] After the march, members of the BSU met with college president Willis D. Weatherford to convey their concerns about the safety of Black students. They described what they considered to be the college's inaction in addressing racist threats against Black students by local white residents. After the meeting, the group of students refused to leave the president's office and instead launched a sit-in. They insisted students had a right to carry protection in order to defend themselves from racial terror. They demanded the charges against the students be dropped. Billy Foster, president of the BSU said, "The fact that they (college officials) hadn't done anything about it is the very reason this situation occurred."[99] During the sit-in, Williams spoke on behalf of the BSU, "The reason we are here is because we wonder why is it that we as black students must arm ourselves in order to go downtown."[100] In response to the arrest of Black students, the BSU organized and carried out direct actions in support of armed self-defense. Their actions were part of an upsurge in Black student activism in the late 1960s and 1970s. They were agitating as members of the student body and on behalf of Black people in Appalachia.

Williams died in a car accident in the fall of 1970. He had been elected as student body president at Berea, a testament to the impact the BSU had on the small campus.

Conclusion

[98] Ibid.

[99] Phil Norman, "Protesting Negroes End Overnight Sit-in," *The Courier-Journal*, March 4, 1970.

[100] *The Corbin Times-Tribune*, "Blacks Occupy Office of Berea President," March 3, 1970.

Black students in Berea, Kentucky, embraced the national call for Black Power by founding Berea College's first Black student union in 1968. The Mideastern Regional Office of the National Urban League wrote a report on the BAC in 1971 that included a short history of the CSM. It recounted that the BAC was created when "a coalition of poor people including students, a black caucus and the more radically oriented professionals combined forces to change the direction of the CSM."[101] Black Berea College students together with mobilization of poor people across the region by Highlander, enabled the creation of the Black Appalachian Commission. Its creation is a concrete example of Black Power in Appalachia.

When asked why he co-founded an organization with a stated purpose to promote "the power of blacks within their own communities so that they can become effective decision makers and so that decisions will affect their lives as blacks," Smith casually remarked, "We were just idealistic students who saw things that we thought weren't right and tried to do what we could to change them."[102] Behind Smith's humble assertion that they were simply idealistic is a profound vision.

The history of the founding of the BAC is an important example of self-definition that links the history of activism in the region to other Black Power Studies. In 1967, Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton identified self-definition as a critical aspect of the search for Black liberation in the United States.[103] In *Black Power: The*

[101] Black Appalachian Commission, Series 6, Subseries 4, Box 173, Folder 17, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Vintage, 1967).

Politics of Liberation, they wrote, "Black people must define themselves, and only they can do that. Throughout this country, vast segments of the black communities are beginning to recognize the need to assert their own definitions, to reclaim their history, their culture; to create their own sense of community and togetherness."[104] That they wrote "definitions" is key. Inherent in their statement is the acknowledgement that there would be more than one definition and that the definitions would differ depending on place. Ture and Hamilton identified self-definition as the first step toward building a Black community consciousness. This was what Black Appalachians accomplished with the BAC. They defined themselves, and they did so as a strategy to create community. It would be in community that they would build power to challenge the status quo, including poverty and racism. Ture and Hamilton wrote, "Only when black people fully develop this sense of community, of themselves, can they begin to deal effectively with the problems of racism in this country. This is what we mean by a new consciousness; this is the vital first step."[105] Black people in Appalachia founded the BAC. It was at once a sign of a growing regional and racial consciousness, and an organizational vehicle through which to build both. Their next step in building a regional Black consciousness would be to locate and count the number of Black Appalachians in the region.

[104] Ibid., 37.

[105] Ibid., 39.

CHAPTER 3. CLAIMING SELF-DETERMINATION, 1969-1971

The development of the BAC was made possible by alliances it developed with national Black organizations. In May 1971, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) published "The Status of Black People in Appalachia: A Statistical Report" for the BAC.[106] Using data from census records and materials from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the report assessed the impact of poverty in Appalachia based on the substantial amount of Black out-migration. Mike Bruland, the author of the report, explained the report's operating assumption: "Assuming that people tend to move from areas where they cannot make decent livings, a decrease in population would indicate an unfavorable economic situation. Assuming that people tend to move to areas where they think they can, at least, better their economic conditions, a substantial increase in population would indicate a favorable economic situation."[107] To compare the migration trends of Black and white Appalachians, and thus their economic situations, the report necessarily calculated the population of Black people in the region. It listed the total number of Black Appalachians, their percentage of the overall Appalachian population, and the percentage of Black people in Appalachian counties for each of the thirteen states in the region. This was perhaps the first time the number of Black people in the counties designated by the ARC as Appalachia had been officially counted as a region since the ARC itself, along with its geographical designation of what comprised Appalachia, was only six years old. The report states, "In 1970, Appalachia's black population was more

[106] Mike Bruland, *The Status of Black People in Appalachia: A Statistical Report*. (New York: NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 1971).

[107] Ibid., 4. Emphasis in original.

than 1.3 million," a number that had decreased by nine thousand people since 1960, out of a total population of 13.2 million.[108] Noting the decrease in the Black Appalachian population against the increase of the national Black population, and after comparing the economic distress of white and Black Appalachians, the report concluded that, through the 1960s, "White deprivation in Appalachia was substantially greater than the U.S. as a whole, but black deprivation was even greater. Moreover, a larger proportion of black people migrated out of the region."[109] In other words, Black Appalachians suffered worse economic conditions than their white counterparts. This was a fact known by Black Appalachians, but the published report furnished the statistical proof they needed to launch a case for their economic relief.

Though prepared by the NAACP LDF for the BAC, the report was the culmination of the BAC's first two years of activity and development. The report began in 1969 as a research project by the BAC in its status as a new commission of the Council of the Southern Mountains (CSM) on the campus of Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. By 1971, the research project had developed into a published report by a national civil rights organization for the BAC. By that time, the BAC had initiated discussions on becoming fully independent of the CSM. Two months after the publication of the report, the BAC, led by a new chairman based in Asheville, North Carolina, and empowered by a $21,000 grant from the Black Women's Community Development Foundation, organized a Black Appalachian regional conference that hosted two hundred attendees. The conference program listed the results of the report, the dissemination of which

[108] Ibid., 2.

[109] Ibid., 21.

became part of the mission of the conference itself. According to the event's program, "This conference of Black Appalachian leaders has been called to use the community studies and other materials to define regional problem areas and to develop strategies to confront them."[110] The report was used as a tool by grassroots activists to assess the economic conditions of Black Appalachians and find strategies for ameliorating those conditions. The story of how the report developed and its presentation at the conference mark the development of the BAC from campus organization to regional force.

This chapter charts the first two years of the BAC by tracing the people and organizations that contributed to the report. The report and the groups involved in its creation were critical to the BAC's transition from a campus-based organization led by Berea College students who were heavily influenced by white CSM leaders, to a community-centered organization led by veteran community activists who challenged the influence of white CSM leaders to ultimately found an independent organization. The history of the report shows the need for Black Appalachian activists in the 1970s to go outside of the region to find financial support even as they worked to build regional solidarity. In order to challenge internal racism, which the BAC cited as the cause of their economic conditions, Black Appalachians aligned with Black people and organizations outside of the region. Thus, Black Appalachian activism, while regionally based, was still very much a part of the national Black Freedom Struggle.

The development of the BAC occurred in three stages. The first stage involved the influence and financial backing of Jean Fairfax of the NAACP LDF and the Black

[110] Ibid.

Women's Community Development Foundation. The second stage included the change in leadership of the BAC from Edward Smith, student activist, to Carl Johnson, community activist. The third stage of development is represented by the convergence of Black Appalachians on Black Mountain, North Carolina for the first and only Black Appalachian regional conference held in 1971. There, the new organization outlined the organization's second task: using the report to demand federal intervention on behalf of poor Black communities in Appalachia through the proportional allocation of funds based on demographics. In each of these stages, the report was the coalescing factor as the primary task of the organization.

Influences on the Early BAC

The BAC requested financial support from the CSM to build the new organization. They wrote, "We are asking CSM to provide office space as well as financial funds and supplies to help the Black commission operate as a functioning body to the black community."[111] It ended its proposal by stating that the commission would elect officers. "Out of this conference will come the election of a board member, a chairman, and other necessary officers."[112] The proposal outlined the BAC's mission, requested material and spatial support from the larger organization, and established leadership. These were key steps to building a viable commission and new Black-led organization.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

Since the BAC leadership were students at Berea College, the BAC was headquartered there during its first two years. As BAC chairman, Smith had access to and regularly interacted with CSM leadership including Loyal Jones, a white Appalachian and Berea alum, who was CSM executive director, and James Holloway, a white professor, CSM board member who served as the faculty advisor for the Black Student Union. Holloway was an active member in the civil rights movement as a member of the Committee of Southern Churchmen and editor of its publication, *Katallegete*. It was Holloway who invited Fannie Lou Hamer's visit to Berea College where she stayed in the dorm room of senior Ann Beard.[113] Beard remembered that many Black students made sure to take Holloway's courses because they knew where he stood on civil rights. This was in spite of his father's participation in the Ku Klux Klan. Beard remembered, "James Holloway lived his high school years in Birmingham where his father was involved with the Klan. He knew things about the bombing of my church because his daddy was part of it."[114] By the time he was teaching at Berea, his politics looked very different from his father's. Beard remembered, "He paid for Fannie Lou Hamer to come. She lectured in his classes, stayed several days. Holloway, Will Campbell, Highlander, all of these white men got together to make sure she had a speaking tour so she could have money. She stayed in my dorm room."[115]

When Smith and Williams returned to Berea to continue their studies and build the new commission, they worked with Jones and Holloway to get started. In May 1969,

[113] Ann Beard Grundy phone interview with author. February 4, 2021.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid.

Smith requested a meeting with Jones and Holloway to discuss the new commission. According to Smith, they determined then that a research study would be a good first step for the commission. Smith writes, "Jones, Holloway, and Smith agreed that they ought to try to do something. As a start, they decided that they should try to get a research project funded to investigate the plight of black people in the region."[116] Smith goes on to write that a year later, "The idea of a research project to study and identify the problems of black people in Appalachia still would not die. For two years (1969-1971), this idea would remain the central focus of the BAC with the moral support of the Council of the Southern Mountains."[117] The meeting shows that the CSM leadership was influential in the first stages of the BAC's history. Smith worked with two members of CSM leadership, two white men, on what direction the BAC should take. Because the CSM was headquartered on Berea's campus and Smith was a student, the educational environment and the leaders of the CSM influenced what Smith chose for the new organization to pursue. However, the decision to conduct a study was also a part of the growing demand for Black Studies on campuses nationally and Appalachian Studies in the region. At the same time the BAC was beginning, the BSU on campus was demanding Black faculty, Black convocations, and Black curricula. Smith's decision was an extension of his own activism in the BSU and his background as a Black Appalachian majoring in history. The research study grew out of Smith's interests and the encouragement of CSM leadership. The connection Smith made between studying Black people and Black people in Appalachia, connects the confluence of Black Studies and

[116] Smith, *Black Power Comes to Appalachia*, 18.

[117] Ibid., 59.

Appalachian Studies to Berea College in 1969. A year later after the meeting between Jones, Holloway, and Smith, Jones became director of the college's Appalachian Center and Smith wrote a senior research paper on Black Appalachians entitled "Black Appalachia: At a Glance."[118] What became a statistical report published by the NAACP LDF, began as a research study, the first project of the new BAC.

Creating Black Appalachian Studies

Within the history of the report is also the history of the study of Black Appalachia. The report itself is a foundational document created during the institutionalization of Black and Appalachian Studies at educational institutions through the 1960s and 1970s. Historian Manning Marable has defined Black Studies as a manifestation of what he calls "the black intellectual tradition," which has three attributes.[119] First, "the black intellectual tradition has always been descriptive, that is, presenting the reality of black life and experiences from the point of view of black people themselves."[120] Second, it is also corrective: "It has attempted to challenge and to critique the racism and stereotypes that have been ever present in the mainstream discourse of white academic institutions."[121] Third, it "has been prescriptive. Black scholars who have theorized from the black experience have often proposed practical steps for the

[118] Ibid., 80.

[119] Manning Marable, "Black Studies and the Racial Mountain." *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 3 (2000), 17.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

empowerment of black people." Black intellectuals in the BAC were student activists at Berea College and community activists from the Appalachian region. Their plans to conduct a research study in 1969 evolved into a statistical report on the economic situation of Black Appalachians in 1971. The evolution of the report paralleled the evolution of the BAC as an organization and its important transition from campus to community. The report was rooted in the Black intellectual tradition and in Black students' goal to collect information about the Black Appalachian experience that would be descriptive of the conditions of Black Appalachians, corrective of ideas about the region as wholly white, and prescriptive in terms of what the federal government could do in order to support Black communities. The BAC engaged in study as its first task, placing it among other campuses and black student union groups that called for Black Studies. In this case, because it included campus and community input, the result was a Black study rooted in regional community activism.

This study was also foundational within Appalachian Studies as a field. The BAC had a strong connection with one of the field's first scholars. Bill Best, the director of Berea College's Upward Bound program, also taught one of the first Appalachian Studies courses in the region at Cumberland College, now Cumberland University. In the Spring 1971 edition of *Peoples' Appalachia*, published by the Peoples' Appalachian Research Collective in Morgantown, West Virginia, Best contributed an article on the importance of Appalachian Studies. The article noted that Best was "completing his dissertation on a conceptual model for Appalachian Studies." Best influenced the BAC through his presence at Berea but also as Upward Bound director. It was at Best's invitation that Homer Williams and Edward D. Smith attended their first meeting of the Council of the

Southern Mountains (CSM) in April 1969 where they founded the BAC. Smith, the BAC's first chairman, was also a history major interested in Black Appalachian history. In *Black Power Comes to Appalachia: Bereans Create the Black Appalachian Commission: A Documentary History, 1969-1970*, Smith recounts his interest in studying the region.[122] "BAC Chairman Ed Smith's growing interest in 'Black Appalachia' led him to research and write a Senior Research Paper for Dr. Richard Drake's Appalachian History course at Berea College during his final semester (September-December 1970). The paper was entitled 'Black Appalachia: At a Glance.'"[123] Smith was immersed in Black and Appalachian studies as a student and chairman of the BAC. He was also Black and Appalachian. Thus, the statistical report published by the NAACP LDF for the BAC in 1971 is in part a result of two developing academic fields.

While the BAC's decision to pursue a research study as its first initiative was due in part to its connection to an academic institution and its connection to the growth of two academic fields at that institution, it was also a necessary first step in completing its goal of "the teaching of the black man's contribution to the region as well as this country as a whole."[124] The BAC purposely called out the CSM's "emphasis on the Appalachian white" stating that the CSM omitted "entirely the plight of the Appalachian black."[125] The study was a way to begin to correct this neglect by identifying the number of Black

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[122] Edward D. Smith, *Black Power Comes to Appalachia: Bereans Create the Black Appalachian Commission: A Documentary History, 1969-1970.* (Bladensburg, Maryland: Edward D. Smith, 2019).

[123] Ibid., 80.

[124] Annual Conference Records, Series 3, Box 145, Folder 6, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives, Berea, Kentucky.

[125] Ibid.

Appalachians. It was also a way to begin gauging what prescriptions were needed to combat poverty.

In order to complete the study, the BAC needed to secure financial funding. At the center of the research study was the question of how to finance it. By tracing the transition from a research study to a report, we can trace how the BAC secured funding for the report. Why did the BAC seek funding outside of the CSM? Who did they receive funding from? What relationship did funding have to the development of the organization? Focusing on the people and organizations who funded the organization enables us to see the vital actors in the story of the BAC's development.

With a research study as the new organization's goal, Smith, Jones, and Holloway set about finding funding to support the study. While Smith notes the "moral support" the CSM provided the young organization, that the BAC was looking for funds reveals that the CSM did not offer financial support to its own commission. This raises the question as to why. Why didn't the CSM give the new commission money even after they requested it in their proposal? Although the CSM had a CAP commission and received funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity, the BAC was not a CAP program. The CSM also received funding from the Ford Foundation, but according to scholar David Whisnant, this funding waned after former executive director Perley Ayer, who pushed the CSM to maintain political neutrality left the CSM, and after the radicalization of the CSM in 1969. Instead of allocating funds to the BAC, CSM leadership encouraged the commission to seek outside funding. The predominately white organization that had for years focused solely on white Appalachians, neglected to financially support the first attempt within the organization to address the needs of Black Appalachians. Like a

number of Black organizations, the BAC struggled to secure money to support its programs and tasks from its inception. As a result, the BAC had to reach out to other organizations to fulfill its mandate. When it did, it reached out to Black organizations.

Jean Fairfax and Black Women's Intervention

One possible avenue to connections with national Black organizations was the 1969 invited speaker for Berea College's annual Women's Day: Jean Fairfax, director of NAACP LDF Division of Legal Information and Community Service. The LDF would become the first organization to become a financial supporter of the commission when it provided funds to begin a regional research study. The LDF began as the legal wing of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The LDF, founded by Thurgood Marshall in 1940, was instrumental in the fight for school desegregation. Fairfax joined the LDF in 1965, after it had already split from the NAACP to become an independent entity. Fairfax founded the Division of Legal Information and Community Service, an endeavor that grew out of her history and commitment to serving poor and low-income Black communities.[126]

Fairfax would prove to be a powerful ally. Prior to her work at the NAACP LDF, she had attended the Union Theological Seminary in New York City in a joint master's degree program with Columbia University in the early 1940s. At Union she studied under Reinhold Neibuhr, a Christian theologian and Marxist. Fairfax later served as Dean of

[126] For a history of the LDF, see Jack Greenberg *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

Women at Kentucky State College (now Kentucky State University) and the Tuskegee Institute. She had also worked for the American Friends Service Committee in Austria after World War WII and was director of their civil rights projects in the South upon her return. Fairfax was also involved with the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen before it was revived as the Committee of Southern Churchmen by a group that included James Holloway in the mid-1960s.[127] Fairfax therefore came to her work at the LDF with a rich background in movement work. This background enabled her to start the NAACP LDF's Division of Legal Information and Community Service. Current LDF president Sherrilyn Ifill characterizes Fairfax as a "master strategist" that "came to LDF at precisely the moment that President Johnson was launching his 'Great Society,' and her steady hand, towering intellect, and relentless advocacy shaped many of its most important programs focused on poor children."[128] Jack Greenberg, who replaced Thurgood Marshall as head of the NAACP LDF remembered Fairfax's impact on the LDF. "She became the most influential single staff member in determining the direction we took on such issues as integration of Black College and which industries we should target in employment cases."[129] Fairfax was a formidable influence from within the NAACP LDF. She was also a formative influence on the early BAC.

[127] Interview with Jean Fairfax by David Blanchard, October 15, 1983, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[128] "LDF Remembers Jean Fairfax," *LDF Blog*. NAACP Legal Defense Fund. https://www.naacpldf.org/naacp-publications/ldf-blog/ldf-remembers-jean-fairfax/ (Accessed April 11, 2021).

[129] Ibid.

On May 1, 1969, Fairfax's Woman's Day speech was entitled "The Black Woman and the Contemporary American Crisis."[130] In many ways, her speech to the Berea student body was a call to action and a call for Black Power politics. In her speech, Fairfax referred to the time as a "post-civil rights period."[131] She stated, "If there is a feeling that we cannot use the slogan [Civil Rights], it is a recognition, deep and bitter, that the movement has been betrayed." Fairfax then listed evidence on how the civil rights movement had been betrayed, concluding, "We have won our basic legal victories. But America is still a racist society. 'Civil rights' for which some of our most beautiful people gave their lives is no longer the inspirational rallying cry. So, beyond civil rights, what? What is the black agenda now? It is to mount a new offensive on the value structure and the institutional structure of a racist society."[132] Fairfax went on to encourage her listeners to read literature by the minister of information of the Black Panther Party. "Let me suggest that you read Eldridge Cleaver."[133] She also noted, after quoting Cleaver, "He is dead serious; the Black Panthers are dead serious."[134] Fairfax also spoke about Black Studies, stating

> Black Students (sic) Union sees black studies as a means of making black students relevant to the poor black community. A necessary part of black studies

[130] "Jean Fairfax, 1969," Convocations. Box 2, Folder 4. Berea College Special Collections and Archives. Berea, Kentucky.

[131] Ibid.,6.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 8.

[134] Ibid., 20.

> is that sense is the reorientation of black students themselves away from traditional bourgeois attitudes to an awareness of their responsibility toward their less fortunate brothers. Education, the students are convinced, should not be designed to help students assume a slot in the system or make money or be successful by white standards; it must equip black students for the liberation and development of the black community.[135]

Fairfax spoke directly about changing the capitalist system, noting "It is heartening to see the role which black women are playing in black economic development."[136] Indeed, Fairfax asserted that Black women should apply even more influence on the movement. She said, "Three important questions indicate leverage points where black women should be providing influence."[137] She asked "How can we keep this search for black consciousness honest? . . . How can we establish ground rules that do not violate the basic gains we have won? . . . How can we ensure that our search for identity as black people will lead us into deeper awareness of our common humanity with all people?"[138] These were questions Fairfax believed the voices and actions of Black women to be crucial in answering. Here it is possible to see her ideology as part of the Black Power movement and the women's liberation movement, specifically once that addressed the class, race, and gender position of Black women. Fairfax's speech made her political

[135] Ibid., 16.

[136] Ibid., 18.

[137] Ibid., 11.

[138] Ibid.

positions on civil rights, Black Power, and women's participation clear. She took a more radical stance on the movement than the NAACP.[139] She saw institutional change as mandatory and advocated the role of students and specifically Black women as crucial to this new phase of the Black Freedom Struggle.

It seems likely that Fairfax's words were critical in the development of the BAC's ideas and the eventual publication of the report on Black Appalachians. Her visit to Berea brought her into direct contact with students involved in the BAC.As a reward for their academic achievements, a small group of Berea College women were invited by Holloway to meet with Fairfax privately after her speech. Among the women was Peggy Sloan, a Black senior from Shepherdsville, Kentucky, with plans to attend Columbia law school in New York City. Sloan remembered the meeting with Fairfax over fifty years later. "Jean Fairfax came to Berea for Women's Day, which was a big event in Berea. I was among a small group of students that met with her. James Holloway asked if there would be an interest in funding some work in Appalachia. She was interested, she wanted to know more about it, so a proposal was written and presented to her."[140] Sloan remembers that she wrote the first draft of the proposal in collaboration with Holloway. In addition to the written proposal, Sloan also worked with Fairfax on the possibility of forming a long-term relationship with the LDF. "She was willing to provide some funding for me to do some summer work so that I could become familiar with LDF and could spend time that summer looking at the condition of Blacks in Appalachia. Then

[139] See Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009).

[140] Peggy Sloan Kemp phone interview with author, February 12, 2021.

once [I] graduated from law school, they might sponsor me to start a practice in Appalachia. The commission, Ed Smith, was involved with that."[141] The study that Smith, Jones, and Holloway decided would be the first task was enabled by Sloan's willingness to focus her future career plans on Appalachia and the financial commitment of the NAACP LDF through Fairfax.

The draft of the proposal written by Sloan and Holloway reveals the study's and thus the BAC's intentions. It opens by directly challenging the myth of Appalachia as a white region,

> The Appalachian Region is unique not only in the problems of poverty that it faces but in fact that it in so many ways reflects the larger American society. No better example of this can be found than the existence of large numbers of black people in isolated towns and coal camps in the Region. Their existence and plight are generally unknown, usually obscured by a myth that there are no black people in Appalachia, especially the central Appalachian area. This proposal seeks to rectify this serious error in thinking by a thorough research program and by recommending strategies through which the situations can be alleviated.[142]

It is clear from the proposal that the study was an attempt to be descriptive, corrective, and prescriptive of the condition of Black Appalachians. They wrote, "This proposal

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid. Smith, *Blacks Power Comes to Appalachia*, 23.

seeks funding for a three-month in-depth project into the plight of black people in the Region." It then went on to list six specific purposes of the study:

> To document the existence of black people in the Region and to bring about a public understanding of this fact; To call attention to the poverty problems facing black people in the Region, and to document the extent to which blacks have not received their proportionate share of the Region's resources, especially war on poverty funds; To examine the extent to which black teachers and black principals have been discriminated against in hiring practices after their black schools were closed and consolidated; To bring the focus of the media upon blacks in the Region and to demonstrate to regional colleges and universities that there are indeed available black students in the Region; To call attention to the black contribution to the Appalachian culture and history; To recommend strategies of assistance suggested by the research.[143]

The study's purpose was to collect information that could be used to demand federal funding, to form Black Appalachian studies curricula, and change institutional and government policies affecting Black Appalachians. The research study proposal is also a key document in the development of Black and Appalachian Studies coming out of this period of social justice movements for Black Power and poor people's power in Appalachia. Ultimately, Sloan decided to attend Harvard Law school instead of

[143] Ibid.

Columbia, and her vision of an Appalachian law firm supported by the LDF did not come to fruition. The LDF, however, did continue to support the BAC as it forged ahead with the planned study. It contributed $1780, half of the proposed budget for the study, thus enabling [144] the BAC to begin to answer its mission. It also marked the beginning of its transition from a campus-centered organization to one fully immersed in the region with ties to national organizations. Fairfax's Black Power ideology also helped to return the BAC to its earlier roots in the Black campus movement at Berea College where Black students agitated for a Black Student Union, Black faculty, and Black convocations. The fervor they had in the mid-1960s had been somewhat lost since the influence of CSM leaders on the BAC. When Fairfax entered the equation, this began to change.

Building the BAC: A Change in Leadership, A Change in Tone

Meanwhile, the BAC had begun formal meetings. Thirteen people met in Berea on November 22, 1969, the "first official meeting of the Black Appalachian Commission."[145] In addition to BAC chairman Smith, BAC board representative Homer Williams, and CSM director Loyal Jones, there were people from outside of the college in attendance. Key among them was Almetor King, one of the twenty-five people who signed on as supporters of the BAC during its creation and therefore was one of its founders. King worked for the Highlander Research and Education Center, and she was

[144] BAC Project Proposals, 1969-1970. Black Appalachian Commission, Series 6, Subseries 4, Box 173, Folder 17, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives.

[145] Smith, *Black Power Comes to Appalachia*, 49.

also a founding member of the CSM's Poor People's Self-Help Commission. King traveled to Berea in November to attend the meeting. The second item on the BAC meeting agenda was a discussion of the research study. King suggested a year-long study instead of a summer research project. The commission agreed and decided to compose a new draft of the proposal with the change. The research study grew out of the campus environment but now had stronger connections to the Appalachian regional community through input from King and other meeting attendees from other parts of the region. The study by and about Black Appalachians is what drew them into the BAC. Their participation, and the shifting political environment, would transform the organization. The organization's transformation at the CSM annual meeting a year after its founding demonstrates that funding the organization remained a major concern and a hurdle to its growth and development.

Reflecting on the BAC years later, King remembered it as a "sexist" organization.[146] She remembered that the men involved were eager maintain leadership positions. While she did not remain with the organization after 1970, but her participation was critical for its early development. In 1980, King became the first Black woman to direct the CSM.

The BAC attended the CSM annual meeting at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina in the spring of 1970 to report on its first year as a new CSM commission. It did so after revising its proposal from a summer research study to a year-long study. The second rendition of the research study proposal included the same language as the first, except

[146] Almetor King interview with author. April 7, 2018, Knoxville, Tennessee.

for information regarding who would conduct the study and how much money completing the study required with the new timeline. With Sloan away at Harvard, the BAC needed a new researcher, and they were specific about who should complete the study. The February 1970 proposal draft stated, "The research project will be carried out by a black Appalachian for a one-year period."[147] The BAC was clear that the study should be conducted by someone from the communities they intended to study. This was a way to reinforce the presence of Black Appalachians but also support Black Appalachian knowledge production. The new proposal also shows a change in the budget to accommodate the new timeline. Instead of an overall budget of $3561.00 for a summer research project, the February proposal asked for $14,880 for a year-long study.[148] This would have been the equivalent of a full-time paid position. In addition to employing a Black Appalachian, the BAC sought to pay that person a full-time salary within a context of widespread poverty in the region. This attests to what they considered to be the importance of the work, the responsibility of the CSM to support it, and part of their mission to serve the broader community by supplying a job opportunity.

Sometime between the writing of the first draft of the research study proposal in May 1969, the second draft of the proposal in February 1970, and the annual meeting of the CSM in April 1970, the leadership of the BAC shifted. Its new chair Carl Johnson

[147] BAC Project Proposals, 1969-1970. Black Appalachian Commission, Series 6, Subseries 4, Box 173, Folder 17, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives. Smith, *Black Power Comes to Appalachia*, 99.

[148] Ibid.

was a community activist in Asheville, North Carolina.[149] In 1967, he had initiated a rent strike in the Hillcrest Apartments to protest landlord neglect. In his book on the creation of the BAC, Smith writes that the transition of leadership happened after the CSM meeting at a meeting of the BAC in Knoxville in September 1970.[150] He states that Johnson was appointed then as the BAC chairman. A record of the business meeting from April 1970, however, shows that Johnson was already involved and the new leader of the organization. Whenever the transition happened, along with the continuing willingness of the NAACP LDF to cover part of the study's budget, his leadership took the organization into a new direction. It was the key to the BAC's development from a student-led campus-based organization to a regional organization led by community activists.

At the annual CSM meeting in April and under the new leadership of Johnson, the BAC pushed the CSM to support their work with their revised study proposal. This time, their push was more forceful than before. The tone of the BAC resolutions from the meeting denotes a tension between the commission and its parent organization on the issue of funding. It also denotes a shift in BAC leadership from student activists to community activists. In the business meeting of the 1970 annual meeting, the BAC made the following resolution:

[149] For more on Carl Johnson's background in Asheville, North Carolina see Sarah Judson, "We're Walking Proud and Talking Loud Because We're the New Black Joes!": Community Leadership and Tenants Rights in Asheville's 1968 Rent Strike. *Journal of Urban History* Vol 46, No. 4 (2020), 816-835.

[150] Smith, *Black Power Comes to Appalachia*, 95.

> Whereas: The Black Appalachian Commission seeks to function as a working mechanism of the Council of the Southern Mountains inc., the members of the body resolve (1) that the council of the Southern Mountains make available to the Black Appalachian Commission technical assistance by providing adequate staff expertise for proposal writing, program planning, structuring a mechanism for communication among all black Appalachians, fund raising, and community organization. (2) that the Council of the Southern Mountains, Inc. appropriate financial aid or seek out financial funds to be designated to the Black Appalachian Commission. (3) That the Council of the Southern Mountains consult the Chairman and the Cabinet of the Black Appalachian Commission in all decisions affecting said body.[151]

The resolution was dated April 25, 1970, and signed by Carl Johnson as chairman.

The first part of the resolution that calls for assistance with proposal writing shows that the BAC was still developing ways to write grant proposals for funding to support its study and that it looked to the CSM to provide it. The second part clearly stated that the CSM was responsible for supporting its commissions. But the CSM had its own financial and leadership difficulties. The CSM received funds through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) during Lyndon B. Johnson administration as part of the administration's War on Poverty. After the election of Richard Nixon in 1969, the fate of

[151] BAC Project Reports 1968-1970. Black Appalachian Commission, Series 6, Subseries 4, Box 173, Folder 18, The Council of the Southern Mountains Collection, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives. Smith, *Black Power Comes to Appalachia*, 190.

the OEO was uncertain. In addition to his critical view on the liberal policies of Johnson, Nixon's appointment of Republican congressman Donald Rumsfeld as the new director of the OEO gave the CSM leadership cause to worry about the future of the federal funding they would receive. Would the new government end the liberal programs of the previous government, thus ending OEO and War on Poverty funds? This was a major concern at the 58th annual meeting of the CSM.

The third part of the resolution that would require the CSM to "consult the Chairman and the Cabinet of the Black Appalachian Commission in all decisions affecting said body" suggests a contest for decision-making between the BAC and the CSM. The BAC demanded decision-making power. This was a transition from the time Smith sought advice and direction from CSM leaders on Berea's campus. The BAC took on a new tone in the spring of 1970. The transition from Smith to Johnson was likely the cause. Johnson brought a new energy and the perspective of Black Appalachians in western North Carolina to the BAC. According to Smith, Johnson and other community activists like him could devote a larger part of their lives to advancing the BAC. Smith remembered, the difference between student and community activists,

> We didn't have to worry about families, we didn't have to worry about income. We all had student labor assignments here, we all worked during the summers, so we weren't professional activists, we were just idealistic students who saw things that we thought weren't right and tried to do what we could to change them. It was passed on to Carl and Almetor, passed on to those people who, as I said, they had families. It's like the counselor staff, a large number of them, that was their jobs,

> that's how they were getting paid. Their main thing was how were they going to earn income and support themselves and their families, so I can understand that. We were just idealistic.[152]

The idealism of Black Berea College students is what founded the BAC, but it would be the new leadership's experience in community activism that would launch the next phase of the BAC. Johnson and Almetor were not paid for their participation in the BAC. But Smith is correct in affirming that they differed in their approach to the organization, principally who they thought should steer the organization: Black people or white administrators of the CSM at Berea College.

As the BAC underwent a leadership shift, the CSM was in the midst of its own.[153] The CSM had a budget for its commissions but was short of funds and it is unlikely that any of that money ultimately went to the BAC. At a board of commissioners meeting following the annual conference in April, CSM executive director Loyal Jones disclosed the tight finances of the CSM, remarking, "We do not have enough money to exist and give the hoped-for support to commissions."[154] Nixon did not end War on Poverty

[152] Edward D. Smith with author. August 15, 2018, Berea, Kentucky.

[153] Statement of 1970 receipts and expenditures covering shows that the CSM had a six-month budget of $12,500 from the Ford Foundation allocated for commissions and $9000 allocated for commission from "other sources."[153] This was out of an overall six-month budget of $187,185. The six-month expenditure from January 1 to June 30, 1970, was $91,840.56.

[154] "Notes from Two Meetings," *Mountain Life and Work* Volume XLVL, No. 5 (May 1970), 14.

programs that year and the CSM continued to function.[155] But shortly after the annual meeting, director Jones stepped down from his position as executive director.[156]

Toward Independence

By November 1970, the BAC had a membership of about thirty members and a steering committee of six people. The members hailed from all over the region. It included King from Highlander, Gwendolyn Daugherty, a Berea alum also at Highlander, Mary Farris, a local activist from Berea, Luther Pearson from Harlan, Kentucky, and Raymond Murray from West Point, Mississippi among others. In December, minutes from a cabinet meeting show how far the BAC had come over its first year. In a meeting of the BAC steering committee with Appalachian Regional Commission executive director Ralph A. Widner in the Washington D.C. offices of the Black Women's Community Development Foundation (BWCDF), Johnson reported presence of "a representative from the Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Southern Education Foundation, the Southern Regional Council, and Miss Ann Lora Beard of the Plymouth

[155] Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds. *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 439. See also Dean J. Kotlowski *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principal, and Policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

[156] Warren Wright was appointed the new director. The change in leadership necessitated a change in plans by the BAC. By August 1970, the BAC still had a research proposal, but the listed contact was now Warren Wright instead of the commission and the study was changed back to a summer study with a budget of $4835. A letter from Julian Griggs, director of commissions for the CSM, was sent to "members of the Black Appalachian Cabinet" with updates on the commission's development. In the update, Johnson is mentioned as being in attendance at a meeting in Knoxville that occurred September 1970. Since Smith's last semester at Berea was the fall of 1970, it is possible that Johnson was elected at the April annual meeting as the new BAC chairman.

Settlement House, in Louisville, Kentucky."[157] Johnson reported that the "first order of business was to find a co-ordinator (sic) to do a study of Black Appalachia."[158] Jean Fairfax offered to provide statistics. It was also "discussed that the Black Women (sic) Community Development Foundation be used as a conduit for funds."[159] Johnson went on to briefly describe the BWCDF based on Fairfax's description at the meeting, "Jean Fairfax gave us a brief history of the Black Women Development Foundation and some of the things that they are doing: Major project - Funding for Early Childhood Development Program. Act mainly as a seed operation program - by trying to help Black people get a better part of the action. Supports organizations in Chicago and have someone in Africa looking at community organizations."[160]

There was also another important aspect of the meeting. In addition to a discussion of the study and possible funding, the BAC discussed using the BWCDF as conduit. This was in part due to the turmoil in the larger CSM. This was also due to the BAC's new vision to become an independent organization. At the meeting with the ARC, the NAACP LDF, and the BWCDF, the BAC discussed one of the last items on the agenda: incorporating as a separate entity from the CSM. Johnson wrote, "It was suggested that we incorporate." They discussed possible new locations of the BAC headquarters, another sign of a coming split from the CSM, and "What should be the membership of the corporation." Although the BAC had a handful of white members in

[157] BAC Project Reports 1968-1970. Black Appalachian Commission, Series 6, Subseries 4, Box 173, Folder 18, The Council of the Southern Mountains Records, 1912-1970, Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives. Smith, *Black Power Comes to Appalachia*, 190.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid.

1969, by the end of 1970 and with new leadership, the issue of becoming an all-Black organization was on the table for discussion. To end the meeting, they agreed to "pull together, possibly in March 1971, a general overall meeting of the Black Leaders in Appalachia." After the meeting in Washington D.C., the BAC became an independent organization in March 1971. On leaving the CSM, Johnson stated, "We left the Council because it really did not have anything to offer us . . . Besides, it has few blacks in high places."[161] The BAC separated from the CSM but remained connected through annual meetings. Throughout its history, the BAC continued to send a representative to CSM annual meetings until the organization ended.

The newly independent BAC commissioned the study that would become the May 1971 statistical report by the NAACP LDF. The NAACP LDF covered the cost of the study. The new organization had succeeded in completing its first task by going outside of the region to find alliances with national Black organizations.

The First Black Appalachian Regional Conference

From July 9 to July 11, 1971, the BAC held the Black Appalachian Regional Conference at the Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, North Carolina. The conference itself was a forum for skill-sharing, cross-regional communication, and discussion. It was the BAC's attempt to facilitate and lead the building of Black community power in Appalachia. By that time, the address of the organization was listed

[161] Black Appalachian Commission: History, 1974. Box 90, Folder 5. Council of the Southern Mountains Records, 1970-1989. Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives.

as Asheville, North Carolina. The steering committee for the BAC was identified on the conference program as Carl Johnson, who was BAC chairman, Barbara Jones, Jean Smith, Jesse Pennington, and Viola Cleveland. The program stated,

> Geographically, the Appalachian Region includes portions of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and all of West Virginia -- a vast region of almost 17 million people. Black people constitute nearly one and one half million of the total population, yet we seldom receive the benefits of state and federal programs geared toward Appalachia we seldom communicate with one another on a regional basis; there rarely is publicity about the plight of poor Black people in the midst of this 'white poverty area.'[162]

Here, the BAC is speaking back to the policies of the War on Poverty which, they argue, focused solely on the poverty of white Appalachians. This was the reason why the statistical report was so crucial to the work of the commission and its first task. The BAC needed to show Black presence in the region. The statement on the conference program makes it clear that part of the need to do so was to be able to get the government's attention and some of the resources it sent through federal offices like the OEO. It is also clear from the statement that the BAC saw the coming together of Black Appalachians as

[162] Black Appalachian Commission: Brochures, n.d., Box 90, Folder 18. Council of the Southern Mountains Records, 1970-1989. Berea College Southern Appalachian Archives.

a necessity in their cause. The emphasis on cross-regional communication among Black Appalachians is a way they sought to build power as a group with specific needs and experiences within a region.

The program also included a brief history of the BAC. Interestingly, it begins the history of the organization in 1970 instead of 1969. This may have been a way to emphasize new BAC leadership and the independent status of the organization, a mistake, or evidence of tension between the student activists who started the organization and community activists who took the helm later on. It reads,

> The fledgling Black Appalachian Commission was formed in 1970 to meet these needs with action. Priority in the first months of existence has been given to (1) identifying Black Appalachian leadership; (2) community self-study; (3) watch-dogging state and federal programs insensitive to the needs of Black people; (4) the utilization of census data and research to document the existence and problems of Appalachian Blacks. This conference of Black Appalachian leaders has been called to use the community studies and other materials to define regional problem areas and to develop strategies to confront them.[163]

The back of the event's program schedule included a map labeled as "Black Appalachian Population, 1970s." It was a map of the thirteen states comprising the

[163] Ibid.

Appalachian region and listed a number and a percentage in each state.[164] The map identified a "region-wide Black population" as totaling 1,321,651 people, 7.3% of the total Appalachian population. Broken into Appalachian states, the map showed 11,889 Black people in Appalachian New York which amounted to 1.1% of the total Appalachian population there. There were 211,497 Black people living in Appalachian Pennsylvania (3.6%), about 5,099 (2.47%) in Maryland, and 25,264 (2.2%) in Ohio. Black West Virginians totaled 73,931 (4.2%), Black people living in Appalachian Kentucky numbered 23,785 (2.7%), Virginia included 16,446 Black people in Appalachian counties (3.5%), Tennessee had 109,490 Black people in Appalachian counties (6.3%), North Carolina had 103,517 (10%), and South Carolina had 112,041 (17.1%). In Georgia, Black people in Appalachian counties totaled 68,091 (8.4%), in Alabama their numbers were 438,495 (20.5%), and in Mississippi Black people in Appalachian counties totaled 122,103 (29.2%). The map on the event program identified the source of the statistics as "The Status of Black People in Appalachia; Bruland."[165] Just two years after the BAC was founded, and shortly after deciding to initiate a study, the BAC held a regional conference with statistics from its first report. This was only six months after the BAC steering committee meeting in Washington D.C. where they discussed organizing a conference. The statistics served to prove their presence and in following years would be used by the organization to identify how much government aid should be allocated to Black Appalachian communities.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

The BAC shared the results of the report at the conference, but the conference itself included more than an emphasis on statistics. Over three days, conference attendees attended keynote speeches, panel discussions, and workshops. The keynote address was given by U.S. Congressman Parren Mitchell from Maryland. Mitchell was the first African American congressman from Maryland and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus founded that same year. Mitchell spoke on the need for the federal government to concentrate on poverty in rural areas as well as urban areas. He spoke about the effects of poverty, including decreased life expectancy among Black children. He identified what he described as the price of rural poverty.

> Throughout the Nation, particularly in the deep South Black children do not get enough food to sustain life. Malnutrition is widespread. The life expectancy of the rural born Black infant is significantly below that of the Nation because [of] poor diets, poor housing, and lack of medical facilities, all of these take their toll . . . For those who survive infancy, and early childhood another grim factor awaits. If they go to school at all, they leave their atrocious homes (five out of every thirteen houses in rural Black America are unfit to live in) and go to equally atrocious schools. The schools are so physically bad that learning is impossible.[166]

[166] Remarks by the Honorable Parren J. Mitchell. Box 164, Folder 1. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives. Special Collections. University of Kentucky Libraries.

Within his discussion of Black rural poverty nationally, Mitchell also spoke directly to the needs of Black people in Appalachia.

> As the Appalachian Communities deteriorate, they offer fewer and fewer opportunities to earn a living. Young people understandably desert these communities. Those who stay behind become a part of a living death. The urbanologists have talked about 'the Nekropolis' the dying city. We should also speak of the 'nekratos' - the dying rural area." Mitchell understood that Appalachians had urban centers, but noted, "As young Blacks move into the urban centers in Appalachian towns, they all too often find the same dismal conditions they fled from as a part of their new existence.[167]

Mitchell identified differences between Black and white poverty. To what did Mitchell attribute this difference? He was clear on its causes, stating, "While it is true that both white and Black suffer from poverty in Appalachia, the poverty of the Black i[s] compounded because of racism."[168] Mitchell did not see the dismantling of racist attitudes as the key to solving the problem of Black Appalachian poverty. He instead encouraged conference attendees to devise ways to obtain structural power as the solution. To obtain it, Mitchell argued they would have to take it.

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

> We can legislate as much as we want. We can set up as many commissions as we want or desire. Appalachia can be filled to the brim with Appalachian Regional Commissions, and Appalachian Regional Development Acts (1965) and the Humphrey Talmadge Rural Consolidated Development Act, we can have all of these things but until Black in Appalachian take - note I said take, their share, Blacks in Appalachia will not prosper.[169]

Mitchell's keynote address was a rallying call for Black Appalachians to devise ways to empower themselves by claiming government resources that were rightfully theirs. The key to proving who should receive what was the statistical report. Over the next four years, the BAC used it to claim federal resources, demanding them from the ARC specifically.

The conference panel discussions reveal topics the BAC deemed important to discuss. The topics covered were employment, economic development, education, and housing. There were also "How to Do It Workshops." These included workshops on voter education, miners' benefits, child development programs, and welfare programs. There were workshops on how to strengthen Black power in the electoral realm, on labor rights, in relation to early childhood education and support, and government economic

[169] Ibid.

aid. The BAC was starting to identify areas of need for Black Appalachian communities, and concentration for their mission to serve those communities.

On Saturday night, the conference featured a conference-wide panel discussion entitled "The Plight of Black People in Appalachia." The discussion included a response from the ARC and featured panelists from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Greenville, South Carolina, West Point, Mississippi, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Middleboro, Kentucky. The panel reflected a wide geographical representation of the region, showing just how much the BAC had grown from a campus-centered organization to region-wide organization led by community activists who developed the BAC into an organization with national ties to federal, state, and local government and activists throughout the region. The conference closed with a keynote address by Avon Williams, the Black state senator of Nashville, Tennessee, originally from Knoxville. Williams was an attorney who worked with the NAACP LDF beginning in the late 1940s. That the BAC conference featured two keynote addresses by Black men newly elected for federal and state office is a sign of the shifting political strategies of Black activists in the 1970s who moved from protest to politics.[170] It also confirms the ties the BAC had made to powerful Black representatives in government and civil rights.

The conference also included speakers and panelists from outside of the Appalachian region as designated by the ARC. This demonstrates how Black people had to reach beyond white-run local and state governments to build support and coalitions.

[170] Bayard Rustin spoke about this shift in his 1965 commentary "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement." Box 1, Folder 22. American Left Ephemera Collection. University of Pittsburgh. See also Michael G. Long, ed., *I Must Resist: Bayard Rustin's Life in Letters* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2012).

Black solidarity went beyond the region due to racial politics within the region. The BAC addressed Black community needs but underneath those direct actions was the understanding that many of the economic conditions Black Appalachians attempted to surmount were due to racism and racial discrimination. The BAC would spend its next phase addressing anti-poverty by challenging institutional racism.

According to an interview in *Our Voice* with Johnson a month after the conference, the BAC was,

> Concerned with such things as: geographical locations of blacks, finding potential leadership, calling on some of the present leaders, seeing what the outmigration was and wayfinding out what happened to the social life of young blacks after integration, and finding out what happened to black principals and teachers after integration. For example, we found that the present black head custodian at a school in Kentucky was once the principal at that same school in 1968.[171]

In terms of who supported the conference financially, enabling Johnson and other attendees to uncover such information, Johnson noted that the BWCDF "made $21,000 available for us to have a conference to find the answers to some of these questions."[172] Johnson ended by stating, "This was a great first step. BAC will continue to structure

[171] *Our Voice*. Black Appalachian Commission. Radicalism Collection. Special Collections. Michigan State University Libraries.

[172] Ibid.

itself. We hope to get money to continue the study and try to advise the government on the channeling of more funds to blacks in Appalachia. We must consider the human element and back all people who are sincere in helping blacks in Appalachia."[173] By August 1971, the BAC was fully under the leadership of Johnson and making strides toward becoming a regional advocate for Black Appalachians and representation of Black Appalachian voices.

Conclusion

In *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton identify political mobilization as the second step towards building a sense of Black community and ultimately Black Power.[174] They write, "'Political mobilization' includes many things, but we mean by it three major concepts: (1) questioning old values and institutions of the society; (2) searching for new and different forms of political structure to solve political and economic problems; and (3) broadening the base of political participation to include more people in the decision-making process."[175] The first two years of the BAC reveal an organization struggling to build a Black regional community.

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. I discuss the origins of the BAC as self-definition, Ture and Hamilton's first step to building a Black community consciousness, in Chapter One.

[175] Ibid., 39.

The BAC was founded by college students who initially questioned the CSM as a help to Black Appalachian communities but had nonetheless founded the new organization within the CSM structure. The BAC then spent its first year trying to work with the CSM. When the CSM neglected to fund the new commission's first task, the BAC began its search for solving economic and political problems by building alliances with national Black organizations which enabled it to become a new type of organization. A fundamental goal of the new organization's regional conference was to build Black Appalachian political participation. The BAC was becoming a Black Power organization.

Within two years, the BAC had left the CSM. It was now an independent organization with new leadership, important alliances with Black national organizations, and the successful convenor of a black regional conference. The BAC wrestled with poverty head on by trying to build solidarity within the region while relying on important alliances with national Black organizations outside the region to survive. Even early in its development, the BAC had not received financial support from the CSM. The new organization had to seek outside funding and relied on the vital support of Black women in the BAC's development. Black Appalachian activism necessitated Black solidarity beyond region even as its power was based on regional identity. The BAC grew into a more powerful organization because it left to the CSM to connect with other Black organizations.

The need for outside funding brought influences outside of the Berea College context. These influences came in the form of veteran community activists. Edward Smith, as the first chairman of the BAC, had willingly worked with and followed the direction of CSM leadership. That he did so was undoubtedly influenced by his status as

a Berea College student. But Carl Johnson did not have those relationships and instead thought the BAC should be autonomous from the CSM and white influence. A shift came at the April 1970 meeting when Carl Johnson was elected as BAC chairman, and another when the report on Black Appalachians was completed. The report provided the numerical evidence the BAC needed to prove what they knew to be true: Appalachia was not an all-white region. The report verified Black Appalachian presence, but it also verified another fact: that Black Appalachians were among the poorest residents of the region. Although Black Appalachians were not a majority in the region, the BAC argued that their condition as the poorest Appalachians made addressing their needs a government imperative. The report's conclusion was the evidence the BAC needed to advocate for government intervention and funding for Black Appalachian communities during the aftermath of the War on Poverty and the beginning of the fiscally conservative presidency of Richard Nixon. To the BAC, any discussion on anti-poverty in the region had to start by addressing the condition of Black Appalachians who were at the bottom economically because, the BAC argued, of institutional racism. To address economic inequality, The BAC became a new organization that, after leaving the CSM, would take aim at a more powerful entity: the Appalachian Regional Commission.

CHAPTER 4: TURNING UP THE HEAT ON THE ARC, 1971-1972

With their statistical report in hand, the BAC set out to unmask how policies created to address economic inequality were not race neutral or colorblind. On January 19, 1972, Jack Guillebeaux and Carl Johnson of the BAC met with Donald W. Whitehead, the federal co-chairman of the ARC in Washington, D.C. In a meeting held over two days in the national offices of the ARC, Guillebeaux and Johnson pressed Whitehead to distribute anti-poverty funds directly to Black communities who were some of the poorest in the region. The federal focus on poor white Appalachians, they argued, obscured the needs of even poorer Black Appalachians. In order to ensure the funds reached Black Appalachians, the BAC pushed for a formal role in all ARC decisions related to public policy in the region. Boldly, the BAC made three concrete demands: the implementation of affirmative action plans in all ARC Local Development Districts to ensure Black involvement; allocation of funds to Black-serving child development centers in the region; and allocation of a fixed share of jobs on the Appalachian Development Highway System to Black workers who had been denied entry in white unions.[176] Each demand was intended as a direct assault on what the BAC saw as the primary cause of poverty for Black Appalachians—institutional racism.

In his notes on the meeting, Whitehead implied that his offer short of those demands met with ingratitude from Guillebeaux and Johnson. He commented that

[176] Here I am engaging Rhonda Y. Williams' concept of concrete demands as "urgent needs, things asked for, and questions raised." She notes that, "Those who responded held multiple, if not competing ideologies and goals grounded in specific local and political contexts that fueled their quest for rights and power." Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands*, 4.

Guillebeaux in particular did not appreciate "the moves we are making in the field of civil rights."[177] He wrote,

> Jack did not, as I had hoped he would following yesterday's meeting, accept our offer to help put together an OEO funding proposal to provide money for BAC meetings at the local, state and regional level—on the grounds that this move did not go to the heart of the problem, i.e., establishment of a special relationship between ARC and BAC to provide a mechanism for black input in the decisions made by the Commission.[178]

While Whitehead viewed the meeting as unsuccessful due to Guillebeaux's unwillingness to accept the ARC's counteroffer, another view of the exchange reveals the BAC's success as an organization that re-envisioned political power in the region. The BAC's radical vision of anti-poverty was to address it through anti-racism. Though all of their demands were not met, the BAC changed the ARC. The history of the interaction between the two institutions offers an example of the ability of a small grassroots organization to make an impact at the federal level.

Over the course of their exchanges with the ARC between 1971 and 1972, the BAC insisted on centering the needs of working-class Black Appalachians. Doing so

[177] Memorandum, January 19, 1972. Box 164, Folder 2, Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[178] Ibid.

raised the issue of who mattered in anti-poverty programs and who would ultimately benefit from regional policy. The BAC challenged how decisions were made, specifically demanding that poor Black people make decisions for themselves. By demanding changes to ARC staffing, direct funding for Black child development, and affirmative action in hiring, the BAC exposed institutional racism as a barrier to economic justice. To the BAC, any project to alleviate poverty had to address systemic racism on the local and federal level. Economic and racial justice were intertwined. The War on Poverty could not be separated from the problem of racism, and any discussion on anti-poverty would necessarily have to attack racial disparities. The BAC used the War on Poverty to wage a regional war on racism.

The BAC's concrete demands and refusal to accept the ARC's offer that fell short of those demands were an intensification of its struggle for Black self-determination. The organization had evolved from a student-led commission of the Council of the Southern Mountains with an interracial membership to an all-Black independent non-profit organization with a paid staff and board members from ten Appalachian states. After the publication of its own statistical study that clearly identified Black people in the region and deduced their low economic condition from increased outmigration, the BAC was armed with numbers to back up their claims to proportional funding and representation. Organized into a new institution, the BAC put the fight against institutional racism in action by questioning Appalachian institutions. They intensified their fight for self-determination by demanding changes to public policy.

Exchanges between the BAC and ARC reveal a key aspect of the BAC's political strategy. The BAC was willing to work within the system to try to change it. They took

what John T. McCartney interprets as a Black Power pluralist stance. In *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African American Political Thought,* McCartney categorizes different iterations of Black Power, defining pluralists as activists who "believe that by working within the system and by skillfully using the strategies and techniques sanctioned by it, African-Americans can achieve the level of success that other ethnic groups have attained."[179] McCartney's category includes people like Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm and members of the Congressional Black Caucus who translated Black Power imperatives into public policy. The BAC's efforts to change the ARC reveal its belief that the system could be changed through pressure from below. The pressure they applied required gaining expertise in legislation and public policy. Their Black Power politics included pushing the system using its own tools. The BAC applied pressure to the federal-state agency in the media, in closed-door meetings, and through correspondence.

The BAC's willingness to work with and accept money from federal sources was not unique, but it does inform debates about the degree to which true self-determination can and should be enabled by government funding. Historian Rhonda Y. Williams discusses debates amongst Black Power organizations about accepting corporate and government funds. Williams writes that some Black Power activists saw doing so as antithetical to their cause, while others "viewed corporate, non-profit, and government resources merely as a means to accomplish their agenda."[180] Some asked, "why should black people, as U.S. citizens and taxpayers, not receive government funding as well to

[179] John T. McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 151.

[180] Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands*, 167.

address their needs and promote black advancement"?[181] Ultimately, Williams posits that these organizations concluded that "self-determination politics did not automatically have to mean releasing the government from its responsibility to black people and communities. In fact, the question of who could access what kind of government resources spoke to the critical issues of fairness and power."[182] The BAC took the position that Black Appalachians had a right to government money earmarked for Appalachian programs. As a regional institution, the ARC had the power to shift racial dynamics through its anti-poverty programs. By centering Black Appalachians, the BAC sought to ensure fairness and secure power for Black people in the region.

Centering the Black history of the region shows that the BAC worked with federal agencies such as the ARC by attempting to push them to a broader view of anti-poverty that directly met the needs of the poorest Appalachians. This approach contrasts with the decisions of some white organizations in Appalachia to reject the intervention of the ARC. [183] In collaborating with federal programs, the BAC continued a long tradition of Black activists seeking federal intervention to solve or at least mitigate local manifestations of racism. The BAC attempted to work with the ARC to address the needs of Black Appalachians and their vision of the best way to do so was by challenging institutional racism within the ARC and throughout the region. By demanding a seat at the table of regional decision-making, the BAC insisted on upending white top-down

[181] Ibid., 168.

[182] Ibid., 167.

[183] Thomas Kiffmeyer argues that Appalachians rejected ARC programs in favor of their own in "Looking Back to the City on the Hills: The Council of the Southern Mountains and a Longer View of the War on Poverty in the Appalachian South, 1913-1970" in Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds. *The War on Poverty*.

control by putting Black Appalachians in positions of power. By demanding federal funds for Black Appalachian institutions, the BAC demanded government economic support for Black autonomy and self-determination. To get at the poverty Black Appalachians experienced, including job discrimination, the ARC would have to take the BAC's counsel and begin to dismantle institutional racism. Formal participation in policy decisions, proportional funding, and job allocations for Black workers became mechanisms for anti-racism.

New Staff, New Energy

This period of BAC intensification and increased demands was due in part to a new staff. In 1971, the BAC board hired Isaac Coleman as field coordinator and Jack Guillebeaux as executive director. Both were veteran civil rights activists. Originally from Lexington, Kentucky, Coleman was a student at Knoxville College in 1960 when he was recruited to join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) by Marion Barry, SNCC chairman and graduate student at nearby University of Tennessee. Through Barry, Coleman joined the fight for desegregation. Coleman traveled to Mississippi in 1964 for Freedom Summer, joined the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and worked alongside Fannie Lou Hamer in the fight for Black voting rights. When he was looking for a job in 1971, a friend at the Southern Poverty Law Center connected Coleman to Carl Johnson. Shortly after, he moved to Asheville, North Carolina. Coleman remembered, "I flew into Asheville and went to work for the Black Appalachian Commission. My job was to organize the leadership of Appalachian states for a

conference here in Asheville."[184] Coleman, with a background in organizing and recruitment for the civil rights movement, strengthened the organization's staff and visibility as a regional Black Power organization.

The BAC became known locally as the place for Black community members to go for help. Coleman remembered that Johnson was called the "Mayor of Hillcrest" after leading fellow public housing residents in the 1968 Hillcrest apartments rent strike. His reputation as a local activist extended to his work as BAC board chairman where he had existing contact in local government and trust by Black people in the community. Coleman remembered, "People knocked on his door late at night with some kind of problem, and he'd climb out of bed, go to the door and listen to them."[185] He said Johnson would say "Come see me tomorrow and we'll work out the problem."[186]Johnson and Coleman's activism on behalf of Black people extended from Asheville to the wider region.

Arbury Jack Guillebeaux was born and raised in the East End neighborhood of Asheville, North Carolina. After completing high school and a course on watchmaking, Guillebeaux went to work in W.E Roland Jewelry Company, a Black-owned jewelry store owned by William E. Roland. There he was radicalized by Roland, a civil rights activist, who held meetings in the back of his store. Guillebeaux attended the meetings and was eventually elected as an officer of the Asheville Buncombe County Citizen's

[184] Rob Neufeld, "An Interview with Isaac Coleman" *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 23, 2016.

[185] Rob Neufeld, "Asheville Civic Leader Coleman had Roots in Student Organizing" *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 14, 2011.

[186] Ibid.

Organization. Guillebeaux remembered, "We did sit-ins, and we petitioned the city council, developing strategies."[187] Guillebeaux worked with the organization for three years before transitioning to work for the Ford Foundation.[188] "I ended up as a liaison with the Ford Foundation that was funding the corporation. I ended up as a liaison dealing with the executive director and the board members of that program in Asheville and a couple of others in Western North Carolina."[189] The North Carolina Fund was a non-profit corporation tasked with alleviating poverty in North Carolina in 1963, two years before the Economic Opportunity Act of 1965.[190] The corporation was funded in part by the Ford Foundation. In terms of making contacts throughout Appalachia, Guillebeaux noted that working with the North Carolina Fund enabled him to "hook up with a lot of organizers and people doing this kind of work, including at some point the Council of the Southern Mountains."[191] Guillebeaux was a member of the Council of Southern Mountains before the BAC was founded in 1969, so he was familiar with the events that led to the organization's formation.

Two years after the BAC was founded, when it had become an independent nonprofit organization with a budget for a paid staff, Guillebeaux was asked to take the helm as its leader. He remembered, "At some time when I was available, I was asked if I

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[187] Jack Guillebeaux interview with author. May 11, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama.

188 For more on the Ford Foundation and Black Power see Ferguson, Karen. *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[189] Ibid.

190 Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis. *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

[191] Ibid.

would take on the directorship of the Black Appalachian Commission and I said yes. And they had $25,000 that somebody had given them, I don't remember exactly now, and that would be my salary."[192] Guillebeaux brought non-profit experience, but he also knew Johnson from public housing activism in Asheville. Johnson's experience working on the ground with Guillebeaux are likely why he was asked to accept the position as director. He was Black and Appalachian, he knew non-profit organizations, and he had a background in civil rights activism.

The money to hire Guillebeaux and Coleman likely came from the Black Women's Community Development Foundation (BWCDF), a small foundation based in Washington, D. C., that had been supporting the BAC's efforts since 1969. The BWCDF was directed by Inez Smith Reid. Jean Fairfax, who had been advising the BAC through her role in the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, was BWCDF board president. The BWCDF made "small grants to Negro women community groups that it believes will have an impact on the black community at large."[193] By 1972, the organization played a crucial role in supporting the BAC both monetarily and in connecting the regional organization to national events. The 1972 BWCDF symposium on Black women in Chicago attracted two-hundred attendees, including Ella Baker, Amina Baraka, Septima P. Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Viola Cleveland, a BAC board member from Middlesboro, Kentucky.[194]

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[192] Ibid.

[193] Charlayne Hunter, "200 Black Women 'Have Dialogue' *New York Times*, January 10, 1972.

[194] "Symposium on Black Women" Booklet, AMN 1000 Box 11 Folder 06, Septima P. Clark Papers, Avery Research Center, College of Charleston.

Black women's organizations were instrumental to the work of the BAC, and they supported the hiring of new staff to advance the goals of the organization.

Guillebeaux was outspoken toward the ARC in both private meetings and public statements. His 1972 *South Today* article conveys the organization's new orientation and the philosophy underlying his refusal to accept the ARC's January 1972 offer.[195] Guillebeaux critiqued both the sudden government focus on Appalachia and the fact that the focus was solely on white Appalachians. As a result of the Appalachian Regional Development Act, he wrote, "In came the poverty fighters, the big money, the special programs and studies. Almost a billion dollars has been poured into the region since the inception of the [ARC]."[196] But the money did not reach all corners of the region, and concern for Black Appalachians did not happen until the formation of the BAC. He wrote,

> Although more than 1,300,000 Appalachians are black, one out of every 14 (sic), they somehow remained invisible during the discovery of 'white Appalachia.' When the region was being studied and new programs planned, the black Appalachian was overlooked, although he was worse off economically than the white Appalachian and his troubles were compounded by racial discrimination.[197]

[195] Jack Guillebeaux, "Not Just Whites in Appalachia," *South Today* (June 1972).

[196] Ibid.

[197] Ibid.

It was this compounding that the BAC tried to combat as a step towards their ultimate goal of self-determination. Guillebeaux explained that the BAC was an organization working to change the conditions for Black Appalachians, specifically to "free themselves from poverty and oppression as a community."[198] Guillebeaux explained, "Obviously, black Appalachians must be able to watch and challenge federal programs and institutions that discriminate against blacks. And BAC must be a tool at the grassroots level for unifying blacks in the region."[199] Here, Guillebeaux spoke to the BAC's role in monitoring the government as it continued to try to raise a regional Black consciousness and solidarity.

By 1972, the BAC was at the height of its work as an anti-racist organization. The hiring of paid staff brought an official quality to the BAC and formalized the organization. Coleman and Guillebeaux, veteran activists, brought new energy and leadership due to the support of the BWCDF. Active participants in the civil rights movement locally and regionally, they brought to the BAC an arsenal of strategies and connections. Like many Black activists at the time, they also thoroughly studied new legislation that purported to serve all Americans. Paying closest attention to legislation for Appalachia, the BAC began to assess the degree to which the actions of the ARC matched its mandate.

The Limitations and Opportunities of the 1965 Appalachian Regional Development Act

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid.

In taking on the ARC, the BAC was both utilizing and challenging the legislation that had created the federal agency. By 1972, the BAC had developed a detailed critique of the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965. Not only had the BAC identified its limitations, but it had found language that opened opportunities for BAC influence. The act reveals the focused intentions of the War on Poverty in a specific location: Appalachia. The act established the ARC, a partnership between the federal government and Appalachian state governments.[200] A result of the influence of social scientists on government policy, the ARC was a unique undertaking and a case study in the possible regionalization of the entire country with federal, state, and local governments working together to spark economic development and potentially share fiscal responsibility. Development in this sense was rooted in furthering the possibilities of regional planning, extractive capitalism, and private ownership. The Appalachian Regional Development Act states that the ARC functions to "encourage private investment in industrial, commercial, and recreational projects."[201] Theories of economic growth for private benefit propelled the legislation. It further states, "As the region obtains the needed physical and transportation facilities and develops its human resources, the Congress expects that the region will generate a diversified industry, and that the region will then be able to support itself, through the workings of a strengthened free enterprise

[200] For more on the legislation, the ARC, and its history see Michael Bradshaw, *The Appalachian Regional Commission: Twenty-Five Years of Government Policy* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992).

[201] U.S. Congress. United States Code: Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1964, 40a U.S.C. §§ 1-405 Suppl. 1 1964. 1964. Periodical. https://www.loc.gov/item/uscode1964-015040a001/

economy."[202] Stimulating the regional economy through transportation projects and increased jobs were key parts of the act.

To solve the problem of economic stagnation, the ARC was tasked with several functions that included the mandate that it "encourage the formation of local development districts" and "provide a forum for consideration of problems of the region and proposed solutions and establish and utilize, as appropriate, citizens and special advisory councils and public conferences."[203] Local Development Districts (LDDs) were especially important as the mechanisms through which the ARC and local governments collaborated. The act defines an LDD as "an entity certified to the Commission either by the Governor of the State or States in which such entity is located . . . as having a charter or authority that includes the economic development of counties or parts of counties or other political subdivisions within the region."[204] In order to be certified as an LDD, an organization had to be "(1) a nonprofit incorporated body organized or chartered under the law of the State in which it is located; (2) a nonprofit agency or instrumentality of a State or local government; (3) a nonprofit agency or instrumentality created through an interstate compact; or (4) a nonprofit association or combination of such bodies, agencies, and instrumentalities."[205] In other words, states could identify certain state, city, or county nonprofit agencies and certify them as official LDDs with the power to identify projects eligible for federal funds. The LDDs, as local entities that geographically cross

[202] Ibid.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid.

city, state or county lines, would be empowered to decide which projects, programs, and communities would be targeted for economic development. Targeted projects would then go through an approval process. This is what made the ARC a federal-state partnership. An LDD recommended programs and projects to the state governor for approval. Then, once approved, the project would be sent to the ARC for further approval and coordination with the corresponding federal agency for independent or matching grants. The entire approval process ensured that power would remain at the highest levels of state and federal government. State governments chose the LDDs, LDDs then chose the projects the states would approve, and the states then sent the projects to the ARC for funding.

This made LDDs another unit of authority in the region and a way of concentrating power on a broader geographical scale. From the BAC's perspective, the LDDs, made up of mostly white Appalachians, added an additional barrier for Black community groups trying to access funds. Challenging institutional racism would begin with challenging the racial composition of LDDs and going straight to the ARC to do it. They were empowered by the Appalachian Regional Development Act stipulation that states work with local and community groups. It reads, "In carrying out the development planning process, including the selection of programs and projects for assistance, States shall consult with local development districts, local units of government, and citizen groups and take into consideration the goals, objectives, priorities, and recommendations of such bodies."[206] The inclusion of "citizen groups" is key. As a part of the War on

[206] Ibid.

Poverty, the act had elements of community input comparable to the "maximum feasible participation" of the community action programs mandated by the Economic Opportunity Act. By stating that states were to take input from citizen groups and non-profit agencies and associations, the act opened the door for input from people directly affected by poverty. This carried over the liberalism of War on Poverty programs that presented themselves as open to citizen participation, presumably input from people the laws and programs would affect most.

What the act did not do was speak directly to issues of civil rights or racial inequality. These were issues the BAC raised and succeeded in centering on a regional level. The BAC harnessed the opening of the War on Poverty to make demands. The BAC staff and board members were citizens of Appalachian states, and the BAC was a non-profit agency. It had a right to anti-poverty funding and a right to demand input. The BAC chose three areas to address: ARC staffing, child development, and jobs on the Appalachian Development Highway System. To them, "maximum feasible participation" translated to Black control of Black institutions fully funded by their tax dollars returned to them through the federal government. This would eventually enable autonomy and self-determination.

Affirmative Action for ARC Staff

Advocating for more Black representation in the ARC had been an early BAC priority. The BAC's first meeting with the ARC had occurred in December 1970 in the Washington D.C., offices of the BWCDF. To launch their attack on institutional racism,

the BAC pushed the ARC to conduct a statistical study of the region and an assessment of Black participation in LDDs. Although the BAC was completing its own population study sponsored by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, an official ARC study would ensure the federal-state partnership acknowledged the truth behind its own numbers in terms of the presence and economic condition of Black Appalachians. Based on those statistics, the BAC would have evidence to support their demands for the allocation of a proportional amount of money and number of jobs within the ARC and across the region. This would increase Black representation in the ARC and in LDDs, a measure the BAC hoped would ensure Black input. This aligned with the idea that Black representation in predominantly white spaces would translate to changes for Black people as a whole. The BAC did not fight for jobs for themselves. There were fighting on behalf of a collective, a regional Black collective, in the hopes that Black input and representation would shift the balance of power in the region.

In these demands, the BAC succeeded. In June 1971, the ARC created a Black technical assistance team that included at least one Black regional planner, a recent graduate from Ohio State University. In December of that year, it published a statistical report entitled "Blacks in Appalachia." [207] The report confirmed the existence of Black Appalachians in the region, a fact apparent by the existence of the BAC, but necessary in terms of highlighting the need to specifically target those communities. That same month, results from a survey on Black representation in LDDs entitled "Blacks and Local

[207] Letter from Donald Whitehead to Patricia Reilly Hitt, February 4, 1972. ARC Archives Box 164, Folder 2. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

Development Districts" was also published by the ARC.[208] Unsurprisingly to the BAC, the survey showed there were few Black people involved in LDDs. After establishing the number of Black people in Appalachia, it was now necessary to ensure that some were in a position of political influence. The ARC reports placed the BAC in a position to make specific staffing demands. This was a step towards their mission of securing Black regional power.

Rather than admit the BAC's demands had led to the LDD survey, the ARC attributed its self-examination to the stance of the Nixon Administration on civil rights. However, correspondence between the grassroots organization and the federal-state partnership shows that the BAC influenced the ARC to consider the question of racial equality among its staff and within its anti-poverty programs. And Guillebeaux's June 1972 *South Today* article tells the same story: "A little more than a year ago BAC confronted the Appalachian Regional Commission with its failure to meaningfully involve blacks in its programs. At that time ARC had no affirmative action civil rights program."[209] He continued, "A recent ARC communication states: 'The Commission adopted an equal opportunity grievance procedure for internal operations as well as an affirmative action policy for local development districts.' But the communication credited this to President Nixon's stand on civil rights and equal employment, rather than to the Black Appalachian Commission's visit to the commission." [210] Still, even though

[208] Alicia King, "Blacks and Local Development Districts." ARC Archives Box 164, Folder 5. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[209] Ibid.

[210] Jack Guillebeaux, "Not Just Whites in Appalachia," *South Today* (June 1972). Edited and reprinted in William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (eds.) *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985).

the ARC attributed its stance on civil rights to a mandate from Nixon, Guillebeaux was adamant that it was the BAC that pushed the ARC to examine its organization and confront racial discrimination.

Lobbying for Black Child Development

While the ARC acquiesced to examining Black representation on its staff, within LDDs, and Black populations in the region, it refused BAC requests to allocate funds for child development and jobs for Black workers on the Appalachian Development Highway system. The history of the BAC's interaction with the ARC on child development funding and affirmative action in construction projects demonstrates its use of an anti-racism approach to antipoverty.

The BAC's advocacy for child development began with Johnson's April 1971request for a second meeting with the ARC. Johnson wanted to address what the BAC discovered from its forthcoming statistical study funded by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. "We have discovered that Black people of Appalachia, because of their numbers and isolation, have been bypassed by many of the programs operating in Appalachia."[211] To discuss the disparities and possible solutions with the ARC, Johnson suggested a spring meeting. Widner agreed and planned to meet Johnson on May 4th in Washington, D.C. As in his December meeting with the ARC, Johnson did not go alone. This time he attended with Coleman, BAC's new field coordinator, and three Black

[211] Letter from Carl Johnson to Ralph Widner, April 26, 1971. ARC box 164, Folder 1. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

women from the National Black Child Development Institute. The National Black Child Development Institute (BCDI), a national non-profit agency in Washington D.C., was founded by the BWCDF. Evelyn Moore, Maurien McKinley, and Sarah Walden Herbin went with Johnson and Coleman to the meeting to demonstrate their support and commitment to working with the BAC on child development in the region. The BWCDF likely connected Johnson and Coleman with BCDI leadership in preparation for the meeting with the ARC.

The BCDI had been created in August 1970 as "the technical assistant arm of the National Association of Black Child Development, Inc." made up of "educators, pediatricians, psychologists, social workers, nutritionists, parents, and others, all black, who have organized as advocates of black children."[212] Its mission was to "offer technical assistance, including administration, staff training, community involvement, curriculum and economic development to Black child development centers and to help establish new centers in the Black community."[213] McKinley described the BCDI's philosophy which included "building institutions to meet the needs of black families and black children, for it is through our present and existing institutions that racism moves."[214] Both the BCDI and the BAC considered Black child development as anti-poverty intervention. They connected child development work to overall community development. "We believe," McKinley said in an interview, "that child-development centers can be the catalyst for total community development . . . As day-care centers are utilized to catalyze

[212] Ibid.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

development in black and other communities, the enhanced political and economic power that results can provide effective leverage for the improvement of the overall social and economic condition of the nation.'"[215] Testimony given by McKinley before the United States Senate on May 20th in support of the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971 summarizes the organization's stance on Black child development, which the BAC adopted. The hearing was in reference to an amendment of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 that sought "to provide for a comprehensive child development program in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare."[216] In her testimony, McKinley, associate director of the BCDI, informed the Senate that there was inferred racism in government policy:

> Public policy has defined the black child in a deficit context, designing programs for the black child that are 'compensatory,' and that will presumably give him a 'head start.' The institute rejects this assumption and has therefore, accepted the responsibility for monitoring legislation, engaging in research activities, and moving programmatically to combat this destructive activity of the Government and existing institutions.[217]

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[215] Quoted in William V. Shannon, "A Radical, Direct, Simple, Utopian Alternative to Day-Care Centers" *New York Times*, April 30, 1972. Crystal R. Sanders highlights how child development programs like Head Start were extensions of the civil rights movement in *A Chance for Change: Head Start and Mississippi's Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 71.

[216] United States Senate. *Joint Hearings before the Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty and the Subcommittee on Children and Youth of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare*. Ninety-second Congress. May 13 and 20, 1971.

[217] Ibid.

In order to combat what they saw as an inherently racist model, the BCDI supported Black community input and ultimately, control. They saw child development as a way to instill ethnic pride, a stance that ultimately challenged "the validity of color-blind programs."[218] McKinley stated that, "In Senate bill 1512, we enthusiastically support the design of a process for consumer input in the development of standards . . ."[219] McKinley ultimately lobbied for a two-thirds community approval on child development standards. Such a ratio would ensure greater community control.

The BAC took the BCDI's cue to assert community input. Under the guidance of the BCDI, the BAC demanded 10.8% of the ARC's children's development funding for Black children, based on the study that had revealed approximately 10% of people in Appalachia were Black. That the BAC took up child development at their second task after completing a statistical study can probably be attributed to the financial and technical support of the BWCDF. Child development laws had also undergone recent changes in the legislature. A 1969 amendment to the Appalachian Regional Development Act gave the Department of Health and Human Services the authority "to make grants for the planning, construction, equipment, and operation of multi-county demonstration health, nutrition, and child care projects, including hospitals, regional health diagnostic and treatment centers and other facilities and services necessary for the purposes of this section."[220] With a new area to focus resources, in March 1970 the ARC made its own

[218] Ibid.

[219] Ibid.

[220] Appalachian Regional Development Act Amendments of 1969.

resolution to encourage "a State-level capability of planning child development programs for the Region and a program of demonstrations providing child development services in selected areas throughout the Region."[221] It planned to use the new amendment as an incentive for states to devise statewide programs that could be expanded into regional models. In theory, funding from the HHS would allow Appalachian groups to secure funds to build model child development programs. As a first step, the programs would have to be proposed by LDDs, approved by a corresponding state, then approved by the ARC in its application process. The BAC's demand for 10.8% of the ARC's child development funds shows they were astute in the intricacies of the act, but also defiant in regard to its process. They went directly to ARC. Their interactions reveal that they did so to try and avoid being denied at the state level.

The BCDI and the BAC wanted the funds for the creation of Black Appalachian-led child development centers for Black children. This was a way to address Black community development overall. By funding centers specifically for Black Appalachian children, ARC funds would not have to take the circuitous route through LDDs and state legislature where many programs specifically for Black people had been halted. The BAC proposed a different path, that the money be given directly to the BAC for creation of and distribution to Black Appalachian child development programs. By directing funding to Black institutions, the BAC tried to eliminate the states as middlemen. Sending the money to institutions run by and for Black Appalachians would ensure government funds reached Black communities.

[221] Ibid.

When Johnson, Coleman, Moore, McKinley, and Herbin met with ARC deputy director Howard Bray and other members of the child development staff in Washington, D.C., Johnson broached the topic of child development. He showed Bray a newsletter from the Day Care Council stating that the ARC had a $48 million budget for child development programs. With such substantial funding, the BAC requested that the ARC fund Black child development programs in the region through the BAC and its partnership with the BCDI. But Bray would prove unhelpful. He wrote to Johnson that securing funds would be a "highly complicated and time-consuming process."[222] Bray attributed the $48 million quoted in the newsletter to what he called a "theoretical" number based on potential funds due to the ability of the ARC to match funds under Title IV-A of the Social Security Act. He wrote that the ARC only had $8 million. He also explained that requests had to come through LDDs and be approved by state governors.[223] Bray informed them that the ARC planned "to obligate our funds by June 10, 1971" for what he termed "appropriate projects."[224] Bray also wrote that the ARC already had "applications for more money than the amount in the FY 1971 budget allocation."[225] Ultimately, he said,

> At the end of the discussion a question arose as to the possibility of submitting child development projects for funding this fiscal year. The staff will be glad to

[222] Letter from Howard Bray to Carl Johnson, May 10, 1971. ARC Box 164, Folder 1. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[223] Ibid.

[224] Ibid.

[225] Ibid.

> discuss any proposals with you that you have in mind. However, the requirement that potential projects must be approved by the State Interagency committee and by the Governor's representative, plus the fact that we presently have more requests than money, make it unrealistic to expect that funds for such proposals could be obligated from this year's money. The staff is available to work with you to see what can be done in the future.[226]

Bray's letter reveals that he failed to grasp the moral imperative of the BAC request and instead treated it like a request for a favor. His reasoning for denying the BAC's application ignored their argument regarding institutional racism and focused on their failure to follow proper procedures. The ARC already had more applications than funds, he explained. Even if they had been requested earlier, Bray inferred that the BAC's suggested programs were inappropriate. They also had not been sent through certified LDDs and approved by state governments. He also suggested the BAC not expect anything and put off their request to a nebulous future. While the Appalachian Regional Development Act encouraged input on potential programs from citizen groups at the state level, the ARC was unwilling to do the same on the federal level when it came to issues of expenditures.

Johnson responded to Bray's letter in a tone indicative of the BAC's frustration. From the BAC's perspective, the meeting and Bray's summary of it were a clear example of the ARC's negligence in assisting Black Appalachians. Responding on new letterhead

[226] Ibid.

that denoted its nonprofit status as the Black Appalachian Commission, Inc., and placing its headquarters on 13 ½ Eagle Street in Asheville, North Carolina, Johnson wrote frankly, "This is in response to your letter summarizing the meeting held with you and your staff regarding the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) proposed child development programs and the ARC's lack of involvement and participation with the Black Appalachian Commission (BAC)."[227] Johnson then took each of the paragraphs in Bray's letter and offered a rebuttal to "make crystal clear why our stance remains unchanged in spite of our meeting with you where we made an honest attempt to express our concerns."[228] Johnson explained that the BAC already understood the matching funds and application processes and that the BAC supported them. He added, "While we support this process, we abhor your blatant unwillingness to admit that this process has not worked for Black people particularly in the South. In fact, in many cases, states have intentionally created barriers for none access (sic) to these funds, i.e., West Point, Mississippi. Through your exclusion of Black families from utilizing their own tax money vis a vis Title IV-A."[229] Johnson explained why the BAC approached the ARC directly, citing barriers created by states to prevent Black communities from accessing funds.[230] The next paragraph explained the BAC's position on the ARC's response and made the following charge, "Paragraph two of your letter, which speaks to the coordination of agencies as well as state control, also serves to support this

[227] Letter from Carl Johnson to Howard Bray, May 28, 1971. ARC Box 164, Folder 1. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid.

[230] Sanders, *A Change for Change,* 2016.

institutionalized racism."[231] By trying to redirect the BAC to state governments for approval, state governments that had records of excluding Black constituents, Johnson charged, the ARC was enabling and sustaining institutional racism. This was precisely what the BAC sought to challenge.

By charging institutional racism, Johnson used a term coined just a few years prior by Stokely Carmichael and explained in Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton's *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* published in 1967.[232] They write, "Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks and acts by the total white community against the black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism."[233] They went on to describe the latter as "less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human like. The second type originates in the operation of established and respected forces in society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type."[234] Johnson called out the covertness of racism in Bray's response, and in the ARC application process, stating that "these proposed processes cannot work to the benefit of Black communities without the national support of ARC. This would include planning, as well as implementation of Black Child development programs by BAC."[235] Here Johnson expresses his

[231] Ibid.

[232] Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

[233] Ibid., 4.

[234] Ibid.

[235] Ibid.

disappointment with ARC, but also implores it to do more with its power. There was a tension between the BAC's frustration with federal-state partnership because of its ineffectiveness for Black Appalachians, and the BAC's persistent belief that it could change their economic reality. Johnson did allow that a paragraph in Bray's letter was "the only equitable" one, but his response was to mostly draw out how the ARC was upholding "institutionally racist policies."[236] Although the ARC presented itself as a regional solution to poverty, it used state governments as a barrier to antipoverty funds for Black organizations. The BAC took on a government entity and challenged its processes.

Nevertheless, the ARC continued its refusal to accept the premise of the BAC's argument in the following months. The BAC and ARC met again on June 7. Among the topics of discussion was the upcoming BAC conference in North Carolina. Minutes from the meeting also reveal that the BAC "requested a report on what the Commission has done for blacks since it first brought up this issue with the Commission in December."[237] Widner responded, citing the black technical assistance team as evidence and he noted the intention of the ARC to "incorporate requirements under the Civil Rights Act in the Commission Code."[238] The letter also included the demand for 10.8% of child development funds for Black child development projects. ARC minutes from the meeting reveal that the ARC characterized the request as discriminatory although it was meant to address precisely that. Widner wrote, "The (ARC) asked whether these funds were to be

[236] Ibid., 5.

[237] ARC Executive Committee Minutes, June 7 and 10, 1971. ARC Box 164, Folder 1. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[238] Ibid.

used exclusively on black projects or whether they were intended to apply across the board to all child development projects in which black children were involved."[239] The ARC ultimately responded, as they had in the May 4th meeting, that projects and programs would have to go through the state. The ARC continued to use the procedure as a barrier to fairness.

The BAC tried another tactic. It proposed that their application receive priority funding for next fiscal year since the ARC claimed it already had too many applications. The ARC responded that they did not consider the previous fiscal year as a factor in determining project approval even though they had just discouraged the BAC from applying because they were close to the end of the fiscal year. The ARC refused to consider Black Appalachian projects for funding by either stating that they were too late with their application, the ARC already had too many applications and not enough money, or that last year's applications would not be considered for the next fiscal year. The ARC's delay further frustrated the BAC, but they refused to be deterred. Johnson wrote that "further delay in the submission of a proposal would be an abdication of our responsibility to the Black children and families in Appalachia."[240]

The BAC intensified of their strategy by going higher up in the organization to try to gain more traction. With the communities they served in mind, Johnson wrote a letter to federal co-chairman Donald Whitehead on June 10. Johnson outlined the BAC's intention to apply for funding the next year, approximately $1 million, and it outlined

[239] Ibid.

[240] Letter from Carl Johnson to Donald Whitehead, June 10, 1971. ARC Box 164, Folder 1. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

what the proposal would entail including "planning, program development and technical assistance . . . Development of two models of early childhood development centers designed to meet the needs of Black children, one rural, one urban . . . and Consultant Service to ARC."[241] The last aspect was especially indicative of the role the BAC wished to play on behalf of Black people in the region. Johnson wrote, "BAC would agree to provide advisory services to ARC which would include: reviewing state plans and proposals, advising ARC about Black concerns, curriculum, etc., assisting in the development of projects relevant to Black needs."[242] This clearly shows the way the BAC attempted to shift the power balance. They were the experts on what Black Appalachians needed, not government officials. As an entity, the BAC would serve as advisors on ARC policy. In some ways, the BAC attempted to become its own jurisdiction in the region, a step towards a kind of Black nationhood.

Despite months of pressure and specific plan proposals from the BAC, the ARC refused to allocate funds to the BAC for child development. The BAC had to look elsewhere for funds with the help of the BWCDF. In 1971, the Ford Foundation gave a $150,000 grant to the BWCDF, "for technical assistance to day-care and early childhood programs."[243] The grant was awarded to support "the Black Child Development Education Institute's (BCDEI) program of technical assistance to black communities planning day-care services."[244] It identified a number of cities for the grant, including

[241] Ibid.

[242] Ibid.

[243] "Ford Grant Goes to NCNW To Aid Housing Program for Low-Income Tenants" *Oakland Post*, March 24, 1971.

[244] Ibid.

West Point, Mississippi, where the BAC was working. The Black Child Development Institute also received a grant from the Office of Child Development in July of that year.[245] The BAC may have received funds from these grants, but they never did receive funds through the ARC, an entity created to serve Appalachians. Black Appalachians had to work with national Black institutions and organizations outside of the region to secure funding.

After these tense exchanges, the BAC still decided to invite the ARC to make a presentation on its programs at the Black Appalachian Regional Conference that July. Johnson tried to get the federal co-chairman Donald Whitehead to attend, but Whitehead declined, sending other ARC staff instead. The Saturday night session featured a panel discussion entitled "The Plight of Black People in Appalachia" with a response from the ARC. The panelists were Alice Nixon from Pittsburgh, Harry Walker from Greenville, South Carolina, John Buffington from West Point, Mississippi, Paul McDaniels from Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Viola Cleveland. Johnson was the moderator and Sandra Gruschin, ARC program manager, gave a response. The next day, during the planning session, the BAC made a number of resolutions, including one about the focus of the ARC. It determined that the ARC's focus was solely on white Appalachians.

At the conference, Johnson reminded attendees that "the primary purpose of the [BAC] is to study federal programs designed to assist the urban and rural poor."[246] He went on to disclose that during the conference, the BAC "had come to two conclusions:

[245] Letter from Howard Bray to Carl Johnson, ARC Archives Box 164, Folder 1. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[246] Mary Cowles, "Conference Opens For Blacks Here" *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 10, 1971.

that federal programs are not delivering benefits to the poor commensurate with their costs and that the black poor do not receive their proportionate share."[247] Six days later, the *Greenville Piedmont* reported statements by W. F. Gibson, Theo W. Mitchell, and Andrew Chisholm, a delegation of BAC members from Greenville, South Carolina. After their interactions with the ARC at the conference, they deduced that the "Appalachian Regional Commission is not doing what it had been charged to do among black people."[248] They concluded that the ARC had "their only concern focused on the needs of the white community."[249] The same article noted the resolution made by the BAC "indicating the Appalachian Regional Commission for 'non-involvement of blacks in decision and policy-making positions in either local communities or in Washington.'"[250] The BAC was clear about its disappointment in the effectiveness of the ARC in alleviating poverty for Black Appalachians. It had been attempting to work with the ARC since December of the previous year to no avail.

At the same time, the future of the ARC itself was uncertain. The act that established the ARC was set to expire in 1971. President Nixon, midway through his first term, vetoed S.575, a bill that would have extended the act. The Senate sustained his veto on July 14, a few days after the Black Appalachian Regional Conference. While the BAC indicated their conclusions about the inefficacy of the ARC, they also publicly relayed their support for the continuation of the federal-state agency to the press. Johnson said,

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[247] Ibid.

[248] Sam. L. Zimmerman, "Blacks Say Appalachian Regional Commission Not Fulfilling Duty" *Greenville Piedmont*, July 16, 1971. Box 164, Folder 1. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection. University of Kentucky.

[249] Ibid.

[250] Ibid.

"[W]e have serious reservations about this program's past record in delivery of services to the black poor in Appalachia."[251] However, Johnson added, "We feel the program should be strengthened and improved, not killed."[252] While it was disappointed with its effectiveness, the BAC still believed in the program's usefulness to their cause. Calling the ARC out in the media was a strategy the BAC used to expedite the federal-state agency's inertia in responding to the BAC's proposed changes to public policy. The press coverage also captured the attention of the ARC. The agency invited the BAC back to Washington, D.C., for further meetings.

Demanding the Philadelphia Plan

Alongside demands for child development funding, the BAC's other 1972 directive to the ARC was enacting the Philadelphia Plan for equity in hiring on the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS).[253] The Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965, in addition to establishing the ARC, had also established the ADHS as one of the ARC's primary and most expensive projects. According to the act, the ADHS was created "to provide a highway system which, in conjunction with the Interstate System and other Federal-aid highways in the Appalachian region, will open up an area or areas with a developmental potential where commerce and communication

[251] "Blacks Ask Appalachia Continuance" *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 25, 1971.

[252] Ibid.

[253] For a detailed history and evolution of the Philadelphia Plan see David Hamilton Golland's C*onstructing Affirmative Action: The Struggle for Equal Employment Opportunity* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011) and Kevin L. Yuill *Richard Nixon and the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in the Era of Limits*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006

have been inhibited by lack of adequate access."[254] By 1971, half of the ARC budget, an amount totaling $840 million, had been used for the ADHS.[255]

When the BAC met with the ARC throughout 1971, in addition to 10.8% of child development funds, the BAC also demanded the establishment of the Philadelphia Plan, an affirmative action policy, on the ADHS. The creation of Assistant Secretary of Labor Arthur Fletcher, a Black Republican and approved by Nixon in 1969, the revised Philadelphia Plan would require proof of the percentage of minority workers before federal contracts would be awarded. Together with deepened enforcement, the revised Philadelphia Plan had a "$20 billion potential" nationally.[256] Fletcher said, "About 225,000 contractors provide $100 billion a year in goods and services . . . it would mean about $20 billion a year in black earning potential."[257] According to Fletcher, the institution of the plan ensured a way to further enforce parts of the previous plan and it enabled excluded workers to sue the government under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Institution of the Philadelphia Plan in Appalachia would require construction companies to demonstrate that they hired a proportional number of minority skilled tradespeople before they could be awarded government contracts. This would directly challenge job discrimination by ensuring that government contracts went to contractors with Black workers. Previous attempts at integration allowed contractors to say that they

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[254] Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965.

[255] Letter from Donald Whitehead to George Holland, April 4, 1972. ARC Box 164, Folder 2. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[256] Robert C. Maynard. "Fletcher Sees Position at U.N. as Stepping-Stone to Senate." *Washington Post*, Tuesday, Sept 7, 1971 in ARC Box 164, Folder 2. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[257] Ibid.

would try to hire Black workers, making their adherence to the policy and government enforcement voluntary. Instead of a voluntary adherence in Appalachia, the BAC tried to institute a plan that would require a percentage of Black skilled workers so that money flowing into the region to address poverty actually went to Black working-class people.

In January 1972, when Guillebeaux and Johnson met with Whitehead in Washington, D.C., they demanded establishment of the Philadelphia Plan in Appalachia. They wanted the ARC to ensure that a proportional share of jobs on the ADHS went to Black workers. Knowing that Black construction workers had been shut out of white unions in the region, unions who received the government contracts to work on the ADHS, mandating affirmative action was a way to disengage local racism. The ARC refused. Whitehead offered to help the BAC contact the Department of Labor and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, stating that they had an existing "local plan program based on the concepts of the Philadelphia Plan."[258] His offer to help was a sidestep from the BAC's request for implementation of the plan as it already stood.

In response to the ARC's refusal to institute the plan, Guillebeaux wrote to Whitehead. He wrote, "ARC and you, as an important decision maker in the organization, have failed to take the kinds of actions or make the kinds of responses to the problems of blacks as they relate to ARC so as to give even minimum satisfaction to this matter."[259] To rectify the ARC's inertia, Guillebeaux requested it send a summary of what it had done for Black people in the region within the week. The ARC did not respond within the

[258] Ibid.

[259] Letter from Jack Guillebeaux to Donald Whitehead, February 2, 1971. Box 164, Folder 2. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection. University of Kentucky.

week, but Whitehead did seek advice from ARC general counsel Robert McCloskey on how to respond. McCloskey advised Whitehead to ignore the BAC altogether. He wrote, "We do not recognize any particular duty owing to Guillebeaux or the BAC. They have no particular status, they are self-generated, self-chartered and represent only themselves."[260] McCloskey bluntly rejected the BAC's input and questioned their right to make any demands at all. In spite of McCloskey's counsel to ignore the BAC, Whitehead eventually wrote back to Guillebeaux in April critiquing the Philadelphia Plan's approach to job discrimination. He wrote, "More important than mechanical procedures and percentages and quotas, we feel, is our record of performance in providing the benefits of ARC program funds to serve the needs of Black Appalachians."[261] By noting affirmative action measures as "mechanical procedures" and "quotas," Whitehead posed the interventions pejoratively. His disdain reveals his and the ARC's rejection of the principles of fairness upon which BAC demands were built. He continued, "President Nixon, whom I represent on this Commission, has indicated his strong intent to emphasize civil rights compliance in all Federal programs."[262] Intention was not the same as action. Whitehead ended his letter with an admonition. On whether the ARC was influenced by the BAC to make changes within its organization, he wrote "I wish to advise you, however, that these actions have been taken in response to the initiative of President Nixon in the civil rights and equal employment areas and that they would have

[260] Letter draft, March 3, 1972. ARC Box 164, Folder 2. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[261] Letter from Donald Whitehead to Jack Guillebeaux, April 3, 1972. ARC Box 164, Folder 2. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

[262] Ibid.

been taken regardless of whether or not the Black Appalachian Committee (sic) had ever visited this Commission."[263] The ARC rejected the BAC's demands to mandate fairness related to spending and jobs. By doing so, they ultimately rejected the premise of equity behind the BAC's demands. The ARC also tried to reject the fact that a small grassroots organization had made an impact on the agency. Even so, the BAC's agitation is an example of Black activist success in pushing the Nixon Administration to do more in the field of civil rights.

Despite Whitehead's protestations, internal records reveal that an impact was indeed made. Whitehead sent a letter to labor secretary George Holland, director of the Department of Labor. He informed him about his recent conversations with the BAC, writing, "One of the concerns they have discussed with us is the possibility of developing a 'Philadelphia Plan' in regard to our highway construction program . . . We would appreciate your assistance in our efforts to assure appropriate levels of minority involvement in our highway program."[264] Whitehead's request for assistance did not amount to a mandate, but it does show the impact of the BAC.

Ultimately, an internal memo sent six days later confirms the reason Black workers were unable to access jobs, a reason the BAC knew and tried to address through the ARC by pushing for policy changes. When McCloskey inquired about working with the Department of Transportation on the possibility of instituting the plan, Sandy Gruschin answered, "The problem is that blacks can't get into the local labor market

[263] Ibid.

[264] Letter From Donald Whitehead to George Holland, April 4, 1972. ARC Box 164, Folder 2. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

because they can't get in the unions."[265] The ARC was aware of racist practices that locked Black Appalachian workers out of white unions. Their knowledge, however, did not change their stance on instituting the BAC's demand for changes that would have directly addressed job discrimination and lack of access to funds. This was the reason the BAC attempted to fight poverty by fighting institutional racism. They knew that the latter was a major cause of the former for Black people in the region.

Conclusion

When the BAC turned up the heat, the ARC changed. Though the grassroots organization critiqued the federal-state agency, it took a Black Power pluralist stance and continued to try to work with them. For a short period of time, the BAC forced the government to concentrate on the most vulnerable population, arguing that a focus on working-class Black Appalachians would address regional poverty head on. By centering the needs of Black Appalachians, institutional racism had to be confronted. However, while the ARC was willing to examine its staff and complete studies of the region, it refused two demands that would have directly addressed economic inequality through antiracism. Although ultimately limited by the unwillingness of federal agencies to recognize institutional racism within their structures, the BAC harnessed the opening of the War on Poverty to challenge racism. It altered the balance of political power in the region by shifting the conversation to who would benefit and who mattered. That their

[265] Memorandum from Robert McCloskey to Sandy Gruschin, April 10, 1972. ARC Box 164, Folder 2. Appalachian Regional Commission Archives, Bert T. Combs Appalachian Collection, University of Kentucky.

demands were not instituted shows the extent to which the ARC failed to serve all Appalachians.

The ARC's refusal to incorporate its demands did not stop the BAC from continuing to organize against poverty and racism. By 1972, the organization was publicly calling for regional solidarity amongst Black people across thirteen states as a way to build political power. It also continued to openly critique the ARC. At the same time that the BAC took on powerful political entities at the top, it also worked for Black Appalachian communities on the ground. The BAC's interaction and experience with the ARC created channels of communication and power that enabled it to assist in the recovery and success of a Black Appalachian community in Kentucky after an environmental disaster destroyed their homes.

CHAPTER 5: THE SANCTIFIED HILL DISASTER, 1972-1973

As the organization became more institutionalized, more independent, and more radical, the BAC's commitment to building power within Black Appalachian communities grew. In March of 1973, the organization took up its most concrete challenge yet: supporting and empowering survivors of the Sanctified Hill Disaster in Cumberland, Kentucky. In December 1972, a mudslide destroyed a community of homes in the neighborhood of Sanctified Hill. Though the federal Office of Equal Opportunity had promised aid, as of March the funds had not appeared, according to Ernestine Scott. Scott, a BAC intern and assistant to Jack Guillebeaux, was lobbying the federal government on behalf of Sanctified Hill residents. She sent a memorandum on United States Senate letterhead to Stanley Scott, special assistant to President Richard Nixon. "Mr. Scott, Please give this matter your fullest possible attention, she wrote"[266] She attached a December 28, 1972 news article entitled "Slide Victims Get Federal Aid."[267] While the article reported that the Office of Economic Opportunity had "set aside $10,000 for the 89 evacuees 'to draw upon for paying rent, food, clothing or whatever else they might need,'" at the top of the article in Ernestine Scott's handwriting was a note to Stanley Scott that read, "To date (3-8-73) OEO has not given these people a dime."[268] The BAC used its connections and influence in Washington, D.C. to press a

[266] Box 11, Folder Ex DI S/ST 17 Natural Disaster by State (Kentucky): White House Central Files: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

[267] Ibid. The name of newspaper is not included but article is dated December 28, 1972, and notes that the information is shared via *The Associated Press*.

[269] "Former Newsman is Top Black in the White House," *Jet*, January 25, 1973.

Black person in proximity to the highest position in government to intervene on behalf of Black Appalachians.

Contacting Stanley Scott, noted in *Jet* magazine as the "top Black in the White House," was an amplification of the BAC's efforts to bring attention to the disaster with the goal of securing federal disaster relief for the community.[269] That winter, Sanctified Hill residents who had been ordered to evacuate their homes moved from place to place seeking shelter among friends and family. The only relief the local and state governments provided was shelter in an unfinished housing project for which the evacuees were charged rent. Instead of going directly to the residents, the $10,000 the OEO allocated for disaster victims went to the white landlord of the housing project. Sanctified Hill residents were not included in that decision, and as Ernestine Scott wrote, they had not received any of the funds directly. To the residents, this was not disaster relief, and for those of the residents who were homeowners, being charged rent was further injustice. To resist, the Sanctified Hill residents used the BAC as a tool to take the urgency of their condition to Washington, D.C.

This chapter examines the evolution of the BAC from 1972 to 1974. Assisting the Sanctified Hill community was in line with the BAC's increased emphasis on power as the key to social change. In 1971, Guillebeaux wrote, "I feel that it should be clear to any veteran in the fight for social change that it is only through the exercising of power that meaningful change happens. It is the aims (sic) of the BAC to be about that business of developing that base of power of Black people in Appalachia, and here is where we deal

[269] "Former Newsman is Top Black in the White House," *Jet*, January 25, 1973.

with fundamentals."[270] Although he did not use the phrase "Black Power," Guillebeaux very clearly talked about building power for and among Black people. Mentoring the Sanctified Hill community in its fight for permanent housing the next year was a way to restore a measure of economic power to the community.

The BAC and the Sanctified Hill residents organized to agitate for government intervention in the form of disaster relief, but there was more to their request than the dispersal of federal funds. They advocated for community control of those funds. This was their way of ensuring the funds went to the replacement of their homes and relocation of their community. That they did so came out of their and the BAC's view that poor Black people had leaders among them who were the best people to control and determine how those resources would be used. Community control was the foundation of self-determination and both fomented power. The BAC's stance was that "Black Appalachians should and must be the determining group that sets forth what the problems of the community are and what steps should be taken by Blacks and resources [from] agencies to begin the process of developing and (sic) economically stable and viable Black Appalachia."[271] This is what Black Power would look like in Appalachia. The Sanctified Hill disaster was a test for the stated mission and philosophy of the BAC. In its

[270] April 12, 1972, Letter from Jack Guillebeaux to Amah Opong. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 25. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[271] 1970 Proposal. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 25. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

pursuit of Black Power, Sanctified Hill would become the BAC's greatest challenge and its greatest success.

The methods the BAC used in pursuit of Black Power were in line with the organization's adherence to Black Power pluralism, working within the system as opposed to against it. As such, the BAC's actions were a part of the larger spectrum of Black Power politics during the War on Poverty period. The BAC was among a number of organizations agitating for federal intervention at the time. In addition to federal funds, they sought control over how the funds would be spent. In her description of the diversity of Black Power politics employed during the era of expansive Black Power, historian Rhonda Y. Williams writes, "In the years when federal anti-poverty and community action programs met Black power, black grassroots activists not only sought access, but also control over the government resources entering their neighborhoods. Securing federal funds afforded them this potential opportunity."[272] This was true for the BAC. In Appalachia, Black grassroots activists were engaged in Black Power politics, what Williams defines as "a politics in which black people placed less faith in white goodwill and paid more attention to the structures of power. In doing so, they demanded the authority to control decisions, as well as resources, impacting black people's lives and circumstances."[273] In Cumberland, Kentucky, the difference between temporary housing and a permanent replacement of their homes was an issue of power. In the latter case, the community would retain their capital. In the former, they would become permanent

[272] Williams, *Concrete Demands*, 167.

[273] Ibid., 4.

renters, losing a base of economic power that enabled them to stay in Appalachia, make decisions about their living spaces, and remain a community.

Using Black Power politics, the BAC and Sanctified Hill community organized against environmental racism.[274] Environmental studies scholars Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright identify racial segregation and neglect by local governments as "slow-moving disasters."[275] Sanctified Hill, a predominantly Black neighborhood, was a vestige of a longer history of racially segregated landscapes in coal-mining communities. Inherent in their idea of these larger processes as slow-moving, is the idea that they are also ongoing. To better understand the connection between race, place, and disaster, this chapter examines Sanctified Hill as a Black ecology, what J.T. Roane and Justin Hosbey interpret as "foremost sites of ongoing injury, gratuitous harm, and premature death."[276] Roane and Hosbey write that their concept "provides a way of historicizing and analyzing the ongoing reality that Black communities in the US South and in the wider African Diaspora are most susceptible to the effects of climate change, including rising sea levels, subsidence, sinking land, as well as the ongoing effects of toxic stewardship."[277] This history takes into account the long history of coal mining in Kentucky to further explain what happened before, during, and after the disaster. The difference between the stated

[274] Connections between Black Power politics and environmentalism during the 1960s are highlighted by Quito J. Swan in his study of Pan-Africanist Black Power activist Pauulu Kamarakafego's life in *Pauulu's Diaspora: Black Internationalism and Environmental Justice.* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020).

[275] Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright, *The Wrong Complexion for Protection: How the Government Response to Disasters Endangers African American Communities* (New York: New York University Press, 2012),4.

[276] J.T. Roane and Justin Hosbey, "Mapping Black Ecologies" *Current Research in Digital History* (Vol. 2 2019) https://crdh.rrchnm.org/essays/v02-05-mapping-black-ecologies/ (Accessed February 21, 2022).

[277] Ibid.

cause of the slide by government officials versus the explanations given by residents who witnessed it speaks to the historical neglect of Black Appalachian epistemologies during environmental disasters and the historiographical neglect of Black Appalachian environmental histories. While the local and state government claimed that the disaster was natural, residents used their knowledge of the landscape and experience with neglect to cast a light on racial inequalities in Cumberland. Their story is an example of how Black Power politics included and necessitated movements for environmental justice.

Institutionalizing the BAC

The BAC was in a position to respond to the Sanctified Hill disaster because of its increased infrastructure and budget. The organization had also begun to support Black Appalachian activists seeking justice in their communities. Since 1970, "the members of the BAC have been identifying and sensitizing grassroots leaders as to the need for regional strategies and joint action by Blacks."[278] In Bremen, Georgia, the BAC provided "technical assistance in documenting violations by state and Appalachian Regional Commission," to the Haralson County Day Care Center. The BAC helped the community block the implementation of a predominately white staff in a predominately Black community. In 1972 alone, the BAC "received requests from communities in Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama and North Carolina seeking program information, models for

[278] 1972 Proposal. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 25. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

strategies, technical assistance and legal support . . .”[279] When the BAC received the call to help in Cumberland, they were used to being called on by Black people in the region. By the end of 1972, it finally had the infrastructure and financial support to help in a major way. Most of this was due to the organization’s move to Atlanta.

The BAC had moved to Atlanta, Georgia sometime in 1972. In grant application materials, it explained that Atlanta “was selected to facilitate travel, communications, and association with other national and southern-based Black leaders and organizations.”[280] Previously, Carl Johnson as board chairman, was the point of contact, placing the BAC headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina. When Guillebeaux was hired, the BAC used Guillebeaux’s home address in Smyrna, Georgia, as its contact address. At Guillebeaux's request, the board approved a temporary move to Atlanta to enable fundraising. When the BAC got sustained financial support, it planned to move back to Appalachia. “When the program is on firmer financial footing, the offices will be moved to a functional location in Appalachia.”[281] Until then, the BAC had to leave the region to find sustained funding to continue existing. With support from the Southern Regional Council, which offered the BAC space as an in-kind donation, the BAC moved to an office in downtown Atlanta at 52 Fairlie Street. Now it had a physical space dedicated solely to the BAC in the heart of a major city, a sign of the organization’s advancement in stature. The connections it maintained in that space enabled its quick response to the disaster in Cumberland.

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[279] Ibid.

[280] 1972 Proposal, IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 25. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[281] Ibid.

The BAC also had a formidable board representing most of the thirteen Appalachian states. It included Mary Brown of Abingdon, Virginia, Viola Cleveland of Middlesboro, Kentucky, Joseph Grant of Spartanburg, South Carolina, Wylda Dean Harbin of Harlan, Kentucky, Carl Johnson of Asheville, North Carolina, Barbara Jones of Star City, West Virginia, Jeff J. Long of Carrollton, Georgia, Wilber J. Miller of Roosevelt City, Alabama, Alice Nixon of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Don Pitts of Beckley, West Virginia, John Price, Jr. of Kingsport, Tennessee, Gwendolyn Shaw of Asheville, North Carolina, Jean E. Smith of Columbus, Ohio, and Helen M. Taylor of Starkville, Mississippi. To foster regional solidarity among Black Appalachians, the BAC began with its own board which included men, women, coal miners, postal workers, disabled people, attorneys, housewives, a mayor of a Black town, and veterans. The geographical reach of the board was crucial in identifying Black Appalachian communities and recommending community projects for the BAC to take on. Its collective power enabled communication across the region and was the foundation for the BAC's ability to pool resources when disaster struck.

Nineteen seventy-two was one of the most financially stable years of the BAC. It won a $10,000 grant from the Southern Education Foundation, a $16,000 grant from the John Hay Foundation, a $6200 grant from the Aaron Norman Foundation, and a $27,500 grant from the Irwin Sweeney Miller Foundation. Grant money enabled the BAC to hire staff, hold regional board meetings, complete field activities, and print its first outreach materials. A BAC pamphlet complete with a logo that showed an illustration of a Black man and women against a mountain backdrop, listed the BAC goal and its philosophy. "We believe that there is Black leadership in Appalachia. That with fundamental

resources, Black leaders can organize themselves, educate themselves, strategize and work together *at all* levels in the community for the development and control of our community."[282] As an antipoverty organization working for Black Power, the BAC emphasized Black leadership in the region and, with resources, the ability of that leadership to confront poverty on its own terms. Their emphasis that this happened on all levels signified its commitment to a class-conscious approach, one that empowered the poor.

The pamphlet listed facts about the region, including that "there are 1.3 million Black people in Appalachia," a figure from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund study.[283] It also included a map of the region, a list of board members, the BAC's new Atlanta address, and suggestions on what people could do, one of which was to "inform Black people of BAC and our goals."[284] The pamphlet also included a portion to tear off and mail back to the office with options for how the person sending it planned to help the organization, whether as a resource person "to identify community leaders and resource programs" in their area, a person in need of resources, or a person willing to tell people about the work of the BAC.[285] The BAC intentionally outlined different levels of participation that considered the difference in economic levels of the community it assisted.

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[282] BAC Pamphlet. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 26. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York. Emphasis in original.

[283] Ibid.

[284] Ibid.

[285] Ibid.

The BAC shared a building with the Southern Regional Council and the Youth Citizenship Fund (YCF). In 1972, with the grant from the John Hay Whitney Foundation, the BAC hired Clarence E. Wright as coordinator of research and communication. Wright, known as "Butch," worked as director of community organization for the Southern Regional Council before transitioning to work for the BAC. Wright previously taught mentally disabled children in Charlottesville, Virginia, attended graduate school at the University of Virginia, and had been deputy director of a community action agency. He was the BAC's second in command and the point person for the BAC's new internship program. According to Edward J. Cabbell, it was Wright who "brought the radical people" to the John Henry Folk Festival in West Virginia in the late 1970s and 1980s.[286] It is likely that Wright's radical ties began much earlier.

In Atlanta, the BAC connected with institutions of higher education to launch a paid internship program. Ernestine Scott was a student at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. As an intern, she worked as assistant to BAC executive director and helped to plan the press conference in Washington that would bring attention to the Sanctified Hill disaster. Anthony Bingham, one of the BAC's first interns, remembered running into John Lewis and Julian Bond in the hallways at 52 Fairlie Street. When Bingham was seventeen years old, he joined the YCF while attending the Downtown Learning Center, an experiential learning high school. There he worked as a photographer on the school's newspaper. By the time he was an undergraduate student on Antioch College's Baltimore campus, he had transitioned to working as an intern for the BAC in

[286] Edward J. Cabbell phone interview with the author, November 20, 2017.

the summers where his skill in photography was used to document the BAC's field activities.

BAC interns supplemented the organization's small staff, but they were also a part of the organization's youth initiative to mobilize Black Appalachian youth. In 1973, to familiarize new interns with Appalachia, the BAC developed a syllabus that included, among other books, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire and *Black Worker in the Deep South* by Hosea Hudson.[287] The inclusion of both titles indicates the BAC's approach to organizing and its political ideology. The BAC wanted its interns to learn about solidarity. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1968, Freire wrote that "Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture."[288] This was very similar to what the BAC stated as its goal to be a tool to assist communities, as opposed to an organization that would take over the problem on behalf of the people experiencing it. This was an important posture the BAC expected its interns to take, one that put them alongside communities on the ground. Freire wrote, "For us, however, the requirement is seen not in terms of explaining to, but rather dialoguing with the people about their actions."[289] This was the approach the BAC took as an organization made up of members of the grassroots themselves. The expectation was that the solution to the problems Black Appalachian communities faced

[287] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020). For how Amilcar Cabral influenced Freire see "How Amilcar Cabral Shaped Paulo Freire's Pedagogy" by Curry Malott, *New Frame*, August 26, 2021, https://www.newframe.com/how-amilcar-cabral-shaped-paulo-freires-pedagogy/ (Accessed February 21, 2022). Hosea Hudson, Black Worker in the Deep South: A Personal Record (New York: International Publishers, 1991).

[288] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

[289] Ibid., 49.

would come out of those communities and not from an outside source. The BAC was a tool towards that end, and not the arbiter. The BAC's perspective and position as a tool for empowerment was a part of the larger push during the War on Poverty for poor people to take control of their own institutions and identify their own priorities. As Black Appalachians from the working class themselves, they were working on solidarity but also, using the idea of a unified Black Appalachian community regionally, they were working to improve what they considered to be their own communities.

The inclusion of Hosea Hudson's *Black Worker in the Deep South* was even more radical. It instructed interns on the BAC's class-conscious stance to counteract the effect the BAC believed institutions had on students in advancing a middle-class ideology. Published in 1972, the book is an account of Hudson's life organizing against racial oppression in the South through his union activism and membership in the Communist Party. Birmingham was a hub of union activism among coal miners and steelworkers. By listing the book on its syllabus, the BAC tried to instill a worker's consciousness amongst interns as a way to build solidarity. Reading Hudson's book was a part of it. It was also the reason Guillebeaux remembered they took the approach they did in Cumberland,

> It was just that we were workers along with other workers. Because we were there. We were there at the grassroots. We were there in the coal mines. We were there. We were there. So naturally, I think we were there in all of these things, it's just that we were not as much able I suppose to direct as much attention, as many resources as we would like in the ways that we would like them addressed, because we were there supporting black lung. We were there supporting

> whatever, whatever. So again, the Black Appalachian Commission was to say, 'Okay, we need a way for us to direct resources to issues that we have concern about and mobilize from the council and anywhere else, resources to focus on the way we want to see it focused on in terms of the way we went to present this and priorities that we have and stuff like that.'[290]

When the BAC linked up in solidarity with Black communities, there was not a wide bridge between them and the communities they assisted. Still, the organization wanted to ensure interns who may or may not have been from those communities, and who were engaged in learning at institutions of higher education, took a certain approach to interacting with working-class Black Appalachians.

In 1972, the BAC had the infrastructure it needed to do its field activities, working with communities on the ground throughout the region to assist them in their goals. The organization saw itself as a tool. Organizing in Cumberland was a part of the BAC's goal to "become a tool that will measurably assist the Black Appalachian Community identify its problems, mobilize its resources, and deal more effectively with the institutional causes of the problems."[291] The BAC had been fighting institutional racism at the federal level. It also worked to challenge the everyday effects of institutional racism through mobilizing Black communities on the ground. As an

[290] Interview with Jack Guillebeaux by author, May 11, 2018.

[291] BAC Pamphlet. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 26. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

organization led and composed by working-class Black Appalachians, the BAC knew the ways in which racism functioned to stymie Black Power. In grant applications to the IFCO, the BAC declared that "In Appalachia, the forces of racism, discrimination and injustice unite and become the determining factor in all activity that effects the Black community."[292] The key to struggling against those forces was for the Black Appalachian community to unite. Guillebeaux saw unity as the path to building power. The BAC's efforts to organize in Cumberland were a part of its larger effort to unite Black people into collective action regionally. Doing so would build power.

Sanctified Hill

On Wednesday, December 14, 1972, one hundred and fifty people were ordered to evacuate their homes on Sanctified Hill in Cumberland, Harlan County, Kentucky. Four days prior, the topsoil beneath their homes had begun to slide downhill. As the soil moved, so did their homes. Walls buckled, foundations cracked, and widening fissures in the earth caused chimneys, the only source of heat for many residents on the hill during the cold winter months, to implode. By Friday, city officials estimated the slide was "continuing to move at that rate of about a foot a day."[293] The city and state declared Sanctified Hill a disaster area and estimated $1,500,000 in damages to public and private

[292] Ibid.

[293] "Landslide forces people from Cumberland homes," *The Courier-Journal*, December 15, 1972, 1. Very little has been written on Sanctified Hill with the exception of Edward J. Cabbell's, "Black Invisibility and Racism in Appalachia: An Informal Survey," *Appalachian Journal* Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn 1980), 48-54, reprinted in William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, eds. *Blacks in Appalachia*, Alessandro Portelli *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Gerald L. Smith, Karen Cotton McDaniel, and John H. Hardin, *The Kentucky African American Experience Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

property.[294] While some residents were able to return to their homes a week later, the homes of seventeen families were declared permanently uninhabitable. While the slide destroyed their homes, the response by federal officials threatened to destroy their status as homeowners. Instead of providing federal disaster relief directly to disaster victims, local and federal agencies attempted to use the opening of the disaster to turn Black Appalachians who had previously owned their homes into permanent renters. In protest, the community organized into the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee.[295]

About one hundred and fifty people lived on Sanctified Hill. They occupied homes that were "modest dwellings composed of wood, aluminum siding, brick, and stone veneer-siding and brick."[296] The community was predominantly Black, low income, retired, and elderly. Among the evacuees were William and Elnora Greene. William Greene was seventy-eight years old and had been a resident on the hill since 1933. Greene retired from the U.S. Coal and Coke Company, a company owned by United States Steel Corporation, in nearby Lynch in 1956. He and Elnora were evacuated before, "the bottom floor of the house crumbled and toppled down an embankment."[297] Also among the evacuees was Mattye Guy Knight, a graduate of Kentucky State, musician, and long-time teacher of English literature at Lynch High School. Her home and the Macedonia Baptist Church where she directed music were also condemned.

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[294] Box 11, Folder Ex DI S/ST 17 Natural Disaster by State (Kentucky): White House Central Files: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

[295] Ibid.

[296] Box 11, Folder Ex DI S/ST 17 Natural Disaster by State (Kentucky): White House Central Files: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

[297] "Homes Crack, Buckle Under the Stress of Landslide," *The Harlan Daily Enterprise*, December 17, 1972.

The Greenes, Knight, and most of the families who could not return, owned their homes on Sanctified Hill but neither the City of Cumberland nor the Commonwealth of Kentucky immediately offered disaster relief in the form of payment for their lost property. Due to the city's earlier refusals to install basic city services, including fire hydrants and sewers, Sanctified Hill residents had been refused housing insurance. Kentucky governor Wendell Ford petitioned the federal government to declare a national disaster in an attempt to secure federal funds, arguing that the state had done all it could, but the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) determined that the disaster did "not appear to be of such severity and magnitude to warrant a major disaster declaration."[298] It appeared that the disaster victims would receive no relief.

Residents of Sanctified Hill were further dismayed by what happened to funds that one federal agency did allocate. Soon after the slide began, the United States Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), and the Harlan County Community Action Agency made an arrangement with a local white contractor of an unfinished housing project. When the OEO granted $10,000 to go towards community relief, the money went to the Community Action Agency to cover rent in the housing project without input from the community. The money from the OEO did not reach the hands of the residents, though. It also did not begin to cover the cost of replacing their homes. The case of Sanctified Hill was an example of what happened when federal agencies did not put funds under Black community control. Neglecting to

[298] Box 11, Folder Ex DI S/ST 17 Natural Disaster by State (Kentucky): White House Central Files: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

consult Black residents, the most impacted by the disaster, in favor of white landlords and local government agencies was also environmental racism in action.

Sanctified Hill residents, "having become disgusted with the response to appeals of local state and federal officials," received word of possible help from the Black Appalachian Commission.[299] Wylda Dean Harbin, a BAC board member, lived in Harlan, about twenty miles from Cumberland. When she learned of the disaster, she contacted the rest of the board and BAC staff, telling them that they should get to Sanctified Hill to see the damage and help the community. When Guillebeaux arrived, he was struck by the devastation. "I went there and by the time I got hooked up it was dark. But when I got there the streets had buckled and it was really like . . . it was unbelievable. Houses had shifted around. The land had slid and these people were in dire shape."[300] After assessing the damage, Guillebeaux met with some of the residents. He remembered, "So, we met one night and there were about a dozen people there and they had asked, everybody had gone to this, local people, the churches, their representatives and so forth. And they had said nothing can be done. Everybody said, it's just a tragedy. What can you do? Just pick up and move on."[301] The community felt discouraged.

The community was also initially disappointed in the BAC's suggestion that the solution to their problems could be found from within their own community. A member of the Sanctified Hill community remembered, "When we received notice that some

[299] Commemorative program Greater Cumberland Corporation, "From Sanctified Hill to Pride Terrace: December 1972 to October 1979." In the author's possession.

[300] Jack Guillebeaux interview with author. May 11, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama.

[301] Ibid.

people from North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia wanted to talk to us, we were not in a very receptive mood. At the appointed hour, we became more skeptical as Wlyda Dean Harbin (BAC Board Member) presented another Board member, [C]arl Johnson and several youthful constituents of the BAC to us."[302] Johnson had traveled from North Carolina and Guillebeaux from Atlanta. The young people were likely BAC interns, one of whom was Anthony Bingham who took photographs of the destruction the slide left behind. Johnson began by telling the community about the role the BAC would play, a role that conveyed the organization's commitment to serving as a tool. The author remembered, "As we listened half-heartedly to [C]arl Johnson offer BAC's assistant in helping us get what we wanted, we were not enthusiastic, especially when he stated that BAC would not do our work for us but would help us help ourselves or do what we wanted to do."[303] The statement was radical to the community. "Many of us could not comprehend his statement. How could we help ourselves when we felt as if we had neither the time, the money nor the physical stamina?"[304]

It was the counsel from Guillebeaux that changed their minds. Guillebeaux remembered, "And my position to them, I remember I made a promise to them that night. We talked and we talked and I said, first of all, they had to decide if they were going to something in an organized way. Are you going to do something? And they said, 'yeah.' You need to do something about getting some kind of structure."[305] Just as the BAC had

[302] *IFCO News*. IFCO Organization Files, A-BL, Box 44, Folder 13. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.
[303] Ibid.

[304] Ibid.

[305] Jack Guillebeaux interview with author. May 11, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama.

organized itself into a structure, it counseled the Sanctified Hill residents on how to do the same. This, the BAC believed, would be the key to its success. Guillebeaux remembered telling them "I believe, I really believe that if we stay organized, I believe we can make something happen. I believe that. And so that was the foundation. They were to stay organized and then I would work with them in whatever way I could to make something happen. And that was the essence of it."[306] Convinced by Guillebeaux that they could make an impact, the residents organized into the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee and elected Mattye Guy Knight as chairwoman in December.

By January, the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee was developing strategies to combat the federal government's refusal to declare Sanctified Hill a national disaster area. In February the committee sent a position paper to members of Congress and President Nixon imploring them to declare a national disaster. When they received no response, their next strategy was to go to Washington. They asked the BAC to go to set it up. Guillebeaux remembered, "We all agreed I would go there on their behalf. And I went there, went to Washington, up and down the halls of whatever, checking them out. I talked with their senator and I've talked with their two congressman . . . And they going to tell me there ain't a goddamn thing they can do. I was pissed off!"[307] Guillebeaux, getting much the same response the residents had received locally, promised to bring the constituents back to Washington to raise the issue in person.

[306] Ibid.

[307] Ibid.

By March, the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee was in Washington D.C. holding a press conference organized by the BAC. On March 8, 1973, outside of the Russell Senate Office Building, Knight spoke on behalf of the committee,

> We are unfortunate in owning property in a (sic) area of town seeking to become an 'All Kentucky Town' although it is apparently unable to provide equal city services to all of its tax-paying people. We are unfortunate in being the victims of a landslide which is not large enough or tragic enough to make an impact on President Nixon so that he would declare the area one of disaster.[308]

Knight also critiqued Nixon's foreign policy in Nicaragua after the 1972 earthquake when the United States was engaged with imperialism in Latin America. "Perhaps he is too busy with international affairs, aiding the Managuans, and making a shaky peace to consider a few homeless blacks who[se] tax dollars have been used over a period of years to promote general welfare and the posterity of this nation. It is ironic that teams of geologists and seismologists from the United States rushed to Managua to study the feasibility of rebuilding Manguanites (sic) present site, but doesn't matter what 17 homeless families who are citizens of a country…."[309] Knight continued by challenging the housing arrangements made without the input of Sanctified Hill residents by bluntly

[308] Box 11, Folder Ex DI S/ST 17 Natural Disaster by State (Kentucky): White House Central Files: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

[309] Ibid.

asking, "Who made these temporary emergency arrangements?"[310] The Committee's statement also outlined demands from the committee including a study to determine the cause of the slide, legal assistance to assess their rights as homeowners, and what they determined to be their immediate need, "We WANT HOMES! PERMANENT HOMES!"[311] That the committee sought a formal study of the cause shows that they found the official explanation of heavy rains to be insufficient.

During Knight's time in Washington, D.C., the Community Action Agency of Harlan served her with an eviction notice claiming that Knight's income as a teacher disqualified her from disaster relief. She would have to leave the housing project. Knight responded disdainfully, "I didn't know you had to be poverty stricken to qualify for emergency relief."[312] Anna Lee Gibson, director of the agency that made the decision to evict Knight stated, "Somehow these people have been led to believe that someone owes them for their homes. They expect perpetual rent. Now, that's impossible."[313] Gibson was incorrect. The community did not expect government aid in the form of rent but in the form of permanent housing to replace the homes they owned.

Gibson's response and control over OEO funds was why Ernestine Scott escalated the BAC's efforts in assisting the Sanctified Hill residents by contacting Stanley Scott. In the memorandum she sent, Scott noted that Stanley Scott could contact her "in Washington through Congressman Marlow Cook's office," for which she gave the

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[310] Ibid.

[311] Ibid.

[312] Frank Ashley, "Slide victims are finding little help," *The Courier-Journal*, March 25, 1972, 1. Dave Kindred, "Slide victims mobilize congressmen in aid bid," *The Courier-Journal*, March 9, 1973, 1.

[313] Ibid., 2.

number, or the Atlanta offices of the BAC. As an intern working out of the Atlanta office and working with Kentucky politicians, Scott showed the degree of institutionalization of the BAC by this point. Her memorandum to Scott captured his attention. Four days later, on March 12, Stanley Scott sent a confidential memorandum to Howard Phillips, who was the acting director of the OEO. With "Sanctified Hill Community Disaster" as the subject line, Scott wrote,

> I am certain that you and your staff are familiar with the situation described in the attached material. I believe it would be most politic—in the full sense of the word if OEO were to make some sort of special effort to help the people at Sanctified Hill. Any such action would help counteract the erroneous impression held in some quarters that the Administration—and OEO, in particular—has turned its back on people in distress.[314]

Enclosed in the materials he sent to Phillips was the memorandum from Ernestine Scott, along with the materials she sent to the president's special assistant to push him to act. Included were letters to the president and congress from the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee imploring the federal government to provide disaster relief.

Later that month, a delegation from Washington, D.C., including members of the OEO and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), arrived in Cumberland,

[314] Box 11, Folder Ex DI S/ST 17 Natural Disaster by State (Kentucky): White House Central Files: Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

Kentucky by helicopter to survey the area, assess the damage, and meet with Sanctified Hill residents. Their visit, sparked by the pressure from the BAC on the government to act, resulted in the eventual commitment and allocation of funds from both agencies. Though their participation was likely only "politic," good public relations for the agencies and a way to curry favor and attract support for Nixon's republican government, the Sanctified Hill community, with the help of the BAC, took the aid and used it to replace their homes.

The first step to doing so was for the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee to incorporate. The BAC was in a position to instruct the committee on how to incorporate, having done so recently itself. With the help of the BAC, and the Appalachian Research and Defense Fund, it became the Greater Cumberland Corporation with Knight as the chair of the board of directors. The new corporation included city, state, and federal agencies

The money from government agencies did not come without attachments. Now that national attention was on the OEO and the ARC to help, the two institutions stepped in to transform what began as a grassroots movement for permanent housing into a government demonstration housing project. John Sweeney of the ARC developed what he called the Sweeney Plan. It was a relocation project proposal that would move the community from Sanctified Hill to a new location in Cumberland on stable land. Sanctified Hill residents still maintained control over the process because the plan had to be approved by the Advisory Committee, where Sanctified Hill residents outnumbered other members of the board of directors. It was a six-year battle, but the community's organizing efforts were ultimately successful. By 1974, Guillebeaux, reported the former

Sanctified Hill residents had "acquired 1.3 million dollars to build a new community complete with 80 homes and a community center."[315] By 1979, the Greater Cumberland Corporation reported that it secured grants totaling nearly $3,000,000. The community proudly named their new home Pride Terrace.

Mapping Memory and Community

The BAC's action for the victims of the Sanctified Hill disaster was the organization's key success and an example of how Black Power politics in Appalachia included struggling for environmental justice. While the Sanctified Hill community was ultimately successful in replacing their homes, the physical cause of the slide still constitutes an unanswered question. What was the physical ecology of the hill? What role did that ecology play in the slide? Collecting oral histories at annual reunions of Black Appalachian communities offers an important moment of building community counter-cartographies in temporary spaces. Oral history collections become spaces to map the disaster, reaffirm its significance, and continue to seek the cause of the destruction. Oral histories also serve as a roadmap for future community organizing in Appalachia.[316]

Cumberland is in Harlan County in eastern Kentucky. The city is a part of the tri-cities area which also includes Benham and Lynch, two cities with a deep history of mining since the coal boom of the early twentieth century. Sociologist Karida Brown

[315] Fayetta Allen, "Blacks in Appalachia" *The Black Scholar* Vol. 5, No. 9, (June 1974), pp. 42-51, 51.

[316] Roane and Hosbey, "Mapping Black Ecologies," 2019. Judith Madera, *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

describes how coal companies enforced spatial segregation in the mountains during their construction. Referring to Number One, a coal camp in Lynch, Brown writes, "In Number One, the higher up the mountain, the blacker the neighborhood."[317] This racialized landscape remained intact even after coal operators chose mechanization over its human labor force following World War II, a change that forced many Black people in Harlan County to leave the region in search of jobs in the urban North. Brown writes that, "As the population dwindled, the companies maneuvered to relinquish their responsibility for the model communities they had created."[318] One of the ways they did so was to sell company homes to mining families, some of whom had been living in the homes for generations. Brown notes, "In 1963, in a last-ditch effort to divest from their housing inventory, U.S. Steel put out a notice that they were offering all their employees the opportunity to partake in the American dream of homeownership."[319] Brown alludes to what the idea of owning property likely meant to Black miners. She writes, "This no doubt came as a surprise, given that the word ownership had never been associated with anything in those parts since the company town was established."[320] This is partly what made the issue of property and homeownership so important to residents on Sanctified Hill. The homes they purchased were hard won, and over the years, through investment and upkeep, they came to represent a kind of self-determination and control in the form of the ability to stay in Kentucky and not have to rent from white landlords. Brown

[317] Karida Brown, Gone Home: Race and Roots Through Appalachia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 55.

[318] Ibid., 173.

[319] Ibid.

[320] Ibid.

concludes that, “So many families jumped at the opportunity and did whatever they could to scrape up enough money to claim a stake in the bounty that the company was offering.”[321] Homeownership was crucial to their ability to remain in Harlan County.

As they remained, Jim Crow segregation sustained racialized boundaries across time. White Appalachians, through racial violence and control over city and county governments, prevented Black Appalachians from moving to other parts of the tri-cities area, thereby maintaining the landscape of racial segregation from the 1930s through the 1960s. The coal companies, in their effort to seize and hold captive a racialized workforce, had shaped the human landscape. Juan D. De Lara describes this process as the territorialization of race, the way “capitalism has been territorialized and enshrined as a racial project.”[322] By the 1960s and 1970s, segregation and the neglect of Black spaces by city and county officials rendered Black Appalachian communities constantly vulnerable. When the mudslide began in December 1972, it deepened those vulnerabilities as seventeen families were asked to evacuate the hill.

Almost fifty years after the slide, former residents are still trying to determine its cause. In a 2018 interview, Guillebeaux remembered the cause as coal waste. He said,

> But you couldn't build the community on a slag heap, because that was the problem in first place. It was built on a slag heap, which is coal that had been dug. And the refuse from the coal that was now whatever, they just piled it up. It's like

[321] Ibid.

[322] Ibid., 11.

> anything, just piled it up. And so, over time this was, it became a place where that you can put a house or whatever. And so that's where the Black folk ended up on this thing. And it had rained and rained and rained and rained, and that's when it slid.[323]

In September 2019, at the 50th reunion of the Eastern Kentucky Social Club in Detroit, Michigan, Ezell Gerard Smith remembered the morning of the slide, a memory that also calls attention to the physical ecology of the hill itself.

> Woke up one day and it had slidden off and dropped down... Almost like a San Francisco earthquake, what happened. Houses were just gone. It was kind of a smokey-like coming up from the ground as if it had been a mine up under it because about a mile from Sanctified Hill the mountain burnt for all my life. When I lived there for the whole 30 years it would just smolder. My grandfather said that was a mine under there that was still burning.[324]

Guillebeaux and Smith reveal that the slide might have been caused by decades of instability due to blasts from underground coal mining or surface coal mining within a

[323] Jack Guillebeaux interview with author. May 11, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama.

[324] Ezell Gerard Smith interview with author. August 31, 2019, Detroit, Michigan.

five-mile radius of eastern Cumberland. Their knowledge of the landscape coincides with what environmental historians chronicle was happening in eastern Kentucky at the time.

Surface coal mining and resistance to it was high in Harlan County. Historian Chad Montrie writes that "In Harlan, residents on Little Creek also began circulating petitions to Governor Breathitt explaining that stripping on steep slopes endangered private property and public safety and asking him to revoke the permits of strip operators and to refuse to issue new permits."[325] He continues, noting that "Some families in those areas had already been forced from their homes as a result of stripping and, with more mud, rocks, logs, and stumps accumulating on hillsides and in streams, the local residents also wanted an end to strip mining."[326] This coincides with what was happening in Cumberland which was also in Harlan County.

Harlan County was a commodified environment. Historian Drew Swanson writes that "Denuded hillsides and enormous piles of mining spoils also created new drainage challenges in parts of the mountains, as the mined landscapes could no longer absorb as much rainfall. The result was devastating localized flooding . . ."[327] Sanctified Hill's proximity to coal mining, both underground and surface coal mining, exacerbated the already precarious placement of Black communities on steep hillsides.

Guillebeaux and Smith ultimately offer what historian J.T. Roane and anthropologist Justin Hosbey cite from Judith Madera's work as a counter-cartography,

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[325] Chad Montrie, *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 85.

[326] Ibid., 86.

[327] Drew A. Swanson, 185.

"key ways that Black people have defined spaces for themselves and de-stabilized dominant and exclusionary representations."[328] The Sanctified Hill disaster exposed racial inequalities embedded in Appalachian landscapes. By restricting working-class Black people to live on steep hillsides without city services, Black people were placed in an ongoing state of precarity. Roane and Hosbey's Black ecology concept also calls for the cartographic knowledge of everyday people as its own epistemology.[329] When Guillebeaux and Smith posit that the Sanctified Hill Disaster was caused by more than heavy rains, they reveal a deeper story about the effects of coal mining on a landscape and the racial and class dynamics the resource extraction built and upheld and left in its aftermath. They offer a Black Appalachian epistemology of land rooted in a specific place.[330] The telling and retelling of the Sanctified Hill disaster challenges dominant narratives of Appalachia as an entirely white region. It also opens the door to Black interpretations of the region.

Smith also remembered housing on hillsides as a common reality for black people in mountainous communities. When asked about whether the slide affected white residents, Smith responded, "No. No. Their land basically is on the flat," a memory that echoes what Brown observed about coal-mining landscapes.[331] During a period of

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[328] Roane and Hosbey, "Mapping Black Ecologies." Madera, *Black Atlas*, 2015.

[329] Roane and Hosbey further developed a concept introduced by Nathan Hare in "Black Ecology," *The Black Scholar* Vol. 1, No. 6 (April 1970), 2-8.

[330] Tim Cresswell writes, "But place is also a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world. When we look at the world as a world of places, we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience…. This book is as much about place as a way of knowing as it is about place as a thing in the world. It is as much about epistemology (way of knowing) as it is about ontology (way of being)," *Place: An Introduction*. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 18. Here, I suggest a Black Appalachian way of knowing.

[331] Ezell Gerard Smith interview with Jillean McCommons. August 31, 2019, Detroit, Michigan.

disaster that rendered a Black community homeless while white families in flat areas with city services remained secure, the dynamics of race and class segregation and inequity were apparent.

The Sanctified Hill disaster exposed the vulnerability of Black people to climate events. Due to ongoing neglect by city officials and placement on hillsides in zones of deep resource extraction, rains impacted Black communities differently than white communities on stable ground. Their positioning, the knowledge they gain through resistance to it, and their vision for alternatives offer an entry point into thinking about the meanings of Black space in the Mountain South. Looking at Black Appalachian communities adds mountains and hillsides as important spaces for consideration in discussions of Black geographies.[332] Appalachia also adds hillsides to Roane and Hosbey's discussion of Black ecologies as "As a naming of the outside and the bottom."[333]

Conclusion

In 1973, Lucius Walker, executive director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), took the temperature of the state of community organizing. In the May-June issue of *IFCO News* he declared that "community organization practice has shifted from the streets to the process of analysis and planning

[332] McKittrick and Woods, eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*.

[333] Roane and Hosbey, "Mapping Black Ecologies," Current Research in Digital History, Vol. 2 (2019). https://crdh.rrchnm.org/essays/v02-05-mapping-black-ecologies/ [Accessed March 3, 2022].

for a new society."[334] Walker went on to say that the IFCO and the organizations it supported were going beyond integrating into current institutions to building a new system altogether. He said, "This new action for liberation is more than 'getting a piece of the pie' or 'carving out a comfortable niche in the system.' The pie is rotten and the system is evil. Independent alternative institutions are our promise for a new system and a new pie."[335] To commemorate this new action, the organization announced grants it had awarded since January of that year. Among them was a $4,332 grant to an independent institution—the Black Appalachian Commission (BAC). The newsletter described the BAC as "an organization of Black people in 397 Appalachian counties which researches and develops the framework for change in the systems which oppress the people of Appalachia."[336] Organizing against oppression was the IFCO's goal, and the BAC was a part of that mission.

The IFCO had a national and international perspective and reach. The BAC's award was among grants to organizations including the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, Malcolm X Liberation University in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the All Africa News Service office in Washington, D.C. Between a call for donations in support of the American Indian Movement during its occupation of Wounded Knee in South Dakota and a tribute to Amilcar Cabral, the pan-Africanist who was assassinated earlier that year during anti-colonial struggles against

[334] *IFCO News*. IFCO Organization Files, A-BL, Box 44, Folder 13. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[335] Ibid.

[336] Ibid.

the Portuguese, was a feature article entitled, "Organizing in Appalachia—The Black Appalachian Commission."[337] An editor's note revealed that the anonymous article was written "by one of the victims of a mountain slide in Appalachia," and that the account "traces the birth of a new community organization."[338] The editor introduced the community's story as proof that "The values of organization are just beginning to be apparent in Cumberland, Kentucky."[339]

When the victims of the slide, referred to in Louisville's *Courier-Journal* as a "ragged community of mountain Negroes," refused to accept permanent shelter in an unfinished housing project as their only relief, they organized into the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee and traveled to Washington D.C. to hold a press conference demanding federal intervention to replace their community.[340] The author of the *IFCO News* article identified the BAC, specifically their interaction with the BAC's director, as the catalyst for the community's pivotal decision to organize,

> Our first meeting with Jack Guillebeaux changed our perspective of the entire situation. This was the true beginning of the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee. We re-evaluated ourselves and our situation, mobilized our meager resources, and began working toward a solution to our problem. Through our re-evaluation we

[337] Ibid.

[338] Ibid.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Frank Ashley, "Slide victims are finding little help," *The Courier-Journal*, March 25, 1972, 1. Dave Kindred, "Slide victims mobilize congressmen in aid bid," *The Courier-Journal*, March 9, 1973, 1.

had to face the fact that we did not have much to work with, but much to work for.[341]

The author made clear that the BAC was the driver of organizing in Cumberland. The organization now had national notoriety in organizing circles thanks to the feature in *IFCO News*. The Sanctified Hill story was shared as an example of the success of community organizing.

By 1973, the BAC had power in the form of a paid staff, a formidable board with representatives from each Appalachian state, a physical office space in downtown Atlanta, and funding from larger organizations to support field activities. It also had alliances with organizations in New York and Washington, D.C including the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, a connection that led to legal aid for the disaster victims. The BAC's regular trips to and powerful connections in Washington would be the decisive factor in helping the Sanctified Hill community organize a press conference to publicize its cause. Ultimately, it was the BAC's involvement that led to the community's success in securing disaster relief. As it became more institutionalized, the BAC had the foundation it needed to serve as a tool for building power. The press conference captured the attention of nine federal agencies. Ernestine Scott's message to Stanley Scott resulted in a visit to Cumberland by representatives of the OEO and the Appalachian Regional Commission. That visit led to the formation of a demonstration housing project for which

[341] *IFCO News*. IFCO Organization Files, A-BL, Box 44, Folder 13. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

the Sanctified Hill community maintained control. Six years later, the community broke ground on a new community it called Pride Terrace.

Guillebeaux reflected on the BAC's role in regional organizing. "We had to make potential leaders realize that they could acquire collective power, they had the potential to create relevant programs for blacks and, in fact, make the federal government more responsive to their needs. Appalachian blacks have to first decide what they want, and BAC will support their efforts."[342] He remembered that the "BAC worked with the group. We motivated them and made them realize that their situation was not hopeless."[343] This was the role the BAC played in helping the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee secure the replacement and relocation of their community.

The history of the BAC's assistance to the victims of the mudslide on Sanctified Hill captures the BAC at its height. As they built power, they assisted black communities, pushing the power outward. However, the road to fostering the creation of Black Appalachian organizations was not a perfect one. From 1974 to 1975, internal conflicts eventually led to the disbandment of the BAC.

[342] Ibid.

[343] Ibid.

CHAPTER 6: SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION: THE LAST TWO YEARS OF THE BAC, 1973-1975

The winter of 1973-1974 was simultaneously the pinnacle of the BAC's fundraising power and the beginning of its demise. On December 19, 1973, the *Atlanta Daily World* reported "Atlanta-Based Group Receives $250,000 Grant to Assist Minority App[a]lachian Development."[344] The group was the BAC, and the grant of a quarter million dollars was awarded in November by the Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Foundation, a family philanthropic foundation based in Columbus, Indiana. The article described the BAC as a "human rights nonprofit organization," featured a photograph of Jack Guillebeaux in its center, and reported that the BAC planned "to use the $250,000 grant to provide extensive technical assistance to Black Appalachian communities in the areas of education, economic development and the strengthening of community leadership."[345] Guillebeaux explained the organization's emphasis on Black leadership. "I believe that if solutions are to be found, Black leaders in Appalachia must be in the forefront and their efforts must be characterized by unity of purpose, well-planned strategies, and an increasing commitment to struggle against poverty, racism and oppression."[346] The BAC's focus on Black leadership was an intentional oppositional stance against white Appalachian leaders who controlled the levers of power in Appalachia.

This was the BAC's largest grant award and a concrete sign of its success. An article in the oldest Black daily newspaper in the country was also evidence of the

[344] "Atlanta-Based Group Receives $250,000 Grant to Assist Minority App[a]lachian Development," *Atlanta Daily World*, December. 18, 1973.

[345] Ibid.

[346] Ibid.

organization's success in publicizing its cause nationally. In 1973, the BAC appeared to have the unity of purpose Guillebeaux noted, and the money to implement strategies. However, just three months later, on March 4, 1974, the *Asheville Citizen-Times* reported that something had gone very wrong inside the organization. The "Black Appalachian Commission" read the article, "filed suit in Buncombe Superior Court Monday asking that Carl A. Johnson, former director, and Jack Guillebeaux, present acting director, be required to turn over to the corporation all books, accounts, and records, with an accounting of all funds."[347] BAC leadership and the organization's finances were in question, specifically the location of funds and control over those funds. The article revealed the side of the board members who filed suit who alleged that "Johnson has funds of the corporation in a bank account in his own name, which he refuses to transfer to the board. They also allege Guillebeaux has refused to continue the operation and has returned funds to donors without the approval of the elected board."[348] Members of the BAC board of directors accused Johnson of theft and Guillebeaux of board obstruction. Even though the BAC began 1974 with the dissemination of the good news of its award of the largest grant it had ever received, bad news had followed close behind. The financial dispute foreshadowed the eventual implosion of the organization due to internal conflicts within the board and BAC leadership over money and power.

Contests over money and power were at the center of internal conflicts among BAC board members in 1973 and 1974. The same things the BAC was fighting to obtain regionally precipitated the organization's collapse from the inside out. Tensions came to

[347] "Corporation Files Suit, Names Directors," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 5, 1974.

[348] Ibid.

a head in December 1973 when the committee granted Johnson a $4000 annual gift, then again sometime in January 1974 when members of the board tried to convince Guillebeaux to accompany them to the bank to change the names on BAC bank accounts. Guillebeaux refused, and that March a group of BAC board members filed suit. By April 1975, Guillebeaux had left the BAC for another job in Alabama, and by August the organization had folded. An article in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* dated August 19, 1975, covering Johnson's run for city council referred to the BAC as "now defunct."[349] The BAC grant that was supposed to be a boon for the young organization turned out to be the beginning of the organization's end.

The end of the organization seemingly came out of nowhere, but the structure the BAC initially chose as the way to obtain Black Power hampered the organization from the moment of incorporation and was at the root of its demise. The main liability was the organization's independence and lack of steady funding. In addition to internal conflicts, as a non-profit organization not under the umbrella of a larger organization or federal agency, the BAC remained dependent on outside funding. When the BAC had formally separated from the CSM in 1971, BAC leaders hoped to foster more autonomy and self-definition separate from the white influence of CSM leadership. The BAC's roots in the Black campus movement at Berea College had grounded it in the era of Black Power organizing and protest, but Johnson, frustrated with the lack of financial support from the CSM, thought forming an independent corporation was the way forward. The choice to form a non-profit, however, meant that the BAC still had to constantly search for funds,

[349] "Johnson to Seek City Council Seat," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 19, 1975.

constantly justify its existence to larger established institutions, and that it spent most of its staff time constructing visions of what it would do before it had the resources to do it. This pressure affected the institution as it tried to hurriedly make decisions in order to obtain funds to continue to exist as it tried to execute its programs across a large region. When internal conflict arose, as it did in all grassroots organizations, there was no broader membership or a strong time-tested infrastructure to shepherd the young organization through the storm. The non-profit model it chose was not a sustainable model for securing Black Power. The BAC might have been more successful as a branch of a larger national Black organization or a cooperative unit.

Even though it disbanded after only five years, the BAC developed an expansive vision and was able to put much of it into action. The BAC spent its last two years developing and implementing what it called an Appalachian Black agenda which included plans to increase communication among Black people in the region. It succeeded through its publication of *Black Appalachian Viewpoints*. Proposals written by the BAC also reveal that, led by women on its board, the BAC developed a vision for Black women. It put forth a program for the development of programs that addressed what it termed the "double minority" position of Black women. Its use of "double minority" denotes the BAC's solidarity with and participation in Black feminist movements of the 1970s. In 1973, the BAC set forth and put into action a vision that put it amongst some of the most forward-thinking social movements in the 1970s. However, after the organization's biggest award, one that should have enabled it to put even more of its vision into action, its efforts were cut short by internal conflicts and the pressures of building a nonprofit institution dependent on outside funding.

This chapter examines the concurrent success and failure of the BAC's last two years. It begins with its alliance with the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization and how that alliance culminated in the BAC's publication *Black Appalachian Viewpoints*. It then moves to a discussion of the BAC's 1973-1974 program plans for Black women as evidence of the organization's connection to Black feminist movements. Then the chapter discusses the $250,000 award and its aftermath, when internal contests over money and power and pressure to survive as a nonprofit institution ultimately caused the organization's collapse. The BAC disbanded sometime in late 1974 and early 1975.

The simultaneity of innovation and fragility in the BAC was surely not an isolated problem. For other Black Power organizations, government repression, deep ideological differences, the shift from a focus on electoral politics, and the lure of Richard Nixon's emphasis on Black entrepreneurship helped to dismantle other grassroots efforts.[350] The constant stress of secure funding was mounted on top of a host of contingencies as organizations worked within a context of racism and poverty fighting from the inside out.

An Appalachian Black Agenda

In May 1973, the BAC entered into a legal agreement with the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) to create what it called an Appalachian Black agenda. As a New York City- based international organization that supported

[350] For a case of a split due to ideological differences, see Komozi Woodard on the Committee for a Unified Newark in *A Nation with a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

grassroots movements, the IFCO agreed to be a grant funder to the BAC. The agreement certified that the IFCO, as "a membership corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of New York for the purpose, among others, of developing community organization among the poor," and the BAC, as "a community organization engaged in community organizing activities within a 340-county area from southern New York to Mississippi," the organizations would work together with the IFCO as granter and the BAC as grantee.[351] The $4,332 grant that the IFCO announced in its newsletter was part of the agreement.

Founded in 1967, the IFCO was created by a diverse group of religious leaders as an ecumenical incubator for grassroots activism to fight poverty and injustice worldwide. Religious organizations could send funds to politically-engaged groups through the IFCO as a means of supporting social movements. With IFCO as a conduit for funds, religious organizations that wanted to privately support civil rights and Black Power groups could do so while maintaining anonymity. Historian Robert Bauman discusses the case of the IFCO's support for the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party.[352] To avoid controversy, Bauman writes that "Major religious organizations gave money to IFCO, and IFCO then distributed the money to community-action-oriented antipoverty agencies . . . By giving money through IFCO, the organizations could be a step removed from funding proposals they did not want to publicly support."[353] Bauman argues that the

[351] IFCO Organization Files, A-BL, Box 44, Folder 12. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[352] Robert Bauman, *Fighting to Preserve a Nation's Soul: America's Ecumenical War on Poverty* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 71.

[353] Ibid.

"IFCO represented perfectly the coalescence of the War on Poverty, the black power movement, and religious organizations into an ecumenical antipoverty coalition."[354] As such, IFCO was arguably the perfect ally for the anti-poverty work the BAC was already engaged in. Funding and training from the organization enabled the BAC to continue to grow its footprint in Appalachia.

The formal legal agreement in May 1973 between the IFCO and the BAC came with conditions. It specified that the "Grantee will apply the funds granted by IFCO hereunder exclusively for the following purposes: To assist the poor Blacks of the Appalachian area; to change the inhuman conditions under which they live."[355] The BAC agreed to do so by "1) developing a comprehensive Appalachian Black agenda with the two-fold purpose of a) usage as a guide for priority setting and resource allocation of federal and non-federal programs and to b) mobilize and focus the resources of the Black community on issues so as to produce the maximum effect on regional problems."[356] The BAC also agreed to create "a system of communications between Black people in the region, and informing Black people as to the issues that [a]ffect the total community, resources that are available, and steps to involvement in federal and non-federal programs."[357] The agreement was signed by Guillebeaux and Lucius Walker, a Black minister and director of IFCO. After it was official, the BAC spent that summer working

[354] Ibid.

[355] IFCO Organization Files, A-BL, Box 44, Folder 12. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[356] Ibid.

[357] Ibid.

to develop the Appalachian Black agenda and create a means of regional communication. It produced the latter in August 1973.

As part of the proposed activities of the IFCO grant, the BAC published two issues of *Black Appalachian Viewpoints*, which it introduced to readers as a "'temporary' publication of the Black Appalachian Commission, Inc."[358] The BAC stressed that "the purpose of *Black Appalachian Viewpoints* is *not* to share information about specific events occurring in a given community, for this is a need that must be addressed by Black oriented regional newspaper, but to attempt to outline some patterns, some issues and overall viewpoints of the region, from a Black perspective."[359] It also emphasized that the publication was to be driven by input from its readership. It states, "It's future depends on your reactions and comments. Let us know how *you* feel, we need and want your input, the region *and the nation* needs your direction and insight."[360] *Black Appalachian Viewpoints* offers a glimpse into the political ideology of the BAC at this point. Formerly, the BAC focused solely on finding leaders in the region. Now it was working to hear from everyday people. Anyone could write in to share their views. The BAC highlighted how much ideas held by everyday Black Appalachians, perspectives that had not been published and circulated before the creation of the BAC, were vital for the region as a means for Black communities to learn about each other and collaborate. The publication also stressed how important it was that the nation understand their lived experiences and

[358] IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 25. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[359] Ibid.

[360] Ibid.

ideas. The BAC used the publication to convince readers that their needs and ideas were important, and to encourage readers to speak out and to use the space as a way to do so locally and nationally.

The first issue of *Black Appalachian Viewpoints* was published on August 6, 1973. It had a cover sheet introducing the publication, then an article that spanned three pages written by Clarence "Butch" Wright, the head of research and communications, and second in command of the BAC. "Black Appalachian Invisibility–Myth or Reality?" was an assessment of Black Appalachians' lack of power and a call to action.[361] Wright began by directly stating the presence of Black Appalachians as a reality, noting that they made up 1.3 million of the population. In spite of its numbers, he wrote, "In most instances, Blacks in Appalachia are powerless, beyond local efforts and endeavors in Appalachia. Yet Appalachia possesses boundless resources and economic development potentials. We must and should as citizens and residents of Appalachia have a say in the development of this region. To do otherwise or to ignore this responsibility would be senseless."[362] Part of the work of the publication was not just to inform but to move Black Appalachians to political action. He noted that Appalachia had received "Billions of dollars in relief and regional development funds," but that "Blacks in Appalachia, however, have not participated in the local, regional, or national decision-making and

[361] Wright's focus on invisibility may have been influenced by Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *The Invisible Man* (Bronx: Ishi Press International, 2015). Wright's article in *Black Appalachian Viewpoints* predates an article written by Edward J. Cabbell that is often cited as the source of the idea of Black Appalachian invisibility. Edward J. Cabbell, "Black Invisibility and Racism in Appalachia: An Informal Survey Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn 1980), 48-54. Reprinted in William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, eds. Blacks in Appalachia (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985).

[362] IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 25. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

policy-making around these resources!" Wright wrote that, "To us, arguments regarding the cultural, historical boundaries of Appalachia are 'unreal', 'reactive; and in opposition to the struggles of poor and oppressed people in Appalachia . . ."[363] He ended the section by declaring that "Appalachia *is* a *pluralistic* society, possessing more than one race, and it *must* be recognized as such." Wright was conveying the BAC's stance on the role it thought Black people should play in regional planning and development. That role was to be in the forefront.

Wright continued by arguing that Black involvement had been hampered by invisibility by "'so-called' Appalachian experts."[364] He did not specify exactly who, but it is likely he was not just talking about people from outside of the region, but people within it who had written about the region for generations without acknowledging the presence of Black people. As a result, Wright argues that "the Civil Rights Movement, with a very few exceptions, never got to Central Appalachia. During the Sixties, the public relations focus upon poverty portrayed the Deep South as an all-Black poverty area and Central Appalachia as an all-White poverty area. This was not and is not the case in either area."[365] Wright's analysis did not just take on the race in terms of the number of Black people, but also the way the myth contributed to ideas of Appalachia as non-racist. He continued, "This situation has tended to heighten that myth and subsequent plight of Blacks in Central Appalachia. Similarly, with the 'bow-like' portrayal of

[363] Ibid.

[364] Ibid.

[365] Ibid.

Black/White poverty, came the myth of Central Appalachia as non-racist."[366] Wright raised a point missing from so many twenty-first century efforts to dispense with the myth of Appalachian as an all-white region. The studies stop short of discussing internal racial dynamics, specifically, racism in the second half of the twentieth century. The absence of discussions on racial difference overshadowed any discussion on racial terror, inequality, Black activism, and the need to incorporate Black perspectives on regional planning. Wright used the new publication as a platform to dispel the myths and ignite a movement, and his position is still relevant today. He began by inviting readers to write back and share their thoughts, stating, "This is just *one* viewpoint of Black Appalachia. Please give us your reactions, insights, comments on this and/or any other issues relevant to the Black Appalachian experience."[367] The BAC created a forum for discussion on Black Appalachian issues.

The BAC believed that everyday Black Appalachians had important ideas that were diverse and important for the development of a Black regional vision. Focusing more on collaboration, it worked to foster a kind of collectivity in addressing social problems. This was a way of going beyond the board and staff to being open to people outside of the organization to offer possible solutions and tactics for the overall cause. In the rest of the article, Wright described the subregions and the conditions of Black people in each area. He ended by declaring that "Black Appalachian are invisible from a regional focus, we *are not* invisible in our local efforts."[368] Just as it had done with the

[366] Ibid.

[367] Ibid.

[368] Ibid.

Appalachian Regional Commission, the focus of the BAC was to make Black Appalachians central to discussions on poverty, regionalism, and power. To do so, it had to make an overlooked population visible. It went to its own communities for strategies on how to do so. Guillebeaux remembered that their goal was to be collaborative. He said, "It was cooperative. It was collaborative. The spirit of that was cooperative and collaborative. With anything, it was not perfect, but it was damn good. It was good."[369]

The second issue of *Black Appalachian Viewpoints* was printed on August 22. It also included an article written by Wright entitled "The Black Appalachian Movement: People, Power, Change."[370] Wright continued his discussion of invisibility, characterizing it as a kind of separation. He wrote, "Black Appalachian invisibility is isolation. But not physical isolation, for the roads are here, the telephones are here, the media, radio and televisions are here. The basic resources are here." What Wright emphasized was that Black communities in Appalachia had been segregated from each other and that this had limited their ability to build power. He wrote, "We are isolated from each other. Isolated from our common experiences, sufferings, victories, skills and talents."[371] Here, Wright referred to the geographic separation of Black Appalachian communities and the isolation caused by a lack of racial unity. Wright wrote that the solution to this separation was communication, a step towards what he ultimately hoped would result, which was for Black communities to join forces.

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[369] Jack Guillebeaux interview with author. May 11, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama.

[370] *Black Appalachian Viewpoints*, Vol 1, No. 2. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 25. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[371] Ibid.

Wright used examples from the Civil Rights Movement to discuss three themes: people, power, and change. In this section on people, he wrote that although "charismatic leaders like Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King" had "different philosophical orientations, they were united against the common enemies of racism, poverty, and injustice."[372] In the "power" section, Wright about how the "murder and/or departure of the more 'charismatic leaders' did not result in the end of the movement. Instead, Wright wrote that "Black people began to consolidate their 'newfound' confidence, experience and local followings into local bases of power."[373] Here, Wright uses the publication as an education tool to spark action and involvement, both of which would build power. In the change section, Wright acknowledged that there had been some gains in some areas, but that Appalachia needed much more change. He wrote, "The barriers to equal justice and opportunity in America have been cracked but not conquered. The gains of the sixties have been consolidated (power bases), for Black people in the Black Belt portions of the South, and many of the larger urban areas. This is not the case for Blacks in the more remote parts of the nation: this is not the case for Black Appalachians."[374] Wright stressed again that readers should write in and share their thoughts. It is unclear if and how many did and what their thoughts were. Still, through *Black Appalachian Viewpoints,* the BAC had begun to fulfill a critical piece of its agreement with the IFCO to develop a tool for communication, and a critical piece of its own mission to unite Black Appalachians into a shared struggle. Although Wright argued

[372] Ibid.

[373] Ibid.

[374] Ibid.

that the Civil Rights Movement has mostly missed Appalachia, his writing and the actions of the BAC show that they were a critical part of the Black Freedom Struggle in Appalachia.

A Program for Black Women

As the BAC fulfilled its mandate on communication, it also worked toward constructing an Appalachian Black Agenda that placed increased emphasis on Appalachian Black women's leadership and concerns. Black women had shepherded the BAC from the initial inspiration for the organization, to its development into a community-activist run institution. Ideologically, financially, and administratively, Black women's efforts had been critical for the BAC's viability. Their significance was reinforced when the BAC incorporated and elected more women than men to the board of directors. In 1973, Black women were still engaged, but the program materials took on a different shape. Now there were specific plans for developing Black women's programs on the causes that most affected their lives. There was an emphasis on Black women that had not been there before.

There were eight women, including Mary Brown, Viola Cleveland, Wylda Dean Harbin, Barbara Jones, Alice Nixon, Gwendolyn Shaw, Jean Smith, and Helen M. Taylor. Cleveland, a board member and coal miner from Middlesboro, Kentucky, had attended the 1972 Black Women's Community Development Foundation's symposium on Black women in Chicago as a representative of the BAC. The event attracted two-hundred attendees, including Ella Baker, Amina Baraka, Septima P. Clark, Fannie Lou

Hamer, and members of the Third World Women's Alliance. The BAC's shift in focus, one that included the addition of programming for women, was a part of the larger Black women's movement nationally.

The first clues to what a Black women's program would look like came in the form of a September 1973 grant proposal with the BAC's program plans for 1973 and 1974. The most progressive part of the plan concerned its vision for Black women and poor Black women in particular. The proposal noted, "Black women on the Board of BAC, representing a broad range of living experiences and philosophical points of view, have over the past 9 months concentrated on the 'Black Female Experience' in Appalachia."[375] Unlike some organizations that put forth one ideological stance, the proposal emphasized that the women on the board came from a diversity of experiences and political ideologies. They did not specify their specific politics, but instead focused on the roles and work the women did as evidence of the diversity of points of view. The proposal read, "The women, drawing on their own experiences and roles from housewife to community organizer, from program director to welfare recipient and from community leader to community 'villain,' are developing a position on the plight and needs of Black women."[376] "Villain" is particularly key because it denotes the ways some of the women had been punished for their activism in their communities. Coming together to work within the BAC was a way to protect individuals from harm and job loss and unite local movements. The listing of the women's jobs instead of their philosophical backgrounds

[375] September 29, 1973 Proposal. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 26. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[376] Ibid.

was a way to identify their positions as the point of power from which the women would work to create programs. As a working-class movement, the work someone did represented a crucial piece of their identity in the community and informed their ability to understand the needs of people they wanted to attract to movement work. It was used by the BAC as information that would inform the organization's planning. "From this position they will develop specific programs to organize and educate Black women and make input into the development and administration of programs that could—if created or altered—better meet the needs of Black women." The BAC identified working-class Black women as a crucial part of its new Appalachian Black agenda.

There were three areas the program emphasized in relation to women. Each shows the movements the board members were already engaged in or sought to align with during the 1970s. The first area related to the economic status of women. The BAC, as an anti-poverty institution, intentionally targeted poor women. The proposal stated that the board members "are interested in programs to prepare poor Black women to increase their participation in decision making and at the same time identify and deal with the conflicts that arise when Black women assume leadership roles from their double minority position."[377] The use of "double minority" ties the proposal to the larger Black feminist movement, particularly Frances Beal's 1970 essay "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female."[378] Frances Beal was a member of the Third World Women's Alliance

[377] Ibid.

[378] Frances Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" in Toni Cade Bambara, ed., The Black Woman: An Anthology (New York, Washington Square Press, 1970.) Also see Margo Natalie Crawford's "Must Revolution Be a Family Affair?: Revisiting *The Black Woman*" in *Want to Start A Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 195.

(TWWA).[379] Members of the TWWA attended the 1972 conference in Chicago. It is possible that women in the BAC may have read the essay, or that the term came out of their own experiences in Appalachia. Either way, the BAC was in deep discussion on the intersectional aspects of Black womanhood, and it identified that Black women were minoritized in two ways: they were Black and they were women. It was not that they were fewer in number than men, but that their needs, experiences, ideas, lives had been marginalized and disempowered. Their emphasis on poor Black women in particular meant that they were struggling from a position of multiple oppressions.

While the impetus for this new direction does not explicitly appear in the archives, it is possible that the areas of emphasis the board members chose were directly related to their experience on the board. The BAC had a male chairman, and an all-male staff. Some of the push to increase Black women's participation and input might have come directly from the lack of women's leadership within the organization. It is also possible that the BAC was a space for women to push for more than just their presence on the board. The board members were actively engaged in pushing the BAC to go beyond representation to actually addressing the needs of poor Black women. Leadership was a major part of the vision. The proposal stated that "Mechanism of support for women who step out front must also be developed."[380] In this way, Black Appalachian women were working to create a new model. In this, they were aligned with other women in the Black Power era. Historian Ashley D. Farmer demonstrates "how black women's

[379] For more on the Third World Women's Alliance see Stephen Ward, "The Third World Women's Alliance: Black Feminist Radicalism and Black Power Politics," in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, edited by Peniel Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[380] Ibid.

efforts to produce new models of black womanhood shaped the Black Power era."[381] Women in the BAC were reshaping the roles women played in the movement. Like the women in Farmer's study, they "engendered and regendered the principles and rhetoric of the era."[382] Black Appalachian women were engaged in the gender restructuring of social movements.

The proposal's program plan was a step toward developing a position paper on Black Appalachian women. It declared, "The lives of Black women in Appalachia are influenced and directed by almost everyone and everything except themselves."[383] To combat this, women on the BAC board sought to bring Black women together. They had an objection to organize a regional conference, publish materials, and formally organize into a Federation of Black Appalachian Women. They also outlined their intentions to "Identify specific problems to work on, i.e., family planning, discrimination in private and public agencies, representation on elected bodies, training opportunities, day care for working mothers, etc."[384] The inclusion of "family planning" indicates that they were thinking about and in support of reproductive justice and aligned with the recent *Roe. v. Wade* victory earlier that year.

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[381] Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 5. For more on Black Power and gender see Robyn C. Spencer's *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) and Betty Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

[382] Ibid., 11.

[383] September 29, 1973, proposal. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 26. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[384] Ibid.

The BAC also had plans to develop a separate institution solely focused on Black Appalachian women. In its emphasis on poor Black women, the BAC worked from the bottom up within Black communities. They put their belief that the solution to poverty was to engage it from the most disempowered into action within their own organization. It started with women's presence on the board, but the women took those roles higher and developed a vision of empowerment for all Black Appalachian women. The vision depended on their ability to unite. Historian Jessie Wilkerson, though focusing mainly on the efforts of white Appalachian women and their solidarities with Black women outside of the region, writes in her study of white Appalachian women's activism that "Appalachian activists stood at the nexus of mid-twentieth-century social movements, compelling us to reconsider the meaning and scope of the American women's movement."[385] Black Appalachian women engaged based on their race, class, gender, in the Black, labor, and women's movements of the 1970s. While they were affiliated with local groups that were interracial, they also intentionally chose to work in an all-Black organization to empower Black Appalachian communities specifically.

Within the BAC specifically, Black women had always filled leadership roles even if unstated. Ann Beard was a founder of the Berea College BSU that led to the creation of the BAC. The BAC could only be considered for approval at the CSM meeting because it obtained twenty-five signatures from supporting members. Those members became BAC founders and Almetor King was one. King also participated in the first meetings of the BAC where her suggestions changed the direction of their proposed

[385] Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*, 15.

study. Peggy Sloan wrote the proposal for the first study of the region. Mattye Guy Knight led the Sanctified Hill Disaster Committee. In some ways, this period marked a return to an earlier time. By this point, women on the board, many who had been there for three years, had agitated for more.

The Executive Board

In 1973, the BAC's outreach efforts had increased dramatically with the publication of *Black Appalachian Viewpoints*. and was working on a plan to organize and build programming especially for and about Black women. The organization had plenty of plans for what to do with further funding. Besides its day-to-day overhead and planning, it needed funding to put its vision into action. It needed money to plan and execute meetings, conferences, and seminars. It needed money for publications and staff. When it received the largest grant in the organization's existence, it should have initiated an extended boon. Instead, it initiated an abrupt board collapse

Sometime after incorporation in 1971, Johnson organized an executive board within the board of directors. The BAC originally had an advisory board made up of members of the CSM and other organizations like the Knoxville Urban League. This included white and Black people. When the organization moved to Atlanta, the advisory board lost influence as the BAC intentionally became an all-Black organization. Like SNCC, this signaled a transition towards a more nationalist stance in the BAC.[386] With

[386]For more on SNCC, see Clayborne Carson *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

board members from 11 of the 13 Appalachian states in charge of BAC policy, Johnson designated an executive committee that could make decisions without the presence of all board members. The new executive committee had decision-making power over BAC expenditures. This led to disputes over power, money, and the legality of the executive board itself.

The November 1973 $250,000 award from The Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Foundation would bring the problems with the BAC's board structure to a head. When the article in the *Atlanta Daily World* was published the next January, the BAC was already working toward addressing a critical aspect of the grant's specifications: a matching funds provision. The provision meant that the BAC could only access the funds once it had raised a matching amount. To do so, the BAC, specifically Guillebeaux, had to raise more funds. At the time, the BAC had a staff of three, including Wright, Guillebeaux, and an office manager. Student interns helped to supplement the staff but were not primarily used as fundraisers. Although director, Guillebeaux had not been granted the capacity to hire additional staff. He faced the problem of needing help to fundraise but being limited by the power to hire help. He was also limited by the money he could use to pay a new employee as certain grants were designated only for certain functions, like travel expenses for board members from Appalachian states to gather regularly. By the time there were signs of internal conflict, the BAC was already struggling to maintain itself due to the pressures that came with its nonprofit status.

A series of meetings in December 1973 began to address some of the limitations Guillebeaux faced and reveal the first signs of internal conflict among board members. On December 14, a small group of board members identified as the executive committee

of the board of directors confronted Jack Guillebeaux over the finances and leadership structure of the BAC. Guillebeaux let the board know that there was pressure from funders to present the BAC's plan for evaluating its programs. He also explained that his efforts to match funds with the new $250,000 were limited by the fact that the BAC staff was so small, he did not have hiring capacity, and the size of the terrain the BAC needed to cover was itself too big for him to cover alone. In response, some members of the executive committee who were present, including Johnson, Barbara Jones, Joe Grant, Jean Smith, and Jesse Pennington, "began to express concern for the structure of the organization, the corporation, the by-laws that govern the corporation, and the responsibility to funding agencies, financial status, clarification of the roles of the board and staff, and its legal protection."[387] The meeting minutes do not reveal which board members were concerned, and it is also impossible to tell how long they spent discussing the concerns, but the mention of the discussion in the minutes is the first sign of turmoil. The concerns listed had to do with the very foundation of the organization, especially its finances and control over them. After Guillebeaux reported on the BAC's field activities, Johnson "expressed that the Director and his staff are doing an outstanding job, and he felt that the Board should be developed to take on a more responsible role to support the staff."[388] Johnson then presented a proposal for board development. Wright also presented a proposal related to board involvement. The board ultimately decided to table

[387] Meeting minutes, December 14, 1973. IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 26. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[388] Ibid.

the discussion until another meeting in two weeks, but it did grant Guillebeaux hiring capabilities before it adjourned.

The executive committee met again December 28-30 in Atlanta, with Guillebeaux present. The organization's structure came up again: among discussions on the evaluation, board development, and Viola Cleveland's recommendation that the BAC hold another annual conference in the summer of 1975, there was "a discussion of legality of the Executive Committee and its existence (if it had been dissolved or not)."[389] Someone there questioned whether the current meeting, where a small group of board members were discussing the very foundations of the organization and expenditures after its largest grant award, was illegal within the laws of the organization's incorporation. Johnson's response as chairman indicates that the executive board member who questioned the legality of the meeting might have requested to remain anonymous. In response to the questions, Johnson stressed the need for the executive committee. He responded that, "Because of being unable to get the whole board together to act on important things that have to be taken care of immediately, the Executive Committee should be a standing committee."[390] The committee would continue to function for now, but that did not end the discussion on the board's structure or legality of it. Discussion turned to whether a board member could also act as counsel for the organization. Barbara Jones "expressed her concern over Jesse Pennington and Don Pitts' role of lawyer and Board member, and the Board of Directors using them in both capacities. She said she

[389] Ibid.

[390] Ibid.

felt the corporation should hire a lawyer in the best interest of the corporation."[391] There was a vote to do so, and it also passed.

The last item on the agenda was perhaps the most controversial. Pennington expressed concern about the expenses Johnson incurred as chairman. "Jesse stated that he felt that a large responsibility had been placed on Carl as chairman of the corporation, that traveling around thirteen states going to conferences was an added income, the corporation should compensate Carl with some type of gift. Viola moved that Carl be given a gift of $4,000 a year to cover the added expense he incurs, and that he be on call for the service of BAC in all important matters of BAC."[392]This last motion was odd for a nonprofit organization. Although the intention behind it seemed ethical, the awarding of monies to the board was not. This was likely the decision that would spark rebellion amongst other board members.

The BAC was in the midst of restructuring the organization, but only a small group of the board of directors was involved in the decisions to do so. It had changed hiring, legal, financial and evaluation practices in a short span of time, and without the input of board members not on the executive committee. The organization would pay dearly for those decisions.

Collapse

[391] Ibid.

[392] Ibid.

Typically, because of the size of the region and the coordination in gathering board members together, Guillebeaux knew when board members planned to visit BAC offices. But sometime in January 1974, a group of board members led by Don Pitts, a lawyer from West Virginia, surprised Guillebeaux with a visit. They broached the topic of the BAC's bank account, a topic that would have normally been discussed between Guillebeaux and Johnson. The group wanted Guillebeaux to go with them to the bank to change the names on the BAC's bank account so that they could withdraw funds. It is likely that as chairman and director, Johnson and Guillebeaux were the only people who could withdraw funds. Pitts and this faction of board members wanted to change that, perhaps with the influx of $250,000 as an impetus to wrest financial control of the organization from Johnson. Guillebeaux remembered the shocking moment of confrontation.

> So, boom. One day about five of the board members walked into the office and they said, 'We want you in essence to take us down to the bank, which is a few blocks down the street where you have the BAC account, and we want you to change over the signatories on the account. Because when BAC was organized, when it was incorporated, there was some technicality that said who the board members were, and we have read that, and we are here to change that and change the structure. And we want you to stay on Jack, but we'll call Johnson the voided chair. We want to change this around because he is not the legitimate chair of the board.' And so forth. Now I had never heard not one inkling of any of this ever. This was totally whatever. And of course, my position was y'all got to be kidding.

> You want me to just take you down to the bank and we're going to turn all this over to you. My first thought was, the bank is going to do what? Come on, folks. Really? But anyway, that's the way it happened.[393]

Members of the board attempted a takeover of the bank accounts and the organization.

There are some clues that there were earlier roots of conflict between Pitts and Johnson, and that the action of the group in January were extensions of a longer argument about who should be chairman of the BAC board of directors. Earlier, during the BAC's 1971 conference in Black Mountain, North Carolina, there was some tension over who would lead the organization. Even as Johnson had been designated the chairman, a news article identified Pitts as co-chairman.[394] This initiated some tension between Johnson and Pitts that would translate into battles over the board's director. Pitts was not a member of the executive committee, which further ignited the intensity between him and Johnson. It is possible that his and other board member's attempt to change the bank accounts had to do with the elections at the conference. According to conference materials, Johnson was identified as the chairman.

By February, Guillebeaux was out as director." The next month, members of the board filed a lawsuit in Buncombe County, the same county where Johnson lived in Asheville. Guillebeaux remembered, "There was the obvious conflict that needed to be

[393] Jack Guillebeaux interview with author. May 11, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama.

[394] "Don Pitts Elected Co-Chairman of Black Appalachian Commission" *Beckley Post-Herald,* July 14, 1971.

resolved. So, some of the funders and supporters, they arrange for there to be a meeting of the board to try to work this out and so forth. We had a meeting in Knoxville, Tennessee, which was paid for by some of the funders to help us get this worked out."[395] It is unclear what happened at that meeting, as Guillebeaux was called away on the news that his father was ill. The organization never fully recovered after losing Johnson as chairman, and Guillebeaux had to interface with funders who, upon hearing the news of conflict, wanted their funding returned. The lawsuit hurt the reputation of the organization. The BAC had worked so hard to build a rapport with funders. Even if the lawsuit was based on false accusations, the damage was done.

Despite the upheaval in the leadership, the BAC continued to expand its influence. Ann Douglas, the new director of the IFCO, determined in its quarterly evaluation of the BAC that the organization was still in good shape. In April 1974, Douglas interviewed Guillebeaux, Wright, and Barbara Jones who was listed on the evaluation as "former board member recently employed as staff community organizer."[396] Jones had left her post on the board following the turmoil of the December and January executive board meetings. The fact that she remained engaged and now employed by the organization reveals that she was still amenable to and aligned with the overall work of the organization. The evaluation determined that the "BAC is moving in the direction of defining its constituency by incorporating state chapters within local

[395] Jack Guillebeaux interview with author. May 11, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama.

[396] IFCO evaluation of BAC, April 11, 1974. IFCO Organization Files, A-BL, Box 44, Folder 13. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

affiliates."[397] The evaluation accounted for the ways the BAC was progressing in its plan to expand its reach and representation with BAC chapters in each state. Douglas's assessment also noted the organization's progress toward developing a regional agenda and its recent $250,000 award, noting the IFCO assistance with the proposal. It noted, "The Black Appalachian Commission made good use of the IFCO's assistance and advocacy for BAC in following up with the various foundations and church funding sources. It is probably one of our most successful technical assistance stories."[398] Not only was the $250,000 a success for the BAC, but it was also a success for the IFCO.

Another part of the evaluation discussed "board structure and functions," noting that the BAC is currently planning for an election of thirteen (13) Board members (one per Appalachian State) at its Annual Conference planned for this summer. Some turn-over of the existing Board members is anticipated."[399] Douglas's assessment accounted for board turnover, but it did not mention the possibility that the organization might collapse as a result of internal conflicts. It may have been that the IFCO was unaware of the events of the executive board meetings beyond noting that some board turnover was possible. It is possible that the BAC did not want to alarm its strongest ally, one that had helped it apply for its biggest grant and provided technical assistance.

By June, however, the IFCO knew that the organization was in trouble. In a to Douglas that month, Guillebeaux thanked her for a recent $5000 grant. Guillebeaux wrote, "A grant to BAC at this time would appear unwise to one unlearned in the area of

[397] Ibid.

[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid.

struggle. We are having internal conflict, we have recently received a quarter of a million dollars grant, and things in general are not nice and orderly."[400] What Guillebeaux wrote next put the grant in context of the organization overall, its ongoing financial need, and its delay in raising matching funds. He wrote, "Our grant barely covers administration because 1) by the time we officially receive money, much of the grant will cover funds we had already received as emergency 'stay alive' money last fall; and part of the grant is dependent upon our being able to match it."[401] Still, Guillebeaux thanked Douglas profusely for the IFCO's commitment to the BAC even in the midst of internal conflict. He wrote, "Your actions say to us that you recognize that conflict as a part of growth and struggle and that conflict in and of itself is no justification for withdrawal."[402] In the midst of internal conflict, board upheaval, and uncertainty, IFCO remained dedicated to the young organization.

The BAC continued to make the positive work it was doing visible in the press even in the midst of board strife. Fayetta Allen, a Black journalist from Atlanta, worked as a consultant with the BAC and published two articles on the organization in 1974. In May, she published "Appalachian Agony: High on a Mountain, Deep in a Mine," in *Encore Magazine*.[403] The tagline of the article read "Blacks are the poorest group in the

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[400] Letter from Jack Guillebeaux to Ann Douglas, June 19, 1974. IFCO Organization Files, A-BL, Box 44, Folder 13. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

[401] Ibid.

[402] Ibid.

[403] Fayetta Allen "Appalachian Agony: High on a Mountain, Deep in a Mine" *Encore Magazine*, May 1974 in IFCO Proposals, AN-BL, Box 23, Folder 26. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization records, 1966-1984, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

poorest part of the nation."[404] This was a major point the BAC wanted to convey to combat Black invisibility, something Allen discussed in the article, and influence regional policy. Allen also published "Blacks in Appalachia" in the June issue of *The Black Scholar*. There she quoted Guillebeaux saying that "we are not anti-white, but we *are* pro-black."[405] Even in the midst of collapse, the organization still managed to disseminate its message.

Clarence 'Butch' Wright was a part of the organization during its last months. He planned economic development seminars throughout 1973 and 1974, eventually culminating in a published article in the *Review of Black Political Economy* on the work the BAC continued to do on regional policy entitled "Revenue Sharing and Substate Regionalism in Georgia."[406] The article presented a model to take interest from revenue sharing and use it to support community-controlled programs as a way to involve Black poor people in the New federalism the ARC and other regional efforts represented. The first line of the article read, "The Federal System of Government as we know it is dead."[407] A sign of the BAC's increasing radicalism, the line shows the BAC's direct challenge to the government structurally. The article used the work the BAC did in Georgia as a model.

It is unclear which exact moment was the end of the organization. But the BAC's records trail off after November 1974. By April 1975, Guillebeaux had moved to

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[404] Ibid.

[405] Fayetta A. Allen, "Blacks in Appalachia" *The Black Scholar*, Vol 5, No. 9 (June 1974), 42-51.

[406] Wright, Clarence E. "Revenue Sharing and Substate Regionalism in Georgia." *The Review of Black Political Economy* Vol. 5, No. 1 (December 1974), 57-68.

[407] Ibid, 57.

Alabama. By October, Johnson was running for city council in Asheville, North Carolina. Although it maintained support with the IFCO, board strife, Guillebeaux and Johnson's exits initiated the collapse of the org.

Conclusion

In a 2018 interview in his home in Montgomery, Alabama, Guillebeaux relayed his analysis of why the BAC ended so many years ago. His analysis reveals a tension between Black Power principles, where the welfare of the collective is paramount, and personal gain. "I think personally, I think our failure was very simple and it's the failure of many organizations, it's the failure of many families. It's the failure of many churches. It's the failure of many institutions. But it seemed to me that two things were at play. One was money and one was power."[408] He went on to explain how contests over money and power caused internal conflicts within social groups. "One of the realities to me of racism and institutionalized oppression, one of the dynamics is that these systems corrupt the oppressor, and these systems corrupt at some level the oppressed…. The system corrupts in a way that causes failure. So, the quest for money, the quest for power in that system is corrupted in the first place."[409] He concluded that, in terms of struggling for justice within an unjust system, "there is no fair way for that to happen."[410] Guillebeaux said that the BAC was granted the award because the foundation could see what it was already doing

[408] Jack Guillebeaux interview with author. May 11, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama.

[409] Ibid.

[410] Ibid.

to confront poverty. It was not that the organization itself was failing in its programs or vision, but that some members of the organization, namely Pitts and the group of board members with him, had been corrupted by pursuits for money and power. He remembered, "When the folk came in the office, the first thing they said was, 'We want to go to the bank and change over.' They didn't say, 'We want to come and change the direction of the organization. We want to change the stated goals. We want to change the strategy and the method by which we're operating. We want to change the goals or the population we want to serve.' None of that was even mentioned. As a matter of fact, they said, 'We want you to stay on and continue what you're doing but take us around to the bank first.' I mean, that's the kind of thing you see in white organizations Guillebeaux assessed that it was not as much the structure of the organization or the pressure from the outside, as it was the actions of a few of the board members to wrest control of the organization's finances. In hindsight, Guillebeaux concluded that some of the board members had succumbed to the overall corruption of the system it was fighting. They were acting with individualism at the center, something he associated with white organizations. This went against the BAC's new emphasis on the collective.

In spite of internal conflicts, the BAC left behind a vision worthy of note. It was a Black anti-poverty, anti-racist, and feminist organization in Appalachia. Existing from 1969 to 1975, it developed a holistic vision of uplifting the Black Appalachian community from the most marginalized communities up. While it successfully secured funding, it struggled with a small staff, internal conflicts, the massive tasks of confronting Black invisibility, poverty, and sexual discrimination. Trying to secure Black regional power through a nonprofit model, where the organization was dependent on outside

funding, hampered it from its grassroots beginnings. Still, the history of the organization offers a template for grassroots regional Black movements today.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The BAC had plans to expand its reach and grow into a larger mass movement. In September 1973, the BAC worked to develop a plan for 1974 to 1977 that would have adopted a membership model, expanded the board of directors, and included another regional conference. The plan included the organization's intention to focus on Black Appalachians at all ages. They planned to develop programs for Black Appalachian youth, working adults, and the elderly. In this way, it set forth a holistic vision of community uplift out of poverty, one that looked at each generation as a point of focus. Though it did not complete its vision, its history demonstrates that Black Appalachians used Black Power politics in wage their own war against poverty. They did so rooted in their identity and experiences as Black and Appalachian. Their history demonstrates how imperative an analysis of place is in Black Studies.

Though the BAC worked within the system to change it, taking on the Black Power pluralist stance, their focus was always on shifting control over resources in order to enable self-determination. Their tactics were part of a long-term process to grow a larger regional organization with BAC chapters in each Appalachian state. They hoped that an organization with that size and reach could eventually lead to one that had more power over regional planning. The BAC as non-profit was the first step toward the BAC as a much larger and powerful entity, one that would use its influence within government structures to shift more and more power to Black communities. Part of that vision involved shifts in who would be in positions of power. Black Appalachian women were to take on leadership positions within this advanced vision.

The BAC launched direct hits against regional policies that reinforced institutional racism. In the case of childcare, it was not just that they wanted control over the resources allocated for childcare centers, but also that they wanted Black Appalachians to have control over who would be around their children. Specifically, they wanted to determine who would have control over developing their children. The BAC had a long-term vision. They constantly raised the question of "who" when the ARC and larger federal government pretended that the answer was self-evident.

Studying the BAC expands Black Power studies to the Mountain South and Appalachian history to Black Appalachia. The BAC's history shifts our focus away from stereotypes of white Appalachians to internal racial dynamics. To advance their cause, the BAC went outside of Appalachia to secure allies and financial stability. Their story pushes back at the focus on "outsiders" as interlopers in Appalachian Studies. This history reveals that Black people were poor in part due to institutional and environmental racism within the region. For the BAC, regional policy became an important site of Black power politics. I argue that Black Power politics is also what happens in boardrooms and disaster response. It has also always included an emphasis on economic justice as inextricable from race.

The BAC also worked to address immediate needs of communities on the ground. They responded to the Sanctified Hill disaster using the connections they built in and outside of the region, their skill as activists, and their lived experience as Black Appalachians. Their history in Cumberland shows that their organizing efforts were not just about shelter but restoring a measure of economic stability and wealth. This was

precisely what enabled Black Appalachians to stay in the region, one many had lived in for decades if not centuries.

Looking back, Guillebeaux surmised the overall reasoning behind the formation of the BAC. “The Black Appalachian Commission, this very creation was to solidify the fact that in Appalachia there were black folks. In Appalachia there were black leaders. In Appalachia there is black history and in Appalachia there is black struggle.” Guillebeaux’s reasoning helps inspire this dissertation. As the number of voices declaring that Appalachia is not a wholly white region has increased since the 1970s, the first people to outwardly call themselves “Black Appalachians” with the intentions to dispel the myth were Black Appalachians agitating against poverty and racism during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Through the organization’s formation, its statistical study, and its challenges to the ARC on childcare, labor, and affirmative action, the BAC redefined Appalachia. It redefined what Appalachia meant, and it redefined the “who” of Appalachia in policy. These were direct actions for structural change.

What did self-determination look like in Appalachia? It looked like institution-building, direct challenges to economic, labor, and childcare policies, and disaster assistance. It was the fight against poverty by and for Black people. It was also an internal struggle over gender, power, and who would lead. In this way, it links to other Black Power organizations that struggled with the same issues.

In 2021, an organization called the Black Appalachian Coalition (BLAC) formed with the stated goal to “go far beyond narrative to confront directly the racism and discriminatory practices that have left Black Appalachians with fewer opportunities. Black people in Appalachia find themselves at the intersections of historic disinvestment

that has burdened communities with air and water pollution, inadequate health care (including reproductive and mental health issues), food insecurity, and more." Thus far, its work has included challenging media narratives of Appalachia as a wholly white region and lobbying for changes to policy, specifically government policy around issues of environmental justice. This emphasis on Black Appalachia has an earlier precedent with the BAC. It also shows that the work of the BAC continues into the twenty-first century.

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VITA

JILLEAN MCCOMMONS

EDUCATION
M.S., 2007. Information (Library and Information Services). University of Michigan
M.A., 2003. Latin American, Iberian, and Caribbean Studies. University of Wisconsin
B.A., 2000. English Language and Literature. Michigan State University

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT
University of Virginia, Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American and African Studies, Charlottesville, Virginia, Pre-Doctoral Fellow, 2020-2022

University of Kentucky, Department of History, Lexington, Kentucky
Instructor of Record, History 261: African American History Since 1865, Summer 2021

University of Kentucky, Department of History, Lexington, Kentucky
Instructor of Record, History 261: African American History Since 1865, Summer 2020

University of Kentucky, Department of History, Lexington, Kentucky
Teaching Assistant, History 108: United States History to 1877, 2020

University of Kentucky, Department of History, Lexington, Kentucky
Teaching Assistant, History 109: United States History since 1877, 2019

PUBLICATIONS

Essays
"Appalachian Hillsides as Black Ecologies: Housing, Memory, and the Sanctified Hill Disaster of 1972," *Black Perspectives*. June 16, 2020.

Book Reviews
Unwhite: Appalachia, Film, and Race by Meredith McCarroll. Review in *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 118, No. 1 (Winter 2020): Appalachia special issue.

Black Huntington: An Appalachian Story by Cicero M. Fain III. Review in the *Journal of African American History*, Vol. 105, No. 3 (Summer 2020).

"Unearthing New Histories of Black Appalachia." Review of *Liberia, South Carolina: An African American Appalachian Community* by John M. Coggeshall in *Black Perspectives,* August 12, 2020.

Encyclopedia Entries

"Manuel Querino." in Colin Palmer et al. *The Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History: The Black Experience in the Americas.* 2nd Edition. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, December 2005.

Public Engagement

"Cabbell Gave Voice, History, Activism to Black Appalachians," *Lexington Herald Leader*. June 6, 2018.

"Black Women Are Using the Vote That They Fought So Hard To Win," *History News Network*. December 24, 2017. Also appeared as "Black Women Are Eagerly Using the Votes They Fought For," *Newsweek*. December 29, 2017.

INVITED TALKS

"Appalachian Hillsides as Black Ecologies." Black Ecologies Discussion Series. Arizona State University. March-April 2o21.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Black Appalachian Women: Testimonies, Environmental Justice, and Historical Reparations." Appalachian Studies Association Meeting, Lexington, Kentucky, March 12-15, 2020. Panel chair/moderator. (Cancelled due to Covid 19)

"The Black Appalachian Commission: Black Power Politics and the War on Poverty, 1969-1975." African American Intellectual History Society Conference, Austin, Texas, March 3-6, 2020.

"Black Power in Appalachia: The Black Appalachian Commission." Association for the Study of African American Life and History Conference, Charleston, South Carolina, October 2-6, 2019.

"Black Appalachian: The Construction of a Regional Identity." American Studies Association Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, November 8-11, 2018. Panel organizer.

"Recovering the Lives of Black Banjo Players: The Case of John Homer Walker." African
Americans in Western North Carolina and Southern Appalachia Conference, Asheville, North Carolina, October 19-21, 2017.

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND GRANTS

2020-2021 - Awardee - UK College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award
2020 - Awardee - UK Lyman T. Johnson Torch Bearer Award
2020-2022 - Pre-Doctoral Fellow - Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American and African Studies at the University of Virginia
2019 - Awardee - UK Center for Graduate and Professional Diversity Initiatives, Professional Development Grant
2019 - Honorable Mention - Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship
2018 - Awardee - UK Appalachian Center Eller & Billings Student Research Award
2018 - Awardee - West Virginia University Research & Regional History Center Research Grant
2018 - Awardee - Ithaca College Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival Diversity Fellow
2018 - Awardee - UK Department of History Fellowship
2017 - Awardee - Appalachian Studies Association e-Appalachia Award
2017-2019 - Awardee - UK Lyman T. Johnson Fellowship
2017-2019 - Awardee - UK Department of History Robert S. Lipman Graduate Fellowship