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Eastern Kentucky and the War on Poverty:  
Grass-roots Activism, Regional Politics, and Creative Federalism in the Appalachian South during the 1960s

MARGARET RIPLEY WOLFE

During the 1960s, Appalachia became one of the principal theaters in America's War on Poverty and eastern Kentucky became a major battleground. For approximately a decade, commencing with the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) general strike of 1959 and continuing through the Lyndon B. Johnson administration to 1969, rugged eastern Kentucky attracted national and international attention. Journalists embraced the plight of downtrodden mountaineers and contributed to yet another of Appalachia's several "rediscoveries." Newspaper and magazine articles and television and radio news reports that dealt with poverty, out-migration, strip mining, and the broad-form deed evoked emotional responses in America and abroad. Indigenous voices articulated the peculiar problems of the Cumberlands, elected officials rallied their forces, and troops of volunteers and college and university students signed on for the poverty tour. The often-conflicting dynamics of grass-roots activism, creative federalism, and courthouse politics joined in eastern Kentucky.

The sixties sustained a national milieu that sometimes spawned and often fostered social activism. During that decade, circumstances brought the attention of print and broadcast journalists to bear on a multiplicity of existing problems. The literature of expose, intrinsic to the American reform tradition, again had its day, garnering the attention of the concerned citizenry and shaping the thinking of politicians and scholars. In classic American muckraking tradition, Michael Harrington's The Other America: Poverty in the United States, for example, published in 1962, turned a spotlight on the underprivileged and proved to be highly influential with policymakers. Some reformers of these years seemed to assume that poverty equaled purity. Involving the untainted poor therefore held the potential to expand democracy, render government more responsive, and, in turn, elevate the political process. This underlying if unspoken assumption, in part, gave rise to one of the key strategies of the poverty
warriors: maximum feasible participation.\textsuperscript{3}

Although Appalachia has never possessed a monopoly on the American poor, the region possessed more than its fair share of poverty when John F. Kennedy took the presidential oath. Indeed, historical accounts have failed to record a golden age when mountain life was easy and harsh circumstances predated the advent of the mining industry. That notwithstanding, the coal camps and coal towns almost never achieved the high standards touted by promoters; the culture engendered by the industry brought its own peculiar hardships.\textsuperscript{4} The coal industry had held eastern Kentucky in its grip for decades, and miners had come to depend on union representation. For laborers and their families, “before unionization” and “after unionization” held a significance not so unlike that of B.C. and A.D. in the annals of Christianity.

During the fifties and sixties, the UMW failed many of those who had pinned their hopes to it. “What turned out to be the most damaging to the miners in the long run,” according to Kentucky historians Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, “was mechanization of the coalfields.”\textsuperscript{5} UMW President John L. Lewis had signed a wage agreement after a work stoppage in 1950 that essentially freed companies to reduce costs through mechanization at the expense of the labor force. Lewis claimed at the time that it was “better to have half a million men working in the industry at good wages, high standards of living, than it is to have a million men working in the industry in poverty and degradation.” By the early 1960s, however, only some 160,000 miners worked in the coal industry in the entire United States, many of them reduced to abysmal circumstances.\textsuperscript{6} In Kentucky, jobs in underground mining decreased by seventy percent during the fifteen years following the 1950 agreement. Surface (or strip) mining, which had produced only two percent of Kentucky’s coal in 1940, accounted for thirty-three percent in 1960.\textsuperscript{7}

When some of the big Kentucky coal operators refused to sign the national contract won by the UMW in 1959 that guaranteed a wage increase of two dollars a day, John L. Lewis called for a general strike to commence on March 9 of that same year.\textsuperscript{8} The UMW also had a quarrel with the numerous small operators and their truck mines (those without direct rail access). Although the union scale had been established at $24.25 for a day’s work, they paid their employees, many of them card-carrying union members, as little as ten or twelve dollars. It was not uncommon for UMW-contract operators to buy coal from non-union mines and to sell it as their own or to lease non-union mines to meet production needs. The failure of the truck mines to pay the forty-cent royalty to the UMW Welfare and Retirement Fund on
each ton of coal also galled the union. In 1961, an estimated seventy to eighty percent of the truck mines in Kentucky paid no royalties. Union officials readily admitted that probably half of those in eastern Kentucky would have to shut down if forced to comply with the union contract.9

Frustrated by their inability to force the small operators to pay the royalty, the UMWA leadership turned on its own members. In 1960 trustees of the UMWA Welfare and Retirement Fund had taken away free hospital and medical care for union members who had been continuously unemployed for a year. In February 1961, the same officials cut the pensions of retired miners from one hundred to seventy-five dollars per month. In August 1962, they announced the withdrawal of medical care and all other welfare benefits, effective September 1, for some four thousand miners in the Appalachian fields who worked for companies that failed to make full royalty payments to the fund. Toward the end of 1962, they had decided to dispose of four small UMWA hospitals at Middlesboro, Hazard, Whitesburg, and McDowell; the other six, scattered about in coal towns of Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia, remained in jeopardy.10

Historically speaking, the labor movement in the mountains, in large part, had arisen in response to local conditions. It had not only depended upon but had also been nurtured by grass-roots organizing at the community level. Subsequently, a strong allegiance to the UMWA developed. Even when the national leadership chose to abandon significant numbers of mountain miners, some of them retained a commitment to social justice and a sense of community that sustained activism. From this base emerged the “roving picket” movement. Unauthorized by union leadership who tried without success to stop it, this grass-roots protest was essentially spontaneous in origin. Disenchanted miners, acting in concert, shut down mines and pressured operators to sign union contracts.11

“The lid blew off,” Kentucky journalist John Ed Pearce wrote, “when, in the last week of August, hundreds of miners received letters from the UMWA Welfare and Retirement Fund revoking their cherished welfare cards.” These cards had entitled miners and their families to free treatment at the union hospitals. Desperate men responded with walkouts at non-union mines. The “roving picket” movement, so-called because it targeted different dog-hole mines each day in seemingly random fashion, had begun. According to Pearce, “unidentified men” stormed the mine of a nonpaying operator near the Harlan County line, chased off the crew, and dynamited the mine machinery.” Then, on October 12, when the welfare fund officials announced their intention to sell four of its hospitals, the movement gained momentum. “Overnight,” Pearce observed, “the small band of pickets grew to caravans of a hundred, a hundred and fifty, and two hundred cars which moved through the area, closing mines by a show of force.” Shootings and beatings, burning, and dynamiting became increasingly common as the numbers of pickets increased and emotions intensified.
The renegade miners blocked roads, wrecked trucks, and overturned cars. By December the caravan of pickets had grown to as many as five hundred men. Small contingents of state police stood between the “roving pickets” and the operators’ gun-toting guards.12

Such developments in the coal communities of eastern Kentucky did not escape the attention of the national media. Inspired to a considerable degree by the 1963 publication of Kentucky native Harry M. Caudill’s monumental Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area, reporters and photographers began to make their way into the mountains.13 One of those who responded to the Whitesburg attorney’s invitation to come and see for himself was Homer Bigart of the New York Times. His report, “Kentucky Miners: A Grim Winter,” appeared on October 20, 1963. Invoking “the pinched faces of hungry children” and providing a gut-wrenching description of circumstances confronting “tens of thousands of miners and subsistence farmers” as well as their families, Bigart’s article proved to be pivotal in launching the War on Poverty.14

The White House soon felt the repercussions. Heretofore, President John F. Kennedy, along with his aides and cabinet members, had neither been unmindful of poverty nor unresponsive.15 Indeed, Kennedy, acting on the advice of governors from key southern mountain states, had already created the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC) to study prevailing problems and to make recommendations to alleviate them. One can trace the establishment of PARC and, in turn, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), to the efforts of Kentucky governor Bert T. Combs and “Project 60,” an ambitious development plan for eastern Kentucky spearheaded by Combs’s man, John D. Whisman.16 Nevertheless, the story that Bigart told inspired a commitment and concentration that had not yet materialized.

Theodore (Ted) C. Sorensen, who served as special counsel to the president, recollected that Kennedy had “read an article in the New York Times which called attention to the deplorable conditions in parts of Kentucky and asked [him] to see what could be done about it.” Then, the former White House aide reminisced, “after some conversations, he [the president] decided on a crash program to help the worst areas in eastern Kentucky and possibly some in West Virginia through the winter.” “After considerable groundwork had been laid,” Sorensen continued, Kennedy “called a meeting with the outgoing governor [Bert T. Combs] and representatives of the incoming governor, [Edward T., Jr.] Breathitt, immediately after the Kentucky election, planned just such a program, and contemplated touring those areas himself once the program was under way.”17 Before President Kennedy’s fateful trip to Dallas, he had mobilized his cabinet members and other high-ranking federal officials to focus on the plight of eastern Kentucky’s poor during the winter of 1963-1964.18
Although the concept of “a war on poverty” had originated during the Kennedy administration and some implementation had begun with the “New Frontier,” President Lyndon B. Johnson made “the War on Poverty” along with civil rights the cornerstones of his “Great Society.” Within the Kennedy White House, various aides and cabinet members had continued to debate how best to shape and implement a full-fledged antipoverty program. After Kennedy’s assassination, LBJ responded favorably to what heretofore had been a somewhat tentative undertaking, insisting that his advisors move quickly to formulate the specifics for a legislative package.\textsuperscript{19}

When LBJ delivered his State of the Union address on January 8, 1964, he told Congress and the nation that “here and now” his administration declared “unconditional war on poverty in America.”\textsuperscript{20} The president kept up the pressure on all fronts, and by August 20, 1964, the Economic Opportunity Act became law.\textsuperscript{21} In the meantime, he persuaded Sargent Shriver, brother-in-law of the slain president, not only to become director of the War on Poverty Task Force but also to continue his work with the Peace Corps; later Shriver headed the Office of Economic Opportunity.\textsuperscript{22} LBJ also promised in his State of the Union message to “launch a special effort in the chronically distressed areas of Appalachia.”\textsuperscript{23}

Already the “crash program” for eastern Kentucky had committed 16.5 million federal dollars to the winter-relief program.\textsuperscript{24} By April 1964, Johnson seemed ready to act on his January commitment. With the report of the PARC in hand, LBJ made what was described as “a sudden and dramatic visit to Eastern Kentucky and other Appalachian poverty states.”\textsuperscript{25} During the two-day trip, on April 24-25, President Johnson began to speak of a domestic “Marshall Plan.” “Deeply moved by the grinding poverty he saw yesterday in Eastern Kentucky,” the Louisville Courier-Journal reported in its Sunday edition, the president “will ask Congress next week to appropriate $250 million to launch a ‘Marshall plan’ for Appalachia.” Over five years, the proposed program was expected to cost four billion dollars.\textsuperscript{26} Although administration efforts to secure passage of the Appalachian bill failed in 1964, revised legislation passed both houses of Congress the next year and Johnson signed the Appalachian Regional Development Act on March 9, 1965.\textsuperscript{27}

The rhetoric of self-help and community involvement emanating from Washington, D.C., suggested the possibility of a departure from politics as usual. The spectacle of LBJ’s visit to the mountains, his public statements to the na-
tion, and signals that both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations had sent already excited veteran activists and won new converts to social change. The hullabaloo also raised the expectations of the downtrodden and energized people who had previously been excluded from public policymaking. History has hardly accused LBJ of political naiveté, but his social program bordered on being quixotic. Even so, commitment to the expansion of participatory democracy fell well within the realm of American ideology. For the first three years or so of the War on Poverty, the Johnson presidency attempted to transmit that dream to forgotten Americans and to guarantee a place for the poor in antipoverty policymaking.

The official papers of the Johnson presidency demonstrate clearly that LBJ kept his finger on the pulse of the poverty program, its historical significance, and his legacy. He was directly responsible for the preparation of administrative histories including that of the OEO. According to that official account, the War on Poverty had compressed "into a brief span, an entire social revolution... a 'quiet revolution'... carried out in meeting halls and classrooms; town halls and neighborhood centers." It had "offered self-help as a substitute for welfare and participation as a substitute for acceptance [of the status quo]" across America "in a thousand communities, in every state, in almost every county."  

Nevertheless, in theoretical planning as well as attempted implementation, the Johnson administration clearly had not completely reckoned with the remarkable resilience of the urban machines and courthouse gangs. Five months after LBJ signed the antipoverty legislation, OEO Director Shriver warned that some politicians felt "threatened by a new force being given prominence by our insistence on wide community representation"; the poor, meanwhile, "upset about the formation of these local poverty boards, feeling they are excluded [all of which is] complicated by splits between militant and less-militant minority leaders."  

During the fall of 1966, Douglass Cater, special assistant to the president, cautioned that the failure of local governments to function effectively might endanger "the whole concept of creative federalism." Writing to OEO Director Shriver, Cater outlined three major concerns of the White House: local administrative conditions that might handicap aid programs, how the federal government might improve those conditions to make sure that citizens received the full benefits of the programs, and what the federal government might do to encourage reform at the local levels. The president expected Shriver to study these matters and make recommendations by December 1, 1966. Creative federalism notwithstanding, the party system remained well-entrenched. Patronage may have flowed "from the top down" but votes counted "from the bottom up." State politicians remained especially attentive to local powerbrokers; those at the federal level had hardly achieved autonomy.

Realities in eastern Kentucky combined with creative federalism to
produce a fleeting interlude of grassroots activism. Poor people whom politicians had heretofore valued largely as pawns possessing votes they could buy now embraced participatory democracy. They attended community meetings, created citizens’ organizations, published newsletters, organized demonstrations, and staged protests. Their concerns included unemployment, local education, environmental destruction, and political corruption. Not surprisingly, the desperate unemployed men of eastern Kentucky looked to the nation’s capital.

“The roving pickets” phenomenon had been a reality in the mountains since late 1962. Jobless miners had kept the movement alive for more than a year despite considerable economic and political opposition at both the state and local levels. Neither the miners nor their enemies were strangers to violence and intimidation. Unknown parties had dynamited the homes of “roving pickets” along with houses and churches of those who rendered support to the miners. “Roving pickets” in Letcher County had faced charges of assault with intent to kill, and a federal grand jury had indicted one of their principal leaders, Berman Gibson, and seven others for attempting to dynamite a railroad bridge; four of them had supposedly signed confessions while in jail. To defend “roving pickets” facing criminal charges and to assist with other litigation, trade unionists and liberal activists in New York City had founded the Committee for Miners during July 1963. The following January, the organization chartered a bus and representatives of the “roving pickets” took their troubles to Washington, D.C.32

When LBJ declared war on poverty, “roving pickets” were on the scene. For three intensive days, January 7-9, they staged rallies and press conferences and met with officials of the Johnson administration, congressmen, and university students as well as religious and civic groups. Perhaps the most meaningful outcome of the trip came when presidential aide George Reedy suggested that the miners go home to Kentucky and get ready to assist the government with the War on Poverty. Caught up in the heady experience of the trip and the euphoria that carried them back to the hills, the leaders of the “roving pickets” transformed the movement into the Appalachian Committee for Full Employment (ACFE) later that same month.33 The unemployed miners believed that becoming a legitimate organization qualified them for federal funds, not a far-fetched assumption given the rhetoric of the Johnson administration and the OEO’s later sponsorship of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) and Community Action Programs (CAPs). Nevertheless, as Berea College’s Loyal Jones observed, “Government will not long finance or fund an insurrection against itself.”34

An alliance of local politicians and powerbrokers in eastern Kentucky joined forces against the ACFE. Although similar conflicts occurred in neighboring counties, Perry County provided the backdrop for the most publicized fight. There, a panoply of unemployed miners, students, outside agitators, and other
malcontents took on the establishment of businessmen, coal operators, publishers of the *Hazard Herald*, and assorted officeholders and law-enforcement agencies. In truth, the ACFE made a good faith effort to operate within the framework of the federal antipoverty program. Members drafted an unsuccessful proposal for federal funding and failed to secure CAA status. They tried desperately and with very limited and short-lived success to place representatives on legally constituted CAA boards in eastern Kentucky. “We were sold out,” one of the “roving pickets” later observed, “not down the line, up the line.” Nevertheless, for several years they published a newsletter, put themselves forward for elective offices in the primaries, and ran their own aid program for needy families. Make-work projects for unemployed fathers—“Happy Pappies” as they became known—constituted the most concrete aid that came the way of the jobless miners. Yet it, too, proved extremely limited and highly susceptible to political machinations.35

Even though the disaffected miners had attempted to legitimize themselves, some of them continued to think and speak in revolutionary terms. “They won’t have to go to Vietnam to fight their guerrilla warfare—it’ll be right here in eastern Kentucky,” warned Everette Tharp, one of the most articulate of the old “roving pickets” and the secretary for ACFE. “These mountains is a good place for guerrilla warfare—they’ve got it dug full of holes already.”36

Any evidence of radicalism had played into the hands of the ACFE’s opponents, who had already proved all too willing to portray the unemployed miners and their supporters as bomb-throwing, dynamite-wielding radicals influenced by “outsiders.” In 1964, a three-day Easter weekend rally at the Allais Union Hall, sponsored by the ACFE and attended by representatives of the New-York based Committee for Miners, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the Progressive Miners League, fueled the “outsider” allegation. Hamish Sinclair, for example, a Scottish-born trade unionist and a field representative of the Committee for Miners, was not an American citizen.37 As for the reaction to the influx of college and university students, writer Gurney Norman, who had been a reporter for the *Hazard Herald* during the early sixties, recalled that he had been told by a local civic leader: “Watch ’em honey! A lot of ’em are art majors.”38

When confronted with the “roving pickets” phenomenon and later with the ACFE, the establishment organized law and order leagues, denied the miners and their sympathizers the use of public buildings, called for activation of the National Guard, and encouraged law-enforcement officers to harass dissidents. The establishment had also turned to the time-tested American tradition of red-baiting. “Communism Comes to the Mountains of East Kentucky” proclaimed the bold headlines of the *Hazard Herald* in 1963. Publishers of the newspaper sounded the alarm after having reportedly uncovered in the Hazard vicinity a
New York “pink sheet,” *Progressive Labor,* whose editors were avowed Communists dedicated to the overthrow of the United States government. The paper’s southern correspondent supposedly had written “half-truths” and “uncomplimentary remarks” about the local newspaper. Furthermore, he reported that a class war raged in the Kentucky coalfields and that the local boss system robbed the poor and rewarded the rich. Many of the pickets, the *Hazard Herald* feared, had been “caught unawares in this Communist espionage movement [and its attempt] to get a foothold in this part of the country.”

One of the “roving pickets,” Charles “Buck” Maggard, probably said it best: “Just made them [the establishment] look that much more foolish. Can’t you just see the Communists taking over Hazard? What in the hell would they have done with it?”

The Communist bugaboo came to bear on yet another grassroots organization in eastern Kentucky: the Appalachian Volunteers (AVs). In tandem with the initiatives launched from Washington, D.C., during late 1963, federal officials began to cast about for indigenous support and to forge alliances with volunteers and established organizations in the mountains. By late November 1963, the Council of the Southern Mountains (CSM) based at Berea College had agreed to coordinate private voluntary efforts in the Kentucky mountains and to enlist faculty and students from institutions of higher learning in the eastern portion of the state. By early 1964, CSM, with a $50,000 grant from the Area Development Administration of the Department of Commerce, had begun to harness the youthful enthusiasm of college students.

From the AV’s inception during that harsh mountain winter of 1963-1964 until the split with CSM in 1966, the emphasis had been “helping people help themselves.” For the staid old CSM, led by Perley Ayer, that meant mutual cooperation; for the increasingly radicalized AVs, it meant confrontation. Change in the mountains, the young reformers came to realize, might mean circumventing county governments and school superintendents. How best to approach and achieve reform in the mountains posed the most significant disagreement between the Council and the AVs, but lesser controversies also plagued the parent organization and its offspring. It all came to a head on May 2, 1966, when Perley Ayer fired the two top-ranking individuals.
of the AVs, Milton Ogle and Daniel Fox. Thirteen staff members resigned in protest and on May 3, Ogle, Fox, and the others incorporated in Kentucky as the Appalachian Volunteers, a free-standing, nonprofit organization.44

As long as they had concerned themselves only with “painting and fixing up schoolhouses,” the county politicians received them well enough. As one school superintendent put it: “I like you fixing up schools, but if you go out and take pictures of those not fixed up, I’ll pull away your federal tit.” Over the course of a couple of years, the AVs had staffed up, secured various grants, and moved into more communities. Naturally, they talked with the local people about such concerns, as why their roads were not repaired, why there were no hot-lunch programs for their children’s schools, how the political patronage system worked, how the exchange of half-pints and money affected election results, and why their streams were filled with silt from strip mining. As Milton Ogle, director of the AVs, pointed out, “The questions were already there... hope was not there.” “Issue organizing” according to Ogle, “came more out of the communities than from the AVs per se.” Nevertheless, when the young workers began to nurture grassroots activism, particularly targeting the coal industry, they ran into trouble.45

Some residents of Pike County, Kentucky, equated opposition to strip mining with sedition which led to the arrest and trial of Joe Mulloy and Alan and Margaret McSurely.46 The sheriff’s department raided Mulloy’s home and claimed to have found a “communist library.” Although the books in Mulloy’s collection also included the Bible and Senator Barry Goldwater’s Conscience of a Conservative, a Pike County grand jury returned a true bill against Carl and Anne Braden of the Southern Conference Education Fund as well as Mulloy and the McSurely’s. The indictment claimed that they had taught or advocated criminal syndicalism against the state, although the statute on which local authorities based the charge had been found wanting in an 1956 case. Specifically, the defendants’ offense amounted to sedition against the county where, according to the Grand Jury, “a well organized and well financed effort [was] being made to promote and spread the communistic theory of the violent and forceful overthrow of the government of Pike County.”47

In truth, the arrests represented a set attack on the AVs by the coal operators and local officials who wanted to rid themselves of the young reformers by creating a political furor and jeopardizing their OEO funding. As if circumstances were not bizarre enough, the Kentucky Un-American Activities Committee (KUAC, pronounced “Quack” by pundits) decided to hold hearings in Pikeville during October 1968 that specifically targeted the AVs. The organization had alienated not only those it had sought to help but also those who provided its funding and by 1970 was dead.48 Whatever the flaws of the AVs—and flaws there were—the organization had not created the opposition to strip mining in Kentucky. Much of that could be attributed to the arrogance of the coal operators themselves.

No matter how reform-oriented a Kentucky officeholder might have been, he
or she knew the strength of the coal interests in the state; any attempt to change the status quo represented a tight-wire act. Federal funds pouring into eastern Kentucky posed no particular political risks for Congressman Carl D. Perkins, a native of Hindman who represented the mountainous Seventh District, or other politicians among their respective constituencies. Who administered the funds at the county level, however, and how they were spent among the locals presented a minefield. Moreover, being a federal employee offered little immunity from the ire of the coal interests and their allies. Gordon A. Ebersole, for example, of the Department of the Interior, went into eastern Kentucky to work with the Area Development Administration. When his views on strip-mine control and public utility districts put him at odds with the power structure, he felt the consequences. He blamed John Whisman, “whose salary came from the state government of Kentucky [and who] was indebted to the private power companies and the Chamber of Commerce,” for preventing the publication and distribution of a twelve-county report that had been completed.49

Ebersole also ran afoul of Congressman Perkins. “Carl and I were good friends, or I thought we were,” he explained, “but he had a lot of pressure on him... I was told that I was not to take any more trips into Appalachia, and my responsibilities were changed.” Relieved of duties with the Area Development Administration and briefly reassigned to the Job Corps, Ebersole spent the last eight months before his retirement in Sargent Shriver’s office. “I blame Carl Perkins for that,” he said.50

By 1967, even President Lyndon B. Johnson seemed to be wavering. In his State of the Union message, he observed that the War on Poverty was just as difficult as the war in Vietnam; “the enemy,... difficult to perceive, to isolate, to destroy.” Later, in his economic message to Congress, LBJ cautioned that the poverty fight would “be a long and continuing struggle, which will challenge our imagination, our patience, our knowledge, and our resources for years to come.”51

In fact, 1967, “the year of the bosses and the boll weevils,” proved to be climactic for Community Action Agencies. Most of those familiar with the events of 1967 believe that the so-called Green Amendment sponsored by U. S. representative Edith Green, an Oregon Democrat, actually saved CAA’s as well as OEO’s authorization. The Green Amendment required that CAAs be entities of state or local government or that they be nonprofit organizations designated as CAAs by those governments. This legislative adjustment made community action palatable for congressmen from both the rural South and the urban North. In turn, it thwarted a Republican effort to force the spin-off of OEO programs to the established executive departments. It also meant, in effect, the demise of maximum feasible participation. “What a tragedy it would be,” Mrs. Green lamented on the floor of the U. S. House, “if community action against poverty becomes perverted to an attack on local government—as though it were the cause or even held the cure for the problem.”52 Green seemed neither to
understand nor care that well-entrenched local politicians in places like eastern Kentucky found the perpetuation of poverty essential to their own survival as powerbrokers.

When Senator Robert F. Kennedy visited eastern Kentucky in February 1968 and held subcommittee hearings at Neon, he found an abundance of poverty. Eastern Kentucky wags observed that “we had a war on poverty and poverty won.” Even well-intentioned experts from Washington, D.C., failed to escape the biting humor of some educated regional residents who observed that the policy wonks had “gone to Harvard, turned left, and found themselves in Appalachia.” Many years later, Loyal Jones of Berea College and the CSM pointed out that white liberals involved with civil rights were left wanting when African Americans had taken over the movement. Appalachia, at the time, seemed ripe for the picking. Displaced activists came looking for something to occupy themselves in the southern mountains and took as their cause the plight of the region’s poor. An indigenous reformer of that era described Appalachia somewhat jadedly as “a land of convenience... recognize it when you want to, ignore it and get away with it.” Yet the words of one of the “roving pickets,” Charles “Buck” Maggard, offered a more hopeful interpretation. “If nothing else really lasting came out of [the 1960s],” he observed, “[at least] it’s not like it was in the ’50s, when everybody was scared to death to open their mouth[s] about anything.”


8. Wakefield, “In Hazard,” 209–17. Particularly helpful in understanding the labor chaos in eastern Kentucky from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s are the clipping files contained in the Everett Tharp Collection, Special Collections, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington (hereinafter cited as Tharp Collection, King Library, UK). Tharp, of Perry County, Kentucky, was involved with the LKLP (Letcher, Knott, Leslie, Perry counties) Community Action Council and served as recording secretary for the Appalachia Council for Full Employment, which evolved out of the “roving picket” movement.


9. Tharp Collection, files 7 and 8, King Library, UK. Union officials maintained that the failure of the small operators to pay the royalty on coal undercut the UMWA’s Welfare and Retirement Fund. In actuality, the UMWA’s on-going mismanagement had figured significantly. Years later, on January 7, 1972, in United States District Court, District of Columbia, Judge Gerhard A. Gesell, who had presided over the case of Blankenship v. Boyle, found that certain breaches of trust existed. Gesell ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in a class action suit brought against UMW President Tony Boyle and others for mismanagement of the union welfare fund. The court, as of April 18, 1971, placed damages at $11.5 million plus attorneys’ fees. See Willie Ray Blankenship et al. v. W.A. (Tony) Boyle et al., 337 F. Supp. 296 (1972); interview with Harry Hugel, conducted by author for Kentucky Oral History Commission Project, Charleston, South Carolina, June 26, 1999, tape in possession of author and duplicate in Special Collections, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington (hereinafter cited as King Library, UK). Hugel was the lead attorney in the case.


11. Tharp Collection, files 7 and 8, King Library, UK; see also transcript of oral history interview with Charles “Buck” Maggard, conducted by Kate Black assisted by Bill Cooper, Hazard, Kentucky, July 6, 1978, passim (hereinafter cited as Maggard interview), tape in King Library, UK; Anne Lewis Johnson with Buck Maggard, “Roving Pickers, 1961–1965,” [1991], Appalshop Film, Appalshop, Inc., Whitesburg, Kentucky.


16. A comprehensive history of the Appalachian Regional Commission remains to be written. Essential to such an undertaking is the voluminous Appalachian Regional Commission Collection, King Library, UK. Although it is limited in scope, Michael J. Bradshaw, The Appalachian Regional Commission: Twenty-five Years of Government Policy (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), is somewhat helpful. See interview with Loyal Jones, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky, March 15, 1991, conducted by Thomas J. Kiffmeyer for the University of Kentucky War on Poverty Oral History Project (hereinafter cited as Jones interview), tapes in King Library, UK.

17. Sorensen interview, JFK, 169.

18. Memorandum, Theodore C. Sorensen to Under Secretary Murphy, Secretary Wirtz, Secretary Celebrezze, Under Secretary Roosevelt, Director Gordon, Chairman Heller, Administrator Batt, Mr. Lee White, and Mr. Richard Donahue, October 28, 1963, Poverty (Eastern Kentucky), October 15–30, 1963, Subject Files, 1961–1964, Theodore C. Sorensen Papers, box 37, JFK Library (hereinafter cited as Sorensen Papers, JFK); see also Office of the White House Press Secretary, Statement by the President, November 13, 1963, Subject Files, 1961–1964, Sorensen Papers, box 37, JFK.


23. Lyndon B. Johnson: *Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President*, 114.


28. In a memorandum to Bob Kintner, November 24, 1966, LBJ noted that he wanted "to see what John Kennedy has said about a war on poverty in any of his speeches. Get all the quotes—ask Panzer to do it. Anything he said on a programmed war on poverty." See memorandum to Jake Jacobsen from Fred Panzer, November 26, 1966. Both of these documents are contained in Poverty Program, LBJ Papers, box 28, LBJ.

29. "The Office of Economic Opportunity during the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson," in and passim.


31. Douglass Cater to Sargent Shriver, October 3, 1966, White House Correspondence (1965-67), Community Services Administration, Community Action Program Office, Executive Correspondence, 1964-69, box 14, folder 2, Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Group 381, NACP.


33. Tharp, "The History, Goals, and Objectives of the Appalachian Committee for Full Employment," 1-3; appointment schedule of miners delegation, January 7-9, 1964; and Appalachian Committee for Full Employment By-Laws [draft, January 1964]; all contained in Tharp Collection, file 3, King Library, UK.

34. Interview with Loyal Jones, conducted by Thomas J. Kiffmeyer for the University of Kentucky Library War on Poverty Project, Berea, Kentucky, November 19, 1990, tapes in King Library, UK.

35. Evidence of ACVE activities and clippings pertaining to the "Happy Pappies" can be found in the Tharp Collection, King Library, UK; quotation from Anne Lewis Johnson with Buck Maggard, "Roving Picket, 1961-1965," [1991], Appalshop Film, Appalshop, Inc., Whitesburg, Kentucky.


37. Tharp Collection, files 9, King Library, UK; *Courier-Journal*, November 15, 1964.

38. "The Roving Picket," [Appalshop Film].


40. Maggard interview, King Library, UK.


42. James N. Adler to Lee C. White, November 29, 1963, and Office of the White House Press Secretary, Statement by the President [Lyndon B. Johnson], n.d. [1963], Subject Files, 1961-1964, Sorensen Papers, box 37, JFK.


45. Ogle interview, King Library, UK.

46. Ibid.


48. Ibid., 369-403.

49. Interview with Gordon K. Ebersole, conducted by author, Bowie, Maryland, May 29, 1996, tape and transcript in author's possession (hereinafter cited as Ebersole interview). A valuable set of documents relative to Ebersole's work in Appalachia can be found in the Congress for Appalachian Development/Gordon Ebersole Collection, Archives of Appalachia, Sherrod Library, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City; some of the papers in this collection are restricted.

50. Ebersole interview.

51. Quotations from "The Office of Economic Opportunity during the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson," 561-62.

52. Gillette, *Launching the War on Poverty*, 189-213; "The Office of Economic Opportunity during the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson," 544-607; Green's quotation from 603. After the Green Amendment, Community Action Programs and those who worked in them either conformed to local political expectations or ceased to exist. See Huey Perry, "They'll Cut Off Your Project": *A Mingo County Chronicle* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972).

53. Legislative Subject File, Appalachia: Kentucky Hearings, Robert F. Kennedy Senate Papers, box 7, JFK.


55. Ibid.

56. Ogle interview, King Library, UK.

57. Maggard interview, King Library, UK.