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*Valuing Our Past, Creating Our Future: The Founding of the  
Urban Appalachian Council* by Thomas E. Wagner and Phillip J.  
Obermiller (review)

Paul David Nelson

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I find Duncan's book to be one of the most exciting examinations of Appalachian poverty yet produced. Part of the reason for my enthusiasm is the obvious depth of primary research that supports the essay and gives the reader confidence in the conclusions the author reaches. A more significant reason for my positive reaction is the comparative structure of the book. By offering the Mississippi delta and New England Appalachia as bases for comparison, Duncan is able to offer new insights into the social and economic structure of central southern Appalachia. In addition to these analytical points, I agree with her conclusion that a strong civic culture and a commitment to quality education are both essential if southern Appalachia is to break from the negative cycle in which it is trapped. What we need now is to find a way to insure that the dialogue Duncan has begun will continue and that all segments of mountain society are involved.

—Gordon B. McKinney

Thomas E. Wagner and Phillip J. Obermiller. *Valuing Our Past, Creating Our Future: The Founding of the Urban Appalachian Council*. Berea, KY: Berea College Press, 1999. 106 pages. Paperback, \$13.00.

The Urban Appalachian Council of Cincinnati, Ohio, is an agency devoted to advocacy and service for the Appalachian migrant community in that city. The Council came into existence in December, 1973, after years of genesis, when its organizers concluded that the Cincinnati Human Relations Committee, with which they were working through the affiliated Appalachian Committee, could not be an effective vehicle for Appalachian organization and separated from it. Until that time, the Appalachian Committee had been the voice of Appalachian community concerns in Cincinnati. But the Appalachian Committee had no legal existence, and problems with this arrangement were becoming clear to leaders such as Michael Maloney and Stuart Faber. The Committee's activities were growing, and there was a need to seek independent funding outside the CHRC, which "was not proactive on many Appalachian issues" (p. 85). Hence, the Urban Appalachian Council became independent and has since played a role in the Appalachian community of Cincinnati.

The Council's efforts, as articulated by Maloney, were always guided by a "spiritual element": the cultivation of cultural awareness among not only the Appalachians themselves but also the whole community. This goal was to be accomplished by political advocacy

expressed through academic research and community organizing , by improving welfare and health services, and by educational reform. In 1979, the Council was almost destroyed by internal staff dissensions over the direction and form of community organizing, but under the leadership of Louise Spiegel, the board president, it was saved from disintegration. In the 1980s, the Council under Maureen Sullivan, executive director, became a stable agency, emphasizing job training, education and research in eight Appalachian neighborhoods in Cincinnati. According to the authors, the Council has made a difference in the lives of the city's Appalachians by dignifying them in their own eyes and by making the greater Cincinnati community aware of "the richness and variety of Appalachian life" (p. 93).

Thomas E. Wagner and Phillip J. Obermiller are both members of the Urban Appalachian Council's Research Committee, and they have written a frankly celebratory book about the founding of their organization. Going into the history of the Appalachian migrant community in Cincinnati, they delineate all permutations of Appalachian advocacy organization in the twentieth century. This does not make for very exciting reading and one sometimes gets lost plowing through the list of names of persons and committees. Also, the book is at times a bit too celebratory. But the authors have written a useful survey of the genesis and growth of Cincinnati's Appalachian community advocacy programs, culminating in what they see as the successful Urban Appalachian Council.

—Paul David Nelson