

# The Emergence of the Black Economic Research Center and The Review of Black Political Economy: 1969–1972

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**Abstract** This essay discusses the legacy of Robert Browne in the founding of the Black Economic Research Center (BERC), *The Review of Black Political Economy*, and the Caucus of Black Economists and its evolution into the National Economic Association. The launching of BERC occurred within a period of far-reaching social change and the Vietnam War era. During this time, Robert Browne also was a national leader of the Vietnam anti-war movement and one of the first public intellectuals to establish a link between the civil rights movement and the peace movement. An argument is developed that this background provided as much impetus to Robert Browne for the creation of BERC and *The Review* as did the black nationalist programs and conferences of that era. During his eleven year tenure as Director at BERC, he pioneered ground-breaking research on the status of black-owned land in the south; consulted with community development corporations, black-owned businesses and banks; and prompted innovations in modern black philanthropy through the establishment of the Twenty-First Century Foundation. The origin and justification for *The Review of Black Political Economy* and the early activities and meetings of the Caucus and NEA are emphasized. In addition, an effort is made to include an enumeration of the earliest contributors to BERC, the NEA, and *The Review* – many of whom have not been mentioned in previous retrospectives.

**Keywords** National Economic Association · Political economy · Black Economic Research Center

While the term has experienced renewed popularity and usage, Robert Browne was the first true “political economist” that I personally came to know, work with, and admire more than thirty-eight years ago. His writings, interests, and deeply held convictions covered what ordinarily would seem to be an exceedingly wide range of

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fields and issues. His interests and career spanned foreign service in Southeast Asia from 1955–1961; national leadership in the Vietnam peace movement starting in early 1960s; and social activism, advocacy and constructive criticism of the black nationalist movement beginning in 1967. Starting in 1969, he founded the Black Economic Research Center, served as the founding publisher of *The Review of Black Political Economy*, and participated as co-founder of the Caucus of Black Economists and the National Economic Association. From 1980–1982, he served as the first Director of the African Development Bank, and later was Staff Director of the Subcommittee on International Development, Finance, and Trade in the US Congress from 1986–1991. Between these appointments, Robert Browne was Senior Research Fellow of African Studies at Howard University. After semi-retirement in 1993, he served as an economic advisor to the Congressional Black Caucus, Aficare, and the Institute for Policy Studies. However complex and multifarious his journey, Robert Browne's purpose and mode of thought remained consistent throughout his career.

This essay will focus on the early years of Robert Browne's eleven-year tenure as Director and founder of the Black Economic Research Center and publisher of *The Review of Black Political Economy*. During this time, Bob was widely recognized as an authentic activist-scholar who was totally committed to social change and the promotion of black economic advancement during a controversial period of extraordinary social upheaval in the USA.

## Historical context

The nascent period of the Black Economic Research Center (BERC) and its principle publishing organ, *The Review of Black Political Economy* can be clearly demarcated as the years 1969–1972. This period came on the heels of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. Among many of the black intelligentsia, this period continued the long standing controversy between integrationist, civil rights strategies and programs promoting Black Nationalism. Also during the late 1960s and 1970s, there was tension stemming from the collapse of meaningful school integration and busing across every urban area in the country. In Brooklyn and in Harlem, where BERC was located, there had been a nationally publicized series of intense confrontations between black community activists and the American Federation of Teachers over community control of schools. Institutions and conventional practices were being challenged by black and white social activists and self-styled revolutionaries almost on a daily basis. Challenges to traditional forms of music, art, literature and literary criticism seemed to be the norm and not the exception. And if such a thing were possible, these issues began to recede as the forefront issues of the time with the all-pervading impact of the war in Vietnam. This was the era in which the Black Economic Research Center and *The Review of Black Political Economy* were conceived and launched.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The tenor of the times and its impact on BERC are discussed in Browne (1993).

Robert Browne served for 6 years in Southeast Asia, but it was most notably during 1958–1961 while serving as trade advisor and Foreign Service officer in Cambodia and Vietnam that, I believe, Robert Browne’s public foray into black activism and radical economic thought began to crystallize (see Browne 1996, pp. 52–53) While he knew and worked with many of the leading white leftist intellectuals and progressive religious groups of the time, his overall deep distrust of war-time government policy and white America’s inability to fairly treat and work in the interests of people of color, both in Asia and America, led him to advocate reparations and, for a short time, some of the programs associated with the black separatist movement. Bob would frequently make the connection:

Whether entitled reparations or disguised by another name, resources on a scale paralleling those dispersed in Viet Nam will have to be transferred to the black community if we expect to correct existing inequities. A significant sum will be required merely to counter the enormous raids on the public treasury being perpetrated by white America’s establishment in its own behalf. I refer here to oil depletion allowances, agriculture subsidies, public utility privileges, cost overruns and other financial shenanigans conspired in by big government and its favored defense contractors, political supporters, etc.—to say nothing of rectifying our exclusion from the 19th century welfare programs like the Homestead Act and the celebrated give aways to the railroads and other establishment institutions of white America. (Browne 1970a)

His disturbing firsthand observations of the persecution of Buddhists monks and the heavy-handed, misguided policy that the USA was pursuing in that region riveted his deep concerns on the need to both help establish an anti-war movement and address the social and economic inequities facing black Americans. On returning to the USA in 1961, he emerged as one of the first major intellectuals to meet and warn various American groups about the dangerous path the USA was taking toward war in Vietnam. In 1967, during a fact-finding tour in Vietnam, the Buddhist community appealed to Bob Browne to enlist the support of Martin Luther King to take a stand against the Vietnam War. In that same year, Dr. King expressed his opposition to the war and delivered a powerful analysis of the link between the civil rights movement and the peace movement. A reading of Robert Browne’s personal correspondence with leading religious and peace groups during this period confirms the prominence that Robert Browne held in the establishment of the peace movement in the USA.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Robert S. Browne, *Collected Papers, 1962-1968, 1971, 1975*, at Swarthmore College. This five box collection of Robert Browne’s papers covers the persecution of Buddhists in Vietnam, proposals for peaceful alternatives to war in Viet Nam, and his involvement with the National Conference of New Politics, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the Universities Committee on Problems of War and Peace of Greater New York, and the Ad Hoc Group of 5000 College and University Professors for Viet Nam. See also *Robert S. Browne Papers 1957-1995*, Box 14, Folders 1–14 at the Schomburg Library, New York, New York. These materials also outline Robert Browne’s role in launching the college teach-in movement in 1965. Among the many people with whom Bob worked in the peace movement were Saul Alinsky, Richard Barnet, Cesar Chavez, Noam Chomsky, William Slone Coffin, Jr., Ivanhoe Donaldson, Douglas Dowd, Dick Gregory, Margaret Meade, Benjamin Spoke, I.F. Stone, and Andrew Young.

Most disturbing to Bob was the disproportionate deployment of African Americans drafted to fight other people of color in Southeast Asia. His continued interest in Vietnam was underscored by the fact that he was one of the first Americans asked to visit Ho Chi Minh City in 1978, just 3 years after the US withdrawal in 1975. To a large measure, this issue helped shape much of his later positions and writings. Though Bob would often refer to the emergence of the new black activism and the black student movement as a motivating force, I feel, nonetheless, that it was primarily from the perspective of the peace movement, and his troubling Asian experience, that Robert Browne began earnestly advocating black economic development through compensatory justice and wealth generation via sustained black institution building:

The two decades of the 1960s and 1970s constituted a period of domestically-based activity for me, but my work during that period was greatly enriched by the years I had spent abroad. There can be no doubt that the particular focus which I brought to the issue of black economic development was strongly influenced by my experience in working closely with the government of Cambodia....<sup>3</sup>

While working with Bob Browne during the first days of Black Economic Research Center, it was clear to me that the primary, original impetus to establish BEREC came out of these complex events and controversial dynamics.

### **Establishing the Black Economic Research Center**

The Black Economic Research Center (BERC) opened its doors in October 1969. Though not explicitly stated in its platform of demands, BEREC was one of the major outcomes of the National Black Economic Development Conference held in Detroit six months earlier in April 1969. Robert Browne was the keynote speaker and chief economic advisor to the Conference, and viewed the establishment of BEREC as implementing one of the goals of the Conference. The purpose of the Conference was to develop new forms of economics along cooperative lines as a basis for African Americans gaining control of their own economic destiny. The other major outcome of the conference was James Forman's *Black Manifesto*, which issued a demand for reparations to African Americans for payment of unpaid labor dating from slavery. According to Forman's Manifesto, reparations were to start with white churches and synagogues. The money was to be used to establish a southern land bank, job training centers, a university, and cooperative businesses between the USA and Africa.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.58.

<sup>4</sup> For a more complete description of the *Black Manifesto*, and the National Black Economic Development Conference see *The Review of Black Political Economy* 1:1, 1969, pp. 36-44. The Manifesto called for \$500 million for reparations to the black community. At the time, this sum was estimated to be \$20 per black capita in the United States. Also see the summary from the New York Public Library Digital Library Collections at <http://digilibnypl.org/dynaweb/ead/scm/scmgrsbr>

The creativity and remarkable originality of Robert Browne's thinking were clearly evident in the establishment of The Black Economic Research Center, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, The Emergency Land Fund, and the Twenty First Century Foundation—all within a 2-year period. These institutions inexorably developed like ever widening ripples in a pond that eventually became important tributaries, permanent points of reference, and modes of thought for many black political economists and social activists for years to come.

Robert Browne's advocacy for maintaining black land ownership and expanding the black-owned wealth base was lodged in the conventional relationship between capital accumulation and economic growth: "The dilemma of the black community is that it finds itself in the midst of a capitalistic society but virtually without capital."<sup>5</sup> In Bob's view, an absolute requisite for wealth generation in black rural and urban America was the centrality of sustained institution development: While "skills, commitment, expertise, money, and a host of other intangible resources must be present...it is precisely these resources which can best be mobilized via the creation of appropriate institutions."<sup>6</sup> For Bob Browne, development of human resources and physical infrastructure all required, at root, wealth that could be employed for the collective good of the community. For example, Bob Browne often reflected that the Canadian economy had roughly the same magnitude of income as black America, but that Canadians owned their land, productive assets and resources as a basis for economic expansion. (Browne 1975) In extending his ideas, his work reflected a Rawlsian concept of justice based on initial endowments: Black youth are born into a country whose wealth and natural resources are already owned and directed by others, and there are no effective mechanisms within the system to correct or abate these inequalities.<sup>7</sup> Given this, "a massive pool of genuine black-owned equity capital is thus the missing element in an effective strategy of black economic development."<sup>8</sup> Consistent with this view, Bob founded the Twenty-First Century Fund in 1971 to accumulate an equity capital fund for community development projects, along with the Emergency Land Fund in 1971 to help preserve land assets of African Americans in the South. Today, the work of the Emergency Land Fund (ELF) is being continued through the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund with whom it merged in 1985.

In 1973, the ELF conducted the first major research on the decline of black-owned land in the South. The report entitled, *Only Six Million Acres: The Decline of Black Owned Land in the Rural South* documented the 6.5 million acre decline in

<sup>5</sup> Robert Browne. "Institution Building for Urban Revitalization," *The Review of Black Political Economy* 10:1 (Fall, 1979) p.36. It is important to note that Bob's strong, veritably unshakable, position on the preeminence of capital accumulation in economic development came directly from the work of Sir Arthur Lewis. Bob often spoke and wrote of his deep admiration for Arthur Lewis' work, his prominence in the economics profession and his influence on Bob's own development as an economist. In Bob's personal correspondence, he carefully notes every opportunity he had to visit and talk with Arthur Lewis at Princeton. On two occasions, Bob and Glenn Dixon, who was a Princeton economics undergraduate student at the time, talked at length with Dr. Lewis on issues of economic development.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of original position as a basis for establishing economic justice is given in Rawls (1971).

<sup>8</sup> Browne. "Institution Building for Urban Revitalization," p.40. Similar ideas also in "Wealth Distribution and Its Impact on Minorities," *The Review of Black Political Economy* 4:4 (Summer, 1974).

black-owned farmland, from 12 million to 5.5 million acres, which occurred from 1950 to 1969. The document not only discussed the impact of southern black out-migration, urbanization, economies of scale and mechanization replacement of sharecropping, but also the more controversial legal practices associated with tax sales, partition sales of heirs property and foreclosures as tools for eradicating black land ownership. Also outlined were the activist interventions that ELF was prepared to undertake regarding financial and legal assistance in combating these trends. Reports filed in this report included contributions from Michael Figures, Victor McTeer, Lewis Myers, Judith Bourne, Stephen Walker, John Cooper, and Barbara Cooper. In 1981, ELF conducted additional research on the absconding of black-owned land in the rural south through questionable practices on heir property.<sup>9</sup>

The Twenty First Century Foundation was established with an anonymous one million dollar gift that provided the Foundation with an endowment base to fund innovative community organizations working on issues in school reform, youth development, community empowerment and political participation. Since its inception, The Twenty First Century Foundation has distributed approximately \$2 million to more than 350 community-based groups.

The first major source of funding for BERC involved the religious community although Bob was often circumspect regarding the identity of specific individuals:

...in one of those inexplicable mysteries of human experience, an unsolicited inquiry was directed to me asking if I might have an interest in launching an economic research center for blacks if funds were to be made available for such a purpose. (It was somewhat more complicated than this, involving a conference on black economic development and the Black Manifesto of James Forman but essentially it was a spontaneous offer....) (Browne 1996, p. 54)

Nonetheless, if we stitch together Bob Browne's statement in the first issue of *The Review* along with his personal correspondence and my own personal recollections of discussions with Bob, a fairly clear picture emerges. Foremost, the funding for BERC grew out of discussions stemming from the Black Manifesto's appeal to the National Council of Churches. Bob acknowledged that BERC became operational in October 1969 after obtaining a grant from the Inter-Religious Foundation for Community Organization, with smaller supplementary grants from Cornell University and the Center for Community Economic Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts. (Browne 1970b) More specifically, the funding from Inter-Religious Foundation for Community Organization emerged from discussions at Riverside Church with The Presbytery of New York City within their Church and Society Committee.<sup>10</sup> The Cornell grant was undoubtedly through the assistance of James

<sup>9</sup> See "The Impact of Heir Property on Black Rural Land Tenure in the Southeastern Region of the United States." Emergency Land Fund, (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 1981). In 1990, the merged entity, The Federation of Southern Cooperatives would successfully lead efforts to pass the First Minority Rights Bill (section 2501) to provide technical assistance to black farmers and would later file the first lawsuit against the federal government on behalf of all black farmers in conjunction with the Farmers Legal Action Group.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Kirk Sale (9-10-69) indicating follow-through with Jim Forman and Riverside Church. July–Sept, 1969, stemming from the Black Manifesto to the National Council of Churches. Also, Oct. 2, 1969: Further correspondence w/ The Presbytery of New York City within their Church and Society Committee.

Turner, Director of Black Studies at Cornell. Later, the Ford Foundation became one of the major underwriters to BEREC.

I raise this issue, in part, because the religious association also enabled Bob to acquire the building to house BEREC. Throughout its existence, from 1969–1981, BEREC was housed at 112 West 120th Street in Harlem, New York. The building itself was perfectly suited for the task—a very solid, roomy, three-story brownstone that included a working basement area for offices as a functioning forth level. The building actually originally belonged to an official of the African Methodist Episcopal church. The AME conference had agreed to liberally lease the site to Bob for the purpose of housing the new research center. What relation this may have had with the concurrent negotiations with the Church and Society Committee and the Inter-Religious Foundation for Community Organizations, I do not know. I do remember accompanying Bob Browne when he discussed the final details concerning the transfer of the building with the AME bishop who was, then, living at the site.

The first individuals to enter the brownstone once it was transferred from the AME ministry were Bob Browne, Daniel (Danny) Mitchell and I. Danny was one of the original organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) emanating from the Atlanta University Center institutions of Clark College, Spelman College, and Morehouse College in 1960. Danny would be the longest active staff person at BEREC—working with Bob for 10 years. The three of us spent several days moving furniture and boxes among the three floors to get ready for business. I should perhaps mention the name William Sales here. Bill was a fellow graduate student in political science at Columbia who recommended Bob Browne interview me for a position at BEREC. Bill later went on to serve as Chair and Professor of African American Studies at Seton Hall University. Although Bill has, to my knowledge, never been mentioned in any of the BEREC retrospectives over the years, he was someone that Bob Browne often relied on to help think through strategies and personnel during the early years of BEREC.

During the first three years of BEREC's existence other staff persons, economists, and consultants included Jesse Morris, Alvin Puryear, Roger Williams, Maurice Emeka, and Bob's most trusted and capable administrative assistant, Mary Walker. Especially noteworthy was the stalwart contribution of Lloyd Hogan, who helped with many of Bob's formulations and who conducted significant research projects. In the early years of BEREC, an exceptional pool of undergraduate interns, including Julienne Malveaux and Stephanie Wilson, would help on projects. I effectively left BEREC in the fall of 1972 to begin a short stint at Howard University. Around that time, two important contributors arrived—David Swinton and Joe Brooks—David as Director of Research and Joe as Director of the Emergency Land Fund (ELF). Another important staff person was Esther Silver whose duties included contributing as the editorial manager for *The Review*.

With the mission remaining in place, the goals and objectives of BEREC quickly became increasingly relevant and operational just two months after its opening. In New York, in December 1969, a fundamental alteration would occur both within the economics profession among academically trained black economists and within the American Economic Association (AEA). During the annual Allied Social Science Association meetings a new cohort of professional black economists gathered to

establish the Caucus of Black Economists. The purpose of the Caucus was to assert the importance of professionally trained black economists in conducting research on the economic problems and public policy affecting African Americans, and to gain the support of the AEA for launching programs to increase the supply of black economists.

Bob was very impressed with the quality of economists and thinkers involved in this effort. Immediately after the Caucus meeting, Bob Browne wrote in a letter to Lamond Godwin, who was then involved with black rural development efforts and who had earlier in his college career participated in SNCC with Danny Mitchell: “A black caucus met and it was really inspiring to be with so many beautiful black guys who are interested in Economics. The idea of the Center and the journal was extremely well received.” In this letter, Bob also expressed a desire to move forward on southern rural efforts that later emerged as the Emergency Land Fund.<sup>11</sup>

The Caucus, of course, later evolved into the National Economic Association. Bob Browne was among the leadership group that established the NEA. The leadership vanguard and earliest participants of the Caucus included:

Chairman, Marcus Alexis (University of Rochester and UC Berkeley)  
 Associate Chairman, Thaddeus Spratlen (UCLA)  
 Vice Chairman, Flournoy Coles (Fisk University)  
 Vice Chairman, Robert Vowels (Atlanta University)  
 Secretary, Robert Browne (Black Economic Research Center)  
 Richard America (Office of Urban Programs, UC Berkeley)  
 Bernard Anderson (Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania)  
 Robert Bell (Pillsbury Company)  
 Herrington Bryce (US Department of Agriculture)  
 H. R. Carby-Samuels (University of Notre Dame)  
 Cleveland Chandler (Morgan State College)  
 Frank Davis (Howard University)  
 Rawle Farley (SUNY, Brockport)  
 Karl Gregory (Oakland University)  
 Donald Harris (University of Wisconsin)  
 Charles Z. Wilson (UCLA)

As a young graduate student at Columbia, while also working at BERC with Bob Browne, I was afforded the opportunity to sit in on several of the strategy and brainstorming sessions during these historic meetings. From that date, many of these scholars frequently met at BERC to plan new initiatives and programs for the budding organization. In addition to Bob Browne, of course, I recall that the most frequent and active Caucus participants who met regularly at BERC were Marcus Alexis, Richard America, Bernard Anderson, Karl Gregory, Donald Harris, Charles Z. Wilson and Thad Spratlen. Witnessing the chemistry, mutual respect, quick wit and tremendous talent of this group was nothing short of amazing. This leadership

<sup>11</sup> *Papers of Robert S. Browne*. Letter to Lamond Godwin, December 31, 1969. Lamond Godwin would later become a Vice President of American Express Bank and a consultant to Jesse Jackson’s Operation Push. Lamond would also later become a major force on the Board of Trustees of Clark College, his alma mater, and would form with Carl Ware the leadership cadre to oversee the merger of Clark College and Atlanta University to form Clark Atlanta University in 1987.

cadre informed the genesis and program parameters for all future NEA programs. It is this group who effectively started the NEA-AEA Summer Minority Program and provided the rationale for the AEA Pipeline Project and the AEA Committee on Minorities in the Economics Profession. Collectively, their activities were adroitly, professionally and boldly executed. Another agreement that quickly emerged from the early BERC meetings was the establishment of *The Review of Black Political Economy* as the official journal of the NEA. As Bob later reflected: “The creation of the Caucus meshed neatly with my plans for BERC, and a useful working relationship was quickly established...I conferred intensively with Caucus members regarding my plans to establish a quarterly periodical during the coming year” (Browne 1993, p. 18).

The establishment of the Caucus of Black Economists, and later the National Economic Association, was a very welcomed and constructive development for *The Review of Black Political Economy*, the Black Economic Research Center, and for the professional development of black economists in general. Thirty-eight years later, it is difficult to convey to a new generation of black economists the full historic importance of the collaboration of the Caucus of Black Economists with the work of BERC. Never in the history of the AEA had 65 black economists and economic writers gathered to present and discuss papers and programs to increase the supply of black economists. As was true with many of the black economists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Bob Browne felt rather isolated and unacknowledged by the economics profession. While Bob graduated with honors in economics from the University of Illinois in 1943, completed the MBA in Finance at the University of Chicago in 1947, and later focused on international development in graduate school, Bob, during this time, knew of only one other African American who had majored in economics (Dunbar McLaurin, Ph.D., Illinois, 1943) “and the picture changed little over the next twenty years” (Browne 1996, p. 56). After being among the first African Americans to complete an MBA in 1947, Bob was effectively told that he would not be able to get a position utilizing his degree:

As I approached the conclusion of my work on the MBA at the University of Chicago, I sought the placement officer’s assistance in finding me a position. After several weeks of unresponsiveness, she finally called me in her office and stated quite frankly that she found it impossible to arrange a single interview for me—not with a bank, nor an insurance company, nor a brokerage firm, nor with any other type of financial institution. There were no blacks in the financial industry, she said, and the thinking seemed to be that, hopefully, there never would be. With graduation only a few days away... she embarrassedly mentioned a slot at a small Negro college in New Orleans (Browne 1996, p. 50).

As Bob would frequently recount, his first regular employment and first academic position at Dillard University resulted more from racism than a desire for an academic career.

Among the goals cited in the proposal to establish BERC, increasing the number and relevance of black economists was one of the key goals within its mission statement. Given the tenor of the times, it was inevitable that the mission and goals for BERC would later look very similar in spirit to other black think tanks that would emerge

around the same time.<sup>12</sup> In every case, the tenor and pressing needs of the times dictated the imperatives for any organization wishing to establish an African American perspective on national policy matters. BERC had the following objectives:

- To compile data needed to provide a better understanding of the economic dynamics of black America
- To catalog economic research on the black community done by other agencies and to organize this work along with the Center's own original work into a unified whole
- To originate and explore alternative strategies or models which might be effective in improving the economic conditions of black America
- To critically examine legislative and administrative actions of government and proposals by other agencies which purport to aid black economic development
- To provide technical assistance and consulting services to community, private and governmental agencies interested in black economic development
- To increase communication among persons working in the area of black economic development
- To publish and distribute, in the form of a periodical, articles of interest on the topic of black economic development
- To encourage the entry of black youth into the study of economics

### **The Review of Black Political Economy**

The establishment of the Caucus also accelerated the publication target date and the original scope of *The Review*. Before the official opening of BERC, Bob had been having on-going discussions with several individuals about starting a periodical that could serve as a vehicle to enable the views of black thinkers regarding black economic development to reach the widest possible audience. One of the interesting outcomes of the Caucus meetings in December 1969 was the immediate need to expand the scale of the journal beyond what Bob had originally intended:

Swept up in the drama of the moment, I committed myself that evening to the launching of a scholarly, quarterly journal within the coming year, although my original plan had envisioned the creation of a periodical of some kind... after BERC had established a track record of success in its activists undertakings. Having made the commitment, however, I honored it, and in the summer of 1970, we proudly published the first issue of *The Review of Black Political Economy*, one of BERC's most durable and tangible projects (Browne 1996, p. 49).

In late September 1969, before the New York Caucus meetings, and immediately before the opening of BERC at 112 West 120th Street, Bob Browne, Danny Mitchell, and I conferred on the structure of a periodical that would involve the

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<sup>12</sup> For example, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies has a similar mission statement: "The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies informs and illuminates the nation's major public policy debates through research, analysis, and information dissemination in order to: improve the socioeconomic status of black Americans and other minorities; expand their effective participation in the political and public policy arenas; and promote communications and relationships across racial and ethnic lines to strengthen the nation's pluralistic society."

constellation of economics and politics to address the economic problems and programs of Black Americans. I think we had just completed situating a desk on the second floor and walked out into the hallway to get some boxes when Bob again reaffirmed his vision of a periodical where black thinkers could explore ideas on how to bring about effective and substantial improvement in the economic position of black Americans. Danny and I were in agreement with Bob's vision that the proposed journal had to be much more comprehensive in its evaluation of public policy affecting black Americans, and more accessible to readers interested in the political economy of African Americans than currently existed in academic economics journals. It would start out as a modest size publication with selected papers drawn from the community of professional economists, community organizers, political scientists, economic and housing developers, and other creative analysts who had important, new, intriguing, even controversial ideas and analysis about the economic issues confronting black people. We would accept both non-technical and technical pieces of quality that could address the economic life, social and political problems of the African American Community. Our discussion was very much in the flavor that Bob would later describe in Publisher's Preface to the Inaugural Issue:

Why do we use term "Political Economy" rather than "Economics" in our title? We feel that...for black people to effect any significant alteration in their economic position they must be obliged to develop a sound political strategy. It profits us little to spin out beautiful developmental theories which have no hope of ever being implemented. For us the term "Political Economy," which includes within its scope the political realities of economic relationships, seemed far the more accurate one to describe the necessary focus of black economic development.<sup>13</sup>

I mentioned that the one journal whose title had the ring that we might be looking for was the *Journal of Political Economy*; therefore why not *The Journal of Black Political Economy*? Bob thought that was heading in the right direction, but was concerned that the word 'journal' in the title would suggest something more narrow, academic and formal than what we had in mind. Possibly the word 'review' had a better connotation for the informed general reader and would not seem so technical and unapproachable. Why not *The Review of Black Political Economy*? As soon as Bob uttered the words, we immediately recognized that we had found the title.

The original intent of the journal was to combine both scholarly and popular forms of writing which could appeal simultaneously to economic scholars and students, community and political activists, and business leaders. Later, Bob would admit that at its best this was probably an unattainable goal (Browne 1993, p. 20). Bob's vision of the journal and the nature of the discussions that he had with us and with others were summed up very well in the Preface to the Inaugural Issue:

The decision to publish *The Review of Black Political Economy* was made only after a careful weighing of the arguments for and against the appearance of a

<sup>13</sup> "Publisher's Preface to the Inaugural Issue." *The Review of Black Political Economy* 1:1, p. iv.

new publication. Ultimately, we decided in the affirmative because we felt that no other publication was likely to undertake the type of task which we envisioned for *The Review*: the creation of a hospitable arena in which black people could explore ideas as to how they might bring about effective and substantial improvement in their collective economic position....(T)he underlying task of erasing the economic disparity between the black and white communities seems destined to be with us for quite some time yet. Increasingly, black people are taking it upon themselves to explore what steps seem to be the most promising ones for achievement of their developmental goals, and...a nucleus of black economists and social theorists are beginning to make themselves heard. It seemed to us that it would be useful to provide a vehicle to enable the views of these black thinkers to reach the widest possible black audience. These black thinkers, largely in the academic world, either as teachers or students, but oftentimes also to be found working close to the people in community organizations or entrepreneurial undertakings, constitute the genuine creative potential for black economic developmental theory.<sup>14</sup>

Seven articles and four book reviews were published in the first issue of *The Review*. Three of the articles were mainstream works that looked at various issues of black capitalism and the urban racial crisis in America. These included, “Outputs of Minority Entrepreneurship Programs,” by Glenn Dixon; “Brimmer and Black Capitalism: An Analysis” by Charles Tate; and “The Basic Economics of the Urban and Racial Crisis,” by Daniel Fusfeld. The opening article by Glenn Dixon, then a graduate student at Brown University, offered a framework for judging the direct and indirect effects (outputs) of minority entrepreneurship programs on black individuals, the black community, local and national government and the business sector. Dixon’s outputs consisted of employment, income, mobility and power impacts on these constituencies. Fusfeld’s article analyzed the now frequently cited conditions of circular causation and cumulative effects of low incomes, poor housing, poor health, and lack of political power, along with low business and capital formation and inadequate schooling as reinforcing conditions of inner city poverty. In Fusfeld’s view, these debilitating conditions are compounded by white racial attitudes that also prevent black employment mobility. Charles Tate, a community organizer, former Chairman of CORE in Dayton Ohio, and an Urban Fellow at the Urban Institute, critiqued Dr. Brimmer’s assessment that blacks have to develop skills for the integrated national economy and not rely on business and political strategies lodged in “the backwater of separatism and segregation.” Tate offered that this position ignored the causal relationship between powerlessness and black poverty, and the workings of the American political and economic systems. In Tate’s estimation locally controlled businesses need not be ghetto-specific and dependent on the segregated market. Three other articles in the first issue outlined more radical positions drawn from papers presented at the National Black Economic Development Conference.

A budding, local black-owned press, Medic Press in Newark, New Jersey, printed the first six issues of *The Review*. For the cover logo of the inaugural issue, a director

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<sup>14</sup> “Publisher’s Preface to the Inaugural Issue.” *The Review of Black Political Economy* 1:1, pp. iii–iv.

of Medic Press and local artist, Bill Day, showed us a straightforward rendering of a series of black concentric circles with two parallel feeding lines flowing simultaneously from the north and south, yet tangent to the east and west perimeter of the outermost circle. Bill Day indicated that the design was meant to convey the continuous, circulating flow of politics and economics impacting the black community. Though simple in concept, the design was meticulously drafted and precise. That design would remain the cover logo for the Review for twenty-five years. The first Board of Editors for *The Review* appeared in the second issue of the Review (*The Review of Black Political Economy*, Vol. 1, No.2, Autumn, 1970). It consisted of Robert Browne, Jesse Morris, Alvin Puryear, and John Handy. By the third issue of *The Review*, the Editorial Advisory Board was expanded to include Richard America and Bernard Anderson from the Caucus of Black Economists.

The second issue of the *The Review* was published on the heels of the first inaugural issue. During this same time period, Thad Spratlen prepared a report of the 1970 Workshop of the Caucus of Black Economists that took place at the annual Meetings of the American Economic Association in Detroit in December 1970. Given the paucity of paper presentations at AEA meetings by black economists up until that time, the 1970 Workshop was a remarkable session. Paper presentations included (1) Robert Vowels' paper on *The Political Economy of American Racism: Nonblack Decision-Making and Black Economics Status*, with *Comment* by James Hefner, (2) Frank Davis' *Problems of Economic Growth in the Black Community—Some Alternative Hypotheses*, with *Comment* by Edward Irons, (3) Thad Spratlen's *Ghetto Economic Development—Content and Character of the Literature*, with *Comment* by Herrington Bryce, and (4) Duran Bell's *Bonus Schemes and Racism*, with separate *Comment* by John Handy and Donald Harris, respectively. The papers were presented in two sessions that were chaired by Marcus Alexis and Charles Z. Wilson. These 1970 papers and comments were published as the fourth issue of the first volume of the *RBPE (Papers of the Caucus of Black Political Economists, The Review of Black Political Economy*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Summer 1971).

Also presented at the 1970 Detroit sessions, but not published in the *Review* was Rawle Farley's *Poverty and Enterprise in America and Overseas*, and the *Symposium on Economic Institutions and the Black Community*, chaired by Robert Browne with Richard America, James Hefner, Karl Gregory, and Sid Evans as panelists. Thad Spratlen also took it upon himself to report on the session entitled: *Student Symposium—Economics, With or Without Color?*—conducted by undergraduate students. The participants were Henry Coleman (Morehouse College), Charlotte Holt (Morgan State College), Ronald Snelling (Wayne State University), and Reginald Renwick (Talladega College).

Taken as a whole, the articles in the first eight issues, comprising the contents of the first two volumes of *The Review*, dealt almost exclusively with macroeconomic development issues aimed at investigating structural barriers limiting equitable participation in the US economy.<sup>15</sup> Ideological differences and debates among

<sup>15</sup> A good discussion on the type of articles investigating systemic barriers in the early editions of *The Review* can be found in James B. Stewart, "Worker Re-Training and Labor Market Outcomes: A New Focus for Labor Research" Published in *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 25:4 (spring, 1998) pp. 55–76.

contributors concerned the efficacy and meaning of black capitalism; ghetto dispersal versus inner city rebuilding strategies; autonomous development through locally-owned black businesses versus domestic free-trade strategies; and reparations versus traditional public investment strategies. It was also during this time that Congressman Parren Mitchell of Maryland, who frequently conferred with Bob Browne and BEREC, proposed federal set-aside programs that would later become the basis for Affirmative Action programs. Consistent with Bob Browne's personal style and intellectual integrity, widely ranging points of view were published, even encouraged, in *The Review* over this period. As stated in the *Menu* to the third issue of the first volume:

*The Review*, in case it was not already apparent, opens its pages to varying and often times contradictory points of view, eschewing even the slightest suggestion of requiring conformity to any prescribed line by its contributors.<sup>16</sup>

From summer 1970 through summer 1972, articles appearing in the first two volumes of *The Review* articles represented a wide spectrum of thought. They included articles by Andrew Brimmer, Thomas Sowell, Senator Frank Church, Thomas Vietorisz and Bennett Harrison, Rawle Farley, Margaret Simms, Courtney Blackman, Donald Harris, James Forman and James Boggs. From its inception the editors of *The Review* encouraged and published international Third World articles by Norman Garvin on Bauxite in Guyana and Jamaica; Monique Garrity on Africa and the European Economic Community; Herschelle Challenor on South African Economic Hegemony in Africa; Rukudzo Murapa on Neo-Colonialism in Africa; Owen Jefferson on Caribbean Dependence and Economic Development; George Beckford on Resource Underdevelopment in the Caribbean; and Vincent McDonald on the Caribbean Free Trade Association.

On the twenty-third anniversary of *The Review* in 1993, Robert Browne reflected on the progress of the journal. He acknowledged that *The Review* had matured to become more scholarly and less discursive—with more focus on original research and less attention to wide-ranging, ideological issues for restructuring the black community (Browne 1993, p. 22). In another sense, however, Bob felt that the journal's mission, itself, had broadened. The journal's editorial policy would now more formally and explicitly recognize that *The Review* had evolved to include the examination of economic issues affecting all persons of color—black and brown Third World peoples everywhere.

## Conclusion

The legacy of Robert S. Browne endures in the uninterrupted 38 year publication record of *The Review of Black Political Economy*; the 38 years of the National Economic Association's support of programs that have attracted more African Americans to the field and study of economics; the venerable contribution of the Emergency Land Fund in preserving black-owned land which continues through the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund; and in the 36 year

<sup>16</sup> "Menu," *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 1:3 (spring, 1971) p. v.

contribution of The Twenty-First Century Foundation in supporting innovative community development and education projects. One would be hard pressed to name any scholar, activist or political leader who can be identified with the enduring achievement of four such creditable and vital institutions.

The hallmark of Robert Browne's philosophy was scholarship and activism, theory and practice. His inauguration of the first significantly endowed black foundation set the tone for modern black philanthropy. Through BERC, he established the first enduring land fund for protecting black-owned land and black farmers. Its associated partnerships and land assistance funds remain, still today, the backbone for legal activism in this area. In addition to its basic research activities during its first three years, BERC also played an advisory role to the nation's first community development corporations originating in New York City and provided technical assistance to local black-owned banks. The editorial policy of *The Review of Black Political Economy* expresses the journal's continued commitment to disseminate research that does not emphasize methodology and theoretical elaboration for its own sake, and which seeks relevance for improving the income, employment and wealth of black and third world peoples. This is the overarching significance of Robert S. Browne's career and the consistent set of core principles of the institutions he founded.

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