BLACK ECONOMIC RESEARCH CENTER RECORDS

The New York Public Library

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Boulevard
New York, New York 10037

PREFACE

This inventory was prepared as part of an archival preservation project to arrange, describe and catalog resources essential for the study of the post-Civil Rights period of African-American history. The necessary staff and supplies for the Archival Resources for the Study of the Post-Civil Rights Movement project were made available through a combination of funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the City and State of New York.

BLACK ECONOMIC RESEARCH CENTER RECORDS, 1969-1980. 18.8 linear feet (48 boxes).

Administrative History

The Black Economic Research Center (BERC) was founded by economist Robert S. Browne in 1969 in the aftermath of that year's Black Economic Development Conference and the publication of the Black Manifesto. Browne had concluded that the black community lacked sufficient data on matters of their own economic welfare, in part because the information that was available had been gathered primarily by government agencies, universities and foundations: the result was a deficiency regarding economic research and planning conducted from a national black perspective. To remedy this situation, Browne established BERC as a black controlled non-profit organization. Initial funding was provided by the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization and contracts from Cornell University and the Center for Community Economic Development. The primary source, however, was the Ford Foundation, which provided substantial grants covering operating support, salaries, and research from 1971 until 1978. Smaller grants were made available by the Cummins Engine Foundation, the Shalon Foundation, and the United Methodist Church, among others.

Robert S. Browne served as the executive director and president of the board of directors until 1977, at which time Daniel Mitchell assumed that leadership role. Members of the board of directors included Nathan Garret, Monique Garrity, Karl K. Gregory, Charles V. Hamilton, Mary B. Pierce McWilliams, Robert Van Lierop, and Charles Z. Williams. BERC shared an office in Harlem and administrative support with two other self-help organizations Browne founded, the Twenty-First Century Foundation and the Emergency Land Fund, until the latter's move to Atlanta.

To conduct the needed research on the black community BERC employed a team of economists over the years, including Charles Betsy, Barbara Britton, Julian Ellison, James Fortune, Karl Gregory, Lloyd Hogan, Joseph Huttie, Daniel Mitchell, Barbara These economists conducted research Phillips, and David Swinton. on the economic status of African Americans, and developed alternative strategies or models to improve economic conditions in the jobs, business and industrial sectors. Findings were published in BERC's Occasional Papers series and The Review of Black Political Economy, also published by BERC. The journal, featuring articles by black and white economists, most of them not associated with BERC, addressed the questions of developing strategies for the economic development of African Americans and their communities, data compilation and empirical research, and published policy studies. Browne was the originator of the

journal and served as its first editor until Lloyd Hogan assumed this role.

The Review was conceived as a vehicle for bringing about change by promoting viable economic development alternatives in black communities. It enjoyed national and international attention; subscriptions and requests for articles came from individuals, colleges, universities and libraries across the United States and abroad. Because of its success and the significance of this forum for the exchange of ideas, Browne wanted the publication to continue after BERC's funds were exhausted. He therefore, made arrangements for the transfer of ownership to the Atlanta University Center and the National Economic Association, effective July 1977. Lloyd Hogan, editor while the journal was published by BERC, continued in this capacity under the journal's new owners. BERC's specialized library, consisting of books on issues of black economic development, was donated to Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia in the late 1970's.

The Occasional Papers series reflected the research of BERC's In the early to mid-1970's the following papers were published and widely distributed: Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black-Owned Land in the Rural South; Mississippi Property Tax: Special Burden for the Poor; Aggregate Personal Income of the Black Population in the U.S.A., 1947-1980; The Petroleum Industry in Africa and America; The Potential of the Black-Owned Retail Sector in the U.S. Economy; and Annotated Bibliography of Black Income and Wealth. Additionally, BERC assembled a "Black Job Outlook Guide" which was a specialized offshoot of the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook. Nearly all of the publications BERC produced were concerned with the black economic situation in the United States; the publication of Africanization of Personnel in the Mining Industry of Selected African Nations was the only work to deal with Africa exclusively. Research on the latter publication was conducted with a grant from the African American Scholars Conference.

One of BERC's major programs was its work on black land ownership in the South. Land ownership was considered one of the linchpins of black economic self-sufficiency, thus by providing technical and other assistance Browne believed BERC could help black landowners hold onto their land. In the study, Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black-Owned Land in the Rural South, it was disclosed that loss of black-owned land had accelerated since 1950. In order to reverse this trend Browne created the Emergency Land Fund whose goals were to assist black landowners retain their present acreage and to help other blacks acquire land or develop underutilized land already in their possession. Additionally, BERC obtained a series of contractual grants for specific projects that fulfilled requests made by local organizations. Among the organizations which BERC aided were:

John's Island Rural Mission, an agency designed to assist the very poor on John's Island, one of the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina; Black Land Services, which provided legal assistance to prevent loss of land by blacks; Mound Bayou, Mississippi, BERC aided in the town's projects involving housing, a hospital, and government reorganization; and South Rural Development Task Force, whose purpose was the development of small industry in the rural South.

BERC also provided technical assistance to community, private, and governmental agencies interested in black economic development. In some cases this assistance consisted of aiding with the preparation of funding proposals and suggesting likely funding sources. In a few instances, BERC actually sought funding for projects it deemed especially worthwhile. BERC staff also assisted organizations to plan conferences, seminars and staff briefings containing a component on black economic development, and on ways to organize a Minority Enterprise Small Business Company (MESBIC).

Following the end of the Ford Foundation grant received in 1976 which allowed BERC to function until 1977-1978, the secretary who was shared with the Center's sister organization, the Twenty-First Century Foundation, handled basic operations. BERC closed its operations totally in March 1980.

Scope and Content

The Black Economic Research Center Records date from the founding of the Center in 1969 until 1980 with the bulk dating from 1970 through 1976-1977 when BERC was most active. The records document BERC's activities as well as the involvement of Robert Browne in numerous economic organizations. Although the primary function of BERC was to conduct economic research to aid black organizations and individuals, research data, notes and memoranda concerning studies BERC conducted were not included in the collection; therefore the records are stronger in its administrative functions than its programmatic aspects.

BERC records encompass administrative files consisting of minutes of meetings and correspondence of the board of directors, legal papers including contracts for work performed by BERC for various institutions, information regarding funding for BERC's operations and other financial records including investment and tax information, and files related to the staff. A chronological file consisting primarily of outgoing letters from Browne pertains to BERC's projects as well as Browne's professional activities apart from BERC. A significant component of the collection lies in the research papers and studies written by BERC economists; there is also correspondence relating to The Review of Black Political Economy. An extensive general file contains correspondence relating to BERC functions and Browne's professional activities, and a reference file covers such topics as minority businesses, education, banking, churches and black organizations.

The collection is divided into five series and five subseries. The titles, dates and box numbers are as follows:

Title	Dates	Box Numbers
Board of Directors Administration	1970-1976	1
General	1969-1979	1
Financial	1969-1981	2 - 4
Staff	1972-1980	4
Chronological File	1970-1980	5-7
Writings		
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The Review of Black Political Economy	1974-1980	10
General File		11-48

The BOARD OF DIRECTORS SERIES, 1969-1976 (.1 lin. Ft.) consists of lists of board members and their curriculum vitae, minutes of meetings and correspondence referring to day-to-day activities of the research center.

Within the ADMINISTRATION, 1969-1981 (1.3 lin. ft.) series the General subseries 1969-1979 (.2 lin. ft.) contains a draft to establish the research center; background information about BERC detailing its purpose, organization, facilities; annual reports; a report by Browne regarding the closing of BERC, 1976; and legal papers including contracts, and memoranda. The subseries Financial, 1969-1981 (.7 lin. ft.) consists of correspondence, proposals, and reports to funding sources for BERC's daily operations. Additional financial records include auditor's reports, bank statements, investment records, and tax

information. The **Staff** subseries, 1972-1980 (.1 lin. ft.) includes curriculum vitae, dates of employment and job titles for BERC's professional staff.

The series CHRONOLOGICAL FILE, 1970-1980 (1 lin. ft.) consists principally of outgoing letters written by Browne in his official capacity as executive director of BERC as well as letters generated as a result of Browne's prominence as a black economist, inviting him to speak at conferences and to participate as a board member for a variety of organizations. Included are Browne's letters to congressmen and foreign government officials (notably Arab leaders) regarding black related issues, letters to organizations pertaining to black economic and political subjects, letters to the Emergency Land Fund in Atlanta, and requests for publications to build the BERC There are also memoranda to the staff, correspondence regarding articles written by BERC staff, and letters written by James Fortune, the assistant director. Other correspondence pertains to Browne's nationwide speaking engagements and participation in seminars and conferences sponsored by numerous organizations, many of which he was a member or on the board of directors. Additional letters deal with Browne's personal There are also lists of incoming correspondents. business.

The subseries, Papers and Studies, 1970-1977 (.8 lin. ft.) consists of manuscripts and printed versions of articles written by BERC staff members. The research material and statistics which led to the final version of the papers are not in the collection, however. Several studies were published as Occasional Papers; others appeared in The Review of Black
Political Economy. Represented among the economists who authored a number of articles are Robert Browne, Julian Ellison, Jr., Norman Girvan, and Daniel Mitchell. The Occasional Papers and issues of The Review were requested by hundreds of individuals, organizations, and institutions, however only a sampling of the request letters for the Occasional Papers has been kept.

The subseries **The Review of Black Political Economy**, 1976-1980 (.4 lin. ft.) contains correspondence primarily between Browne as editor of the journal and the publisher and subscribers, among others. Also included is the memorandum regarding the transfer of ownership of <u>The Review</u>.

The most extensive series in the collection is the **GENERAL FILE**, **1969-1980 (15.2 lin. ft.)** which includes files primarily on organizations with a black economic or black empowerment focus. Types of organizational material incorporated in these files include memoranda, minutes, proposals, notes, press releases, and other material dealing with conferences and programs sponsored by the organizations. A number of research studies are in these files and a separate listing of these papers has been prepared,

(page). The correspondence contains information about the organizations' activities and/or BERC's or Browne's relationship to it. Browne continued to correspond with many organizations after 1976 when BERC was no longer active, as he maintained his contacts as an influential economist. His professional advice was freely offered regarding proposals, studies, and evaluations, and his opinions about contemporary economic issues were made available. Browne's arrangement scheme has been maintained.

Types of organizational material incorporated in these files include memoranda, minutes, proposals, notes, press releases, and other material dealing with conferences and programs sponsored by the organizations. The wide range of black economic issues on which BERC provided assistance encompass preservation of black owned land in the South, loan of funds to black communities, black businesses (through the Office of Minority Business Enterprise), and promotion of economic activities in Africa. Some of the many organizations and government agencies represented in the file are: Center for Community Economic Development (BERC aided this organization in its study regarding the need for equity and loan funds to further economic development in low-income communities, Browne also served as a trustee); Congressional Budget Office (Browne served on the Economic Adviors Panel); Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA - promoted African research and training activities in economic and social development in Africa -- BERC was a member organization); DJB Foundation (supported various African-American organizations); Harlem Commonwealth Council (Browne served as a member of the board of directors); Minority Enterprise Small Business Investment Companies (MESBIC's provide corporations chartered by a state and licensed by the Small Business Administration with the opportunity to invest capital in socially or economically disadvantaged small businesses); National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (contains many papers relating to economic issues); National Black Convention; National Business Leaque (includes information about the Railroad Reorganization Act with contracts allocated to black businessmen to improve the nation's railroads); National Economic Association (formerly the Caucus of Black Economists, the organization supported the professional development of black economists, Browne was also on the board of directors); National Council of Churches (held conferences dealing with the Mississippi Delta, Angola and South Africa); Overseas Development Council (Browne served on the board of directors); Penn Community Services in Frogmore, South Carolina (BERC helped fund its Black Land Services which became an affiliate of the Emergency Land Fund Project); and the Southern Land Bank (consists of correspondence and proposals by several Southern organizations whose goals included black economic development).

Within the General File series there are also subject files and

files related to individual black economists and to geographic These include Africa (includes information on politics and rural and economic development of Angola, Rhodesia, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe); housing and blacks in the housing construction industry): inquiries (requests for information from BERC); lists (includes quests and mailing lists for black clergy in the Episcopal Church, black journals, and school superintendents); Parren Mitchell (U.S. Representative from Maryland, who was instrumental in influencing the House Committee on Small Business to create a subcommittee which had authority to deal with the problems of minority businesses and with legislation designed to aid minority businessmen); Jesse Morris (BERC staff member at the Southern Land and Recreational Developers in Jackson, Mississippi); Mound Bayou, Mississippi (largest all-black town in the United States, BERC provided technical assistance to maintain a hospital and factory and funded a land-saving project); and South Carolina Sea Islands, especially John's Island (includes proposals to improve economic conditions).

Note:

The personal papers of Robert S. Browne and the records for the Twenty-First Century Foundation are housed as separate collections in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center.

Provenance

Gift of Robert S. Browne, 1985 SCM 85-42

Processed by Janice Quinter June 1996

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9 1 2	"Mississippi Property Tax: Special Burden for the Poor," 1973 James Fortune, Jr., 1974-1975
9 3	"Africanization of Personnel in the Mining Industry of Selected African Nations" by Robert S. Browne and Norman Girvan, 1974
4 5 6	Julian Ellison, Jr., 1974-1976 "Black Job Outlook Guide," 1974-1975 "Business and Labor Education Programs: A Survey and Analysis," 1975

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