DUKE UNIVERSITY

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE 1933-1956:
IN AWE OF THE ABSOLUTE FORM

A SENIOR THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
FOR CONSIDERATION OF HONORS

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PREFACE

John Andrew Rice, one of the founders of Black Mountain College, would have understood the frustrations and anxieties I have felt often but have never been able to define. I cried when I stumbled across a passage in one of his interviews last fall:

the trouble . . . is, that when you're around twenty you have already accepted into this world things that don't belong there, and you know don't belong there, but for some reason you feel well I just can't fight this. So I'll just take them in, so I behave this way, or I pretend to think this way and I'll take that part, but this is not satisfactory. So the people who reach middle age with a completely satisfactory created world are very few.

I have always been intrigued with the courage that people throughout history have had in refusing to accept the things that "don't belong there" and in attempting to redefine their lives, their ideals, and their beliefs. I feel that in many ways I have behaved a certain way, pretended to think a certain way, and taken a part that is not completely me. I study history for the lessons in courage and imagination that will help in eventually allowing me to say that "this is my life."

I first learned about Black Mountain in an exhibition on the college given by The North Carolina Museum of Art in the fall of 1987. Here was a group of students and teachers who refused to accept the forms of education and community that had been imposed on them and who had the courage and imagination to set out and start again. I had to smile, remembering how many times I had sworn in my frustrations with
undergraduate life that I was going to start my own college.

I began this project wanting to know how and why the students and teachers of Black Mountain started their own college. The idealism in me soared: a community that was built on consensus; an education that was not memorization and regurgitation, but an "education of the whole man by the whole man"; a college that aimed to help its students define and create their own "completely satisfactory world."

I am grateful for Martin Duberman and his work on Black Mountain entitled Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community for bringing me and my idealism back down to the ground. His work in tracing the conflicts and the failures in community throughout the college's history reminded me of the humanness on which Black Mountain College was based. Yet I wanted something more; I wanted to be able to learn a lesson from Black Mountain's endeavors; I did not want to have to throw up my hands and say that such attempts at honesty as theirs would never work. A letter from May Sarton (an author who visited the college in 1940) to Black Mountain offered the lesson I was looking for. This thesis is about that lesson that teaches the importance and inevitability of flaw, of tension, and of imperfection; the importance of process and patience; and the importance of awe and respect.

The primary resources used were located in the State Archives of North Carolina in Raleigh, their collections consisting of over 100,000 documents: letters, diaries, minutes, catalogues, and other manuscripts. I am indebted to both Martin Duberman and Mary Harris (author of The Arts at Black Mountain College) for the extensive interviewing projects
they conducted, each interviewing hundreds of former students and professors of Black Mountain, the transcripts of which are available in the Raleigh archives. For a few transcripts and letters that were not available in Raleigh, I relied on the interviews and letters cited in their books. I am also thankful for both of their books, which enabled me to get a grasp on the chronology of Black Mountain. As Duberman writes, however, "I do view this book as yet another individual response to Black Mountain; it is not the last word or the whole word but my word." I hope that I have been able to combine my own research, the many voices of the students and professors of Black Mountain, Duberman's and Harris's interviews, and May Sarton's lessons to create my own word.

I would like to thank my advisers: Larry Goodwyn, for giving me the respect, confidence, and space I needed, teaching me to find my own voice; and Tom Robisheaux and his perpetual patience and enthusiasm for my work. I thank Duke's Project W.I.L.D. for offering alternative ways of thinking about education and community, and teaching me by direct experience of the possibilities and limitations of being more human. I thank my mom and dad for giving me the love and assuredness I needed in order to know that I could step out into this world in search of my own voice. Finally, I am thankful for the support of my aunt, Martha; my sister, Beth; my brother, Matthew; my coach, Robert Thompson; my friends, Laura Shaw, Susan Smith, and especially, the ever patient Jamie Morton: thank you for accepting my flaws and my imperfections and being there to help me back on my feet.
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A Letter to the Students of Black Mountain College, written
in homage and in faith

At the heart of life is the flaw, the imperfection
Without which there would be no motion and no reason
To continue. At the heart of life is the knowledge of death
Without which there would be no boundaries and no limitation
And so no reason for existence or for action—and no time.
At the heart of life there is silence without which sound
Would have no meaning, nor music and we should not hear it—
And this flaw, this knowledge of death, this background
Of silence are the form within which life is boundless,
Everlasting, creating, discarding, destroying, always in flux,
Always changing, choosing, denying, affirming in order to discover
The purer Form in which the purer Freedom may have its being.

We must be united in awe before an Absolute Form and
an Absolute Freedom of which, like the circles of teachers
And students, you can meet a part but never the whole, and
I would like to see you bound together in awe of this secret
Part of the Absolute Form and the Absolute Freedom without which
There would be no flaw to be perfected, no perfection to attain,
No community bound together in time, no sound and no silence,
No life and no death. And it does not matter by what name
You call Absolute Freedom within Absolute Form as long as you
Recognize its existence and allow yourselves to be united in
awe before it.

May Sarton, The House by the Sea
INTRODUCTION

Black Mountain College in North Carolina began in the fall of 1933 with a group of twenty-two students and twelve teachers. Perhaps the words of one of the teachers, John Rice, set the tone most appropriately:

Here we were, a small band of fools against the wide world, setting out to conquer the world and give "wise" another meaning. We had, by an instinct as old as man, gone up on a mountain, there to make our living sacrifice. We would conquer or die. One could almost hear the old words, the old wrong words. The wise, the really wise, know, have always known, that they are wrong, that the order is wrong, and the "or" is wrong. 'Die and conquer,' those are the words and the order. Humility, the wise have said, is the beginning of life. We had no humility, not a tittle.¹

Most of the founders had come from Rollins College in Florida, wishing to establish their own college in order to search for the "freedom to learn in one's own way and according to one's own timetable."² If they had come to conquer the world and if they had died in doing so are questions that remain to be answered. The college did, however, survive twenty-three years through the Great Depression, World War II, the perpetual lack of funds, and the many faculty and student battles and departures. In its final years, it became increasingly smaller and finally collapsed in 1956.


²Ibid., 216.
The history of Black Mountain College is a plethora of stories about everyday life at the college; about the artists that began or expanded their careers at Black Mountain; about new plateaus of communication reached; about conflicts between professors and students, between men and women, between white and black, and between the community and the individual; and about intellectual freedom:

What we did mattered, and what we believed we defended. And there was not one to forbid us the working out of our thoughts as we followed them, whatever they were.  

The study of Black Mountain is indeed important in terms of the contributions it made to so much of American art. It was there that Buckminster Fuller built his first geodesic dome, that John Cage staged his first "happening," and that Merce Cunningham founded his dance company. It was there that Josef Albers and many other European artists escaping from the fascist movements in Europe introduced some of their ideas to America. Robert Rauschenberg, Willem de Kooning, Charles Olson, Harry Callahan, Arthur Penn, John Chamberlain, Joel Oppenheimer, Kenneth Noland, and Francine du Plessix Gray had all been Black Mountain students or professors.

The study of Black Mountain College is also important as a reflection of the progressive education movement of the early 1900s. John Dewey provided much of the philosophy of this movement. To Dewey, education was not to be an exercise in memorizing the cultural products of past ages; education was to center in experience, to be an ongoing

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transaction between the individual and the environment. The only goals of Dewey's education were the individual's capacity for growth and his or her ability to solve problems. Dewey purposely never defined a rigid method of education; to do so would have been against his belief in the importance of experience.

In the 1930s, many universities molded Dewey's ideas into a so-called progressive curriculum characterized by an emphasis on student needs, individualized instruction, and the students taking charge of their own education and government. These universities attempted to emphasize the teacher as guide and not task master and to decrease the emphasis on grades, exams, degrees, or entrance requirements. Progressive colleges such as St. John's, Sarah Lawrence, Bennington, Antioch, and Reed were founded at this time.

With the onset of the depression, progressive education broke into two schools of thought. One urged that schools should be the centers for the reform of the country's economic and social institutions, with the educator identifying the prevailing social ills and using the schools to teach solutions. The other urged that the educator leave social reform to other institutions and be concerned foremost with the child, giving the child the equipment so he or she would be able to identify the social ills himself or herself. The 1924-1930

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6Bowers, 4.
pronouncements of the movement's journal Progressive Education espoused the principles of the latter group: the child is the starting point, the center, and the end. This group was attacked in 1932 at the annual Progressive Education Association meeting for its lack of concrete methods and meaningless phrases: "the whole child," "learning by doing," "creating finely humanized individuals," or "men and women emotionally equipped to take their part in life with a spirit of fine togetherness." The attackers called for schools to face social issues, to develop a theory of welfare, to go so far as to teach the students the evil of capitalism: "if an educational movement . . . calls itself progressive it must have orientation, it must possess direction." Dewey himself did not support this indoctrination of progressive values and ideas, but he did say that education could not isolate itself from social development and that the experience of the outside community should indeed be a subject matter of education.

It was in this proto-progressive educational environment that Black Mountain College was founded. The college would mostly subscribe to the child-center ideas of the progressive movement. John Rice seemed to understand where the students were coming from and he wanted to help them rediscover themselves because:

the trouble . . . is, that when you’re around twenty you have already accepted into this world things that don’t belong there, and you know don’t belong there, but for some reason you feel well I

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7 Bowers, 5.
8 Ibid., 9.
9 George S. Counts, quoted in Bowers, 14.
10 Dewey, quoted in Bowers, 12.
just can't fight this. So I'll just take them in, so I behave this way, or I pretend to think this way and I'll take that part, but this is not satisfactory. So the people who reach middle age with a completely satisfactory created world are very few.\textsuperscript{11}

Black Mountain College went beyond just being an educational institution; it attempted to establish a community in which learning took place twenty-four hours a day. Rice, himself, would immediately understand the contradiction:

In any community which you set up, the idea is that people shall live in and continue to live in that community, and the aim of that community is the achievement of happiness. Whereas the job of a college is to provide a place into which people may come and get the kind of development which will enable them to leave it.\textsuperscript{12}

Indeed there are many arguments against this community-woven education and for the more conventional classroom that respects the privacy, the reticence, the inner stock-taking of the student. Perhaps one's innermost being does not belong to everyone else of the community; there are strong arguments for a place where the community is more voluntary, where anonymity lessens the pain of false starts, where someone's love life is not the business of the community.

The women and men of Black Mountain who believed in it would argue, however, that the community aspect of their education enabled them to find their own significance in the education process:

[The college] treated the student as an adult, capable of making choices affecting his own life, which made the process of learning a

\textsuperscript{11}John Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967, transcript, Duberman Collection, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\textsuperscript{12}Minutes from general meeting, 17 February 1937, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
cooperative endeavor joined by teacher and student together.\textsuperscript{13}

Rice offered his own reasoning for the community. He saw the role of the college as the role that the village used to play in human society: a stepping stone from the familiar, supportive environment of the family to the unfamiliar, sometimes hostile outside world. Nowadays without the village, young adults emerge from the intimate family setting directly into the impersonal city. They quickly learn to build superficial selves to protect themselves against the hostility and indifference they find in the city. Rice believed that by the time the student got to college, "this superficial self is often a work of art. His best thoughts and abilities have gone into its making."\textsuperscript{14} Rice wanted Black Mountain to be the smaller village that would be that place where the student would be able to define himself honestly and unpretentiously before he did enter the wider world.

There are also many arguments against the freedom that Black Mountain wished to offer its students; one detractor believed that four-fifths of the students would "flounder and sink in [this] freedom, and resent it."\textsuperscript{15} Black Mountain did offer the student the freedom to fail, to use poor judgement, to waste opportunities, but it also gave him or her the "liberty to choose, to impose one's own discipline on one's self, and then, through testing and trying, to develop an approach to

\textsuperscript{13}Letter from anonymous student, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\textsuperscript{14}Rice, quoted in Louis Adamic, My America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), 629.

life that is authentically one's own."16

In this thesis, the study of Black Mountain College will be important as a study of a group of people who saw what they did not like in their education and community and attempted to start over to create an education and community of their own. They were given the chance to construct their own rules, their own systems of government, and their own method of communication and education. They would falter when they expected perfection, for as May Sarton, the author and a visitor to the college, would write to them: "perfect freedom is death;" ... without flaw, "there is not motion and no reason to continue". ... it is flaw that keeps the community "in flux and growing." 17 She wrote that she wanted them to realize that they must be united in awe before an Absolute Form and an Absolute Freedom of which you can meet a part but never the whole, and I would like to see you bound together in awe of this secret part of the Absolute Form and the Absolute Freedom without which there would be no flaw to be perfected, no perfection to attain, no community bound together in time, no sound and no silence, no life and no death. And it does not matter by what name you call Absolute Freedom within Absolute Form as long as you recognize its existence and allow yourselves to be united in awe before it.18

Black Mountain would succeed only when it accepted that its members were indeed humans who made mistakes and needed the respect and support, as well as a certain amount of privacy that the community could

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16Letter from anonymous student, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.


18Ibid., 119.
give. It would succeed when it did not demand the "freedom of complete equality," which Sarton compared to an "artificial perfectly flat landscape in which . . . there would not be a tree which might give a little shade from the burning equalizing sun."\textsuperscript{19} It would succeed if it could accept that tension within a community was inevitable, but that it could be incorporated into a learning experience rather than avoided or ignored.

Black Mountain is a story of learning and relearning these lessons over and over again, of people leaving because they could not live up to the demands of perfection or the pressure of ignored tension, and of new people coming in only to have to learn the lessons all over again. Black Mountain is a story of the constant struggle to define the perfect "absolute form" of the community and education and the imperfect process of trying to live up to that absolute form.

Perhaps in studying the attempts of Black Mountain to create their education and community, I will begin an answer to the hopes of John Rice:

Perhaps there will some day happen to us what has happened to men before, when after struggle and failure and struggle again a moment of magic came, and there was the picture or the book or the statue or the sound of a note, and they knew that it was good; not all that they dreamed and hoped it might be, but still, good. Perhaps this will happen to us who want to consider the world and humanity as material and remake them. Perhaps some day we will see a humanity to whom one can say, "You're good. No doubt about it, you're good. But you're not so good as we'd hoped you'd be. It's up to you to make yourself better, and those who come after you still better." Then humanity will be on the way . . .\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19}Sarton, 116.

\textsuperscript{20}Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.
CHAPTER 1

DEFINING THE ABSOLUTE FORM

The founders of Black Mountain College arrived in the fall of 1933, most of them having come from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. In February of that year, Hamilton Holt, the president of Rollins, asked John Andrew Rice, professor of classics, to resign. In a confidential memo from Holt to the trustees of Rollins, Holt charged Rice with engaging in such promiscuous acts as wearing a jockstrap on the beach, calling a chisel a beautiful object, whispering in the chapel, hanging obscene pictures in his class, having an indolent walk, leaving fish scales in the sink, not sending in absence reports, and leading irrelevant discussions on sex in his class.\(^1\) Holt's charges, however, do not reveal the real tensions that culminated in his request for Rice's resignation.

Rollins College itself was considered to be a progressive college. Holt had arrived there in 1925, raising two million dollars in endowment and creating the Conference Plan.\(^2\) The goal of this plan was to

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eliminate the lectures and recitations that provoked memorization and regurgitation and to replace them with an eight-hour day, consisting of four two-hour discussion sessions, one of those being in a laboratory or doing an independent study. In 1931, Holt wanted to institute a "New Plan," which divided the college into upper and lower divisions, with students that reached the upper division being able to concentrate their time more in independent studies. At the time, Rice, who had been hired in 1930 with the "expectation that his appointment would be permanent," was sitting on the curriculum committee. He pointed out that Holt's New Plan and its call for more flexibility in the students' schedules would immediately conflict with the more rigid Conference Plan. He urged the curriculum committee to recommend dropping the eight-hour day and making the college schedule more flexible.4

Holt had had enough of Rice. Since Rice had arrived at Rollins, he was constantly finding fault with the government of the college, sneering at some of its traditions such as the fraternities and sororities and the required chapel services, and harshly criticizing some of his fellow professors and students. Holt also blamed Rice for leading irrelevant discussions on sex and religion, leading students to defy rules and conventions, and teaching students to express themselves regardless of the wounds that would result.5

After Rice refused to resign, the college dismissed him in April

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3Holt, quoted in Lovejoy and Edwards.
4Lovejoy and Edwards, 420.
5Ibid.
in violation of the tenure it had offered him. Rice appealed the
decision to the American Association of University Professors in May,
who found "nothing seriously reflecting upon either the private
character or the scholarship of Mr. Rice, or upon his ability as a
teacher." This association did not announce the decision, however,
until November. Meanwhile, Rollins dismissed several other professors
in violation of their tenures for supporting Rice in the appeal. Most
of these professors acted in this way "not so much as support of Rice or
opposition to Hamilton Holt, but rather as an attempt to make Rollins
what they believed it should be." Several students had also supported
Rice, being "greatly disturbed by the dismissal of John Rice," believing
that "it was highhanded ... and unfounded." By the end of the year,
Rollins had dismissed eight faculty members, and many students,
including the editor of the school newspaper and president of the
student body, had decided not to return.

In 1933, in the middle of the depression, there were few prospects
for other employment. Students also felt the pressure, as one expressed
it to Rice. "I've lost my scholarship. I was warned I would if I
supported you. Now what will I do?" Frederick Georgia, one of the

*Lovejoy and Edwards, 439.

Frederick Georgia, Notes from Adamic meeting, March 1936, Black
Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971,
transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of
North Carolina, Raleigh.

John Andrew Rice, I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century (New York:
Harper and Brothers, 1942), 321.
dismissed professors, prodded a reluctant Rice about the ideal college on which Rice was always lecturing in his Athenian Civilization class at Rollins.

Rice, however, was tired of teaching. He had taught at several other institutions before Rollins: the Webb School (Tennessee), the University of Nebraska, and the New Jersey College for Women. He had left each place after finding himself at odds with the administration, with other faculty members, or even with the students. Looking back on that summer and the planning for an ideal college, Rice would remember that

I didn't much want to do it, to tell you the truth. I foresaw a lot of troubles, and I wasn't quite clear what I wanted to do. I knew what I didn't want to do, clearly. I never wanted to be the head of a college. I never wanted to start one, it never even occurred to me. But I kept thinking about what a college ought to be like. . . . had a College in my pocket for years. . . ."^^10

Rice did agree to participate in the meetings of the dissident students and professors that summer to discuss proposals for a new college. He became less reluctant when Robert Wunsch, a professor of drama at Rollins, told him of the Blue Ridge Assembly buildings eighteen miles east of Asheville, North Carolina, used for YMCA conferences in the summer but vacant in the winter. At least there was an actual place for the college. Rice still felt sure there could be no college until he visited the place and declared that "here was peace."^^11 His words would later come back to haunt him.

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^^10 John Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967, transcript, Duberman collection, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

^^11 Rice, Eighteenth Century, 321.
Rice spent the summer of 1933 travelling through thirteen states, mostly in the Northeast, attempting to find money and students for the college. He had a difficult time doing both. The financial backers wanted charts, graphs, and well-laid plans for the college that Rice could not and would not offer them, arguing that "this is an experiment in change... nothing stands still long enough to be measured. To give us support of any kind is an act of faith."\(^{12}\) He was also not willing to accept any money if the benefactor demanded a voice in the running of the college. He found himself in the clumsy position of telling potential donors to "give us $5000. but, no, we will not put your name on the step."\(^{13}\) He also found it a bit awkward to ask parents to send their children to an expensive, unaccredited college that offered no degree and no promise of remaining open past one year.\(^{14}\) In response to their question, "Didn't he know we were in the midst of a


\(^{13}\) Jane Robinson Stone, Interview by Mary Harris, 27 March 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^{14}\) Tuition and fees were set at one thousand dollars, although few students were expected to pay the whole price: average reductions were 30%; one thousand dollars, however, was a very expensive price when compared to the average cost of a private university in the U.S. in 1936-37: $306. W.S. Monroe, ed., *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, rev. ed. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1950), 227.

Black Mountain would never be accredited by North Carolina or any other institution: the agencies wanted more students, an endowment, and better and more equipment, especially a better library. Said the State Superintendent of Public Instruction: "After considering the matter carefully, we are convinced that we do not have standards for the accrediting of an institution such as Black Mountain College," quoted in "Graduation at Black Mountain," Black Mountain College Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 5, August 1943. 6. Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
depression?," Rice could only coyly reply, "How was a professor to know?"  

By August 1933, though, the planners had raised $14,500 in donations, had signed for the Blue Ridge buildings, and had recruited twenty-two students (fourteen of which were from Rollins) and twelve faculty members (six from Rollins).  

The "corporation of Black Mountain College" was certified August 19, 1933 with the following objectives:

a) to promote the general interest of education and, specifically, to establish and maintain, for students of both sexes, an educational institution or university, collegiate or other academic grade . . . where such students may receive instruction in those branches of learning which will aid in qualifying them for honorably and effectively discharging their obligations to society and their duties as citizens

b) to confer—by action of its faculty and subject of the laws and regulations of the State of North Carolina, academic degrees and certificates

c) Black Mountain will not espouse the cause of any political party, race or creed . . . will have no capital stock, and its period of existence is unlimited

d) The Board of Fellows will be the governing body of the college except as to matters of educational and detail and of student discipline—having six members chosen from the faculty.

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15Rice, Eighteenth Century, 318.

16Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm Forbes, friends of Theodore Dreier, one of the original professors from Rollins, donated $10,000. Forbes had left Rollins the year before Rice was dismissed, after Holt had told him he was not a good teacher. Colonel Arthur Dwight, the stepfather of one of the students who had left Rollins for Black Mountain, donated $1000. William Barstow, a friend of Colonel Dwight, donated $1000. Dreier's parents donated $2000. Board of Fellows minutes, 12 December 1933, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

17Certificate of Incorporation for Black Mountain College, 1933, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
The college officially opened in September of 1933 quite informally:

The formal opening of the college was rather like that of a pick-up game of football: the participants straggled in casually one by one with no one very sure beforehand just who was expected. . . . The ceremony consisted of a meeting on the front porch (preceded by great scrapings of the green rocking chairs as people maneuvered for positions with view) . . . For the present, we appeared to feel, the thing to do was to approach, quite casually and with no preconceived notions about their relative importance, the thousand-and-one details of simply organizing ourselves as a community . . .

If there was any general statement of the College's educational aims and ideals, I have, completely forgotten it. We were there and that was enough: a proof in itself that we were at any rate looking for something new in the college line. But the educational platform which most of us seemed to stand on at that moment was certainly nothing more than "we shall see what we shall see."18

There were to be no classes until the community began to understand its purposes and how it was going to implement them. The founders of Black Mountain College arrived in the fall of 1933 in the mountains of western North Carolina determined to define a new life for themselves, a process that would mean each person first defining a new self, defining how that self would fit into the community, what the purpose of the community would be, how that community would interact, the role of education in that community, and the method of education. Most had come looking for an alternative to the "mechanized, mass-production university system" that "didn't have room in it for human values."19 They had had enough of the memorization, the cramming of facts, and the regurgitation of the teachers' ideas. This system left

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no room for creative thinking, no time to examine oneself within and without, and no permission to accept and to be accepted as an individual with needs, with talents, with faults, and with dreams.

Black Mountain would provide an education based on learning a common way of living together, stressing initiative, ingenuity, cooperation, social responsibility and renouncing submission or competitiveness. Black Mountain would aim to emphasize dynamic growth and not a static assimilation of information. It would "not just be a place that taught about the good society—it would be a good society."\(^{20}\)

The founders arrived in 1933 with these vague notions of democracy, social responsibility, and cooperation; they knew what they did not want their college to be, they knew how they did not want to behave, and they knew how they did not want to learn. The test would be to overcome this reactive behavior and to create a world that was not based on anything they had ever experienced. It would indeed be, as M.C. Richards, a teacher at Black Mountain in the 1940s, described, very difficult in this situation not to import the patterns of old rivalries, not to find them lingering like deposits in the soul. It is very difficult to abandon all one's former supports and to move forward into unfamiliar contacts.\(^{21}\)

When you can do what you want to do, what will you do? Being confronted with this invitation to create a new college, a new way of living in community, and a new way of behaving, would be thrilling, but it would also prove to be frightening, confusing, frustrating, and...  


\(^{21}\)M.C. Richards, Centering (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 120.
painful. As the poetic M.C. Richards explained further:

In order to have a new college, there must be New Persons. Ordeal shall not be avoided. They are the fire. Fear and trembling. The old ego dead, the new man. "Leave all you have and follow me." . . . The frontier lies within.\textsuperscript{22}

Black Mountain College was a daring attempt to start a college community from scratch and to leave behind comfortable routines, prescribed rules of behavior, and a predetermined hierarchy of power. Black Mountain College would be a study of how capable a group of humans were in creating a community, an education, and a lifestyle for which there were originally no guidelines and no examples upon which to rely. It would be a test for all who would come to the college, for it pulverize[d] the forms of behavior to which one had been previously educated. If you were supple enough to yield to the invasion of a new reality, you had a good chance to be reinvested. If you tightened and withdrew, you might escape, but you might also get a bad fall. If you just stood there, you might go into shock or you might go fishing.\textsuperscript{23}

The first step in the creation process was definition. What did education mean? What kind of education would Black Mountain attempt to offer? What did community mean? How would Black Mountain relate education to the community? What would be the rules? Would Black Mountain need rules? Would the community need a leader? How would decisions be made? Who would make decisions? Who would implement them?

The members of the Black Mountain community arrived throughout the history of the college, 1933–1956, with conceptions, ideals, and goals of what the college should be. The rest of this chapter will present

\textsuperscript{22}Richards, 123.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 118.
some of their ideas and the earlier results of some of these ideas in an
effort to introduce what Black Mountain was attempting to do and to be,
allowing as much as possible for the members to speak in their own
words. How and if their ideas were implemented, who made the decisions,
who acted on the decisions, and who did not act on the decisions is the
rest of the story.

The Absolute Form They Did Not Want

In taking the first step in the creation process, the founders had
to define education and community, constructing ideals and philosophies
that would enable the students and faculty to understand why they were
there and why they had left the comfort of their previous routines to
enter a college that could not offer them any promise of security.

Most of the faculty and students would come to Black Mountain
College looking for an alternative to the education to which they had
been exposed. In defining education at Black Mountain, they would be
able to explain what they did not want. Rice, especially, had made it
his quest to criticize constructively some of the educational
philosophies of his predecessors as well as of his contemporaries.
Studying his philosophy of education is important, since it did form so
much of the backbone of the original definition of education at Black
Mountain.

Rice was furious with the ideas of Robert Maynard Hutchins,
president of the University of Chicago. Hutchins was considered a
progressive educator in the 1930s, supporting independent study and
believing in abolishing all requirements except final exams, but
allowing students to take exams when they were ready. Hutchins, however, would not agree with another prominent educator of the time, Alfred North Whitehead, who argued that "the careful shielding of a university from the activities of the world around is the best way to chill interest and to defeat progress." Hutchins demanded that colleges leave experience to other institutions and influences and emphasize in education the contribution that it is supremely fitted to make, the intellectual training of the young. . . . the life they lead when they are out of our hands will give them experience enough.

Hutchins believed that education was a means of conveying a "common stock of fundamental ideas" and that "knowledge is truth; the truth is everywhere the same. Hence, education should be everywhere the same."

Rice looked in history to the days before Aristotle when forethought and action were stressed along with reflection. To Rice, education after Aristotle consisted only of reflection: reflection on the actions of others, reflections on the thought of others, reflections on the reflections of others. Rice argued that educators established the "common stock of fundamental ideas" when they decided that all students, no matter of what politics, sociology, or economic condition,


26 Hutchins.

27 Ibid.

should study only grammar, rhetoric, logic, and mathematics, leaving
"experience to life." To Rice,

education, instead of being the acquisition of a common stock of
fundamental ideas, may well be a learning of a common way of doing
things, a way of approach, a method of dealing with ideas or
anything else. What you do with what you know is the important
thing. To know is not enough.  

Rice did not agree that there was a "one-to-one correspondence
between language and thought" and that therefore the student could be
educated by literature alone. He also criticized the teaching of
classics as "distillations of pure reason," arguing that classics should
be read as tracts of the time; "what makes them great is that they
dignify the stuff of their own times." Moreover, if the classics were
going to be studied, it should not be the role of the teacher to present
his personal interpretations of an author in order for the student to
accept this as fact and to regurgitate it on the next exam. He
criticized the teaching of grammar and rhetoric as a record of how
language was used in the past and how persuasion was used in the past.
The student needed tools to understand the present: "his life is full of
meanings, and he is looking for a way to express them, through language,
through art, through science . . . [he should be] seeking the word for
the meaning, not the meaning for the word." Rice's words reflect much
of the same thoughts as Emerson expressed a century before: "We are shut
up in schools and college recitation rooms for ten to fifteen years and

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29Rice, "Fundamentalism."

30Ibid.

31Ibid (all quotes in paragraph).
come out at last with a bellyful of words and do not know a thing."\footnote{32}

Rice criticized these methods of education that had been around since Aristotle, but he also found fault with the progressive education methods that were being introduced during his time. In both cases, he argued, static doctrines were involved.\footnote{33} Rice decidedly never completely clarified his philosophy of education. He scorned definitions such as the "educated man," believing that they represented a conclusion rather than a process. He would often quote John Dewey, who was considered a progressive educator but never subscribed to one particular method for education:

To arrive at a conclusion was not to arrive at a conclusion, it was to arrive at a pause . . . and you would look at the pause, you would look at the plateau, and then you would see another thing to climb.\footnote{34}

To Rice, there was no conclusive goal for education. He instead concentrated on providing each student with a balance of individual liberty and the support of a community, a combination that was immediately conflicting. This conflict between community and individual would be replayed over and over again throughout the college's experience. Rice, however, wanted to transcend this conflict by placing the student in competition with himself and not with others. He believed that

we are all artists, every one of us: we are free to create the kind


\footnote{33}Rice, quoted in Duberman, 40.

\footnote{34}Rice, quoted in Sue Thrasher, "Radical Education in the 30s," Southern Exposure 1 (Winter 1974).
of world in which we choose to live, and we're equal in that freedom.\textsuperscript{35}

He wanted the community to support the individual: "it's impossible to conceal what you are if you're surrounded by a lot of sensitive people."\textsuperscript{36} Sometimes, he indeed met success; said one student, "I gradually abandoned any expectations of how the community should behave toward me or I toward them. I began to realize, too, that I could simply be myself."\textsuperscript{37} Another student would remark,

> Often a student would come and almost be hiding behind a sort of paper personality . . . but in that kind of situation, the real people came through, which was sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes perfectly delightful.\textsuperscript{38}

Others beside Rice came to Black Mountain College knowing what kind of education they did not want. M.C. Richards asked:

> What kind of witchcraft is it that educates our awareness and paralyzes our wills?\textsuperscript{39}

Higher education had not equipped me nor my colleagues with human insight nor a loving will. Knowledge had not ennobled our behavior.\textsuperscript{40}

John Wallen, a professor at Black Mountain in the mid 1940s, came to the college believing that knowledge was not to be the end of the college: "living is an end to itself; all other activities are means to that

\textsuperscript{35}Rice, Interview by Duberman, 10 June 1967.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37}Letter from anonymous student, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archivews of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\textsuperscript{38}Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.

\textsuperscript{39}Richards, 114.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 111.
end. 

Grades, requirements, and subject matter were not to be stressed at the expense of helping an individual integrate into his community. Teachers were not to encourage the mere accumulation of information nor were they to decide for a student what knowledge is valuable. Professor Kenneth Kurtz arrived in 1938, stating that "there are other media of communication than words or mathematical formulae, and other repositories of human experience than books." Jack Rice, a professor in the 1950s, explained that "you weren't there to amass a nice list of, you know, A's on a chart somewhere."

Students had their own ideas of what college was not supposed to be. Peggy Bennett Cole, a student in 1944-45, wrote that so many other colleges of the time "assumed that intellectual parts of a student could be taken in hand and trained while the remainder of the student stood stock still, obediently passive, suspended, waiting . . . " Patricia Lynch, a student 1942-48, came to Black Mountain because she could not stand the thought of going to another college with sororities and fraternities, and was looking for an alternative. Claire Leighton

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1 John Wallen to Black Mountain College, 16 May 1945, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.


3 Jack Rice, Interview by Mary Harris, 12 June 1972, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

4 Peggy Bennett Cole, quoted in Duberman, 221.

5 Patricia Lynch, Interview by Mary Harris, 20 January 1972, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
arrived as "a reaction, you see, after Duke . . . Duke was so pompous and so tight."

"Others came looking for more freedom (perhaps too much): "I was going there in reaction against formal types of education as I had known them. This seemed to be the only place that allowed me to do nothing if I chose."

Defining the Absolute Form of Education

The students and faculty came to Black Mountain knowing what they did not want in their education. It was not enough to create a college based on negative criticism. In order to create, the first step to take was to define positive goals. Rice, again, led the way in articulating what he thought some of the goals of the college should be. To Rice, the college should aim to

bring young people to intellectual and emotional maturity; to intelligence, by which I mean a subtle balance between the intellect and the emotions."

He blamed Hitlerism on German education, "which always concerned itself only with the intellect . . . preparing for Hitler a nation of emotional infants ready to succumb to his demagoguery." He exhorted his student to not just "be intellectual!" or "be muscular!"; in both

"6 Claire Leighton, Interview by Mary Harris, 10 March 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

"7 Jerry Levy, Interview by Mary Harris, 30 November 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.


"9 Ibid."
cases, the dividing line was the neck. They were to "be intelligent." He wanted to "teach method, not content; to emphasize process, not results; the ways of handling facts and [one]self amid the facts is more important than facts themselves ... facts change." He wished to teach the young how to become, not how to be philosophers, and to show them in their quest for certainty the only thing on which they can rely with assurance is the experience of the quest.

Rice wanted each student to become his own person:

This is a school for giants...I mean that every one of us should grow to the giant that is in him to be; not some one else's giant, but his own.

Others elaborated on the goals originally set by Rice throughout the years of the college. Another professor, Frederick Mangold (at Black Mountain 1934-42), defined the main task of the college to be in understanding the relationship of the individual to the community, which could not be constructed on paper and which depended on experience and the cooperation of both generations. Problems of research would become personal questions, imagination would be stressed, and dialogue would be encouraged over the traditional lecture to the passive audience. Will Hamlin, a student at Black Mountain in the late 1930s explained that "we were trying to make some kind of order out of things, ... creating our

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50Rice, quoted in Adamic, "Education on a Mountain."
51Ibid.
52Rice, "Fundamentalism," 592.
53Rice, Eighteenth Century, 322.
own universities of meaning." Robert Wunsch, a drama teacher in the 1930s, believed that the reality at Black Mountain lay in human relationships, and he used his plays to help people find themselves and to begin to "understand the world in which they were living." One student labelled this type of education as the "true education . . . drawing people out, leading people out." To create a college, though, Black Mountain had to make these lofty goals concrete in some sort of method of education. Black Mountain was to be a place where free use might be made of tested and proved methods of education and new methods tried out in a purely experimental spirit.

Black Mountain, however, was determined to learn from history. Its methods of education were to need a "good likelihood of good results" and to rely on experiments that "have already shown value" . . . but which "have been isolated and prevented from giving their full value because of their existence side by side with thoughtless tradition." In this vein, Joe Martin, one of the original instructors, would explain that "we achieved the releases and raptures of revolutionary enthusiasm without the discouragements and inconveniences of revolutionary

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56Robert Wunsch, Notes from Adamic meeting, March 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

57Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.

58Black Mountain College Bulletin 1933-34, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

59Ibid.
struggle."⁶⁰ Black Mountain would cull the vocabulary and methods it needed in order to define its education from past and contemporary efforts in education. Its creative effort would come in combining the lessons that history had learned and adding a few innovations of its own.

At Black Mountain, there were no required courses, no formal grading, and no systematic exams. Black Mountain would place responsibility for learning "where it belongs; namely, on the student," a principle that was at the basis of the progressive education movement.⁶¹ As in the New Plan of Rollins and plans of many other colleges at the time⁶², the students would enroll in what what was called the Junior Division of the college, in which they would engage in a "period of discovery," by the end having "acquired an attitude towards Science, Social Science, Literature and the Arts that is based upon knowledge rather than ignorance."⁶³ When a student felt competent, he or she would apply to the school's board with a statement of accomplishment and knowledge in order to pass into the senior division. The student would then specialize in a particular discipline and repeat the same kind of process in order to graduate, this time being examined by experts in his field from the outside world; his teachers, therefore, were not the final arbiters, an idea taken directly from the Oxford

⁶⁰Martin, "Black Mountain College: 1933."
⁶¹Black Mountain College Bulletin 1933-34.
⁶³Black Mountain College Bulletin 1933-34.
tutor system (Rice had been a Rhodes Scholar there). As one student explained, this system allowed her to study "the course instead of how to get around the professor to please him."  

Exams were given only twice: once to enter the Senior Division and once to graduate. Both were rigorous, the college believing that more than memory or intellect alone should be tested. This examination is also a means for opening the eyes of the student to the multiplicity involved in common phenomena. The exams would consist of a long written part (often covering two days, eight hours each day) and an oral part, in which the whole community was invited to ask questions of the student. The few students that attempted to graduate were found, for the most part, exemplary candidates by their examiners. Donald K. Adams of Duke stated that his examinees would have received cum laude at most colleges; Frank Allen Patterson of Columbia claimed that his examinee would be "able to hold his own at the present times with the best of my graduate students"; and another professor, John Frederick Dashiell, found his candidate to be "clearly above that of A.B. candidates majoring in psychology and superior to that of most A.M. candidates."  

The graduate programs at such schools as Harvard, Antioch, Bard,  

Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.  

Minutes from a regular meeting of the faculty, 6 February 1934, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.  

For an example of a exam for admission to the senior division, see Appendix A.  

"Graduation at Black Mountain College," Newsletter, Black Mountain College Papers, The State University of North Carolina, Raleigh.
Columbia, Oberlin, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, and Berkeley accepted graduates of Black Mountain.68

The judgement of a student at Black Mountain was not based on how well he met the teachers' expectations, how well he performed under certain limited conditions, or how well he could memorize. Black Mountain did not use grades to measure a student, although some were privately jotted down in case the student would need them to transfer; the college used long written evaluations of the students instead. The judgement of a Black Mountain student was a judgement of the student as a whole, a judgement of not only his academic work but also his entire personality. Some of the remarks the faculty would make would be like these:

Last year, he was completely egocentric. He does things for the group now as he did not before . . .

talented, but one-sided . . . needs strong reality . . .

We allowed her to live in a small circle. People have left her, however69

As a result of this method of judgement, most students never felt ready to graduate from Black Mountain, because, as historian Martin Duberman argues, "to be disapproved of at Black Mountain . . . was the equivalent of being labelled an unworthy human being—not merely a poor student."70 These kind of judgements would prompt a critic, DeVoto of Harper's Magazine, to state that "Black Mountain isn't so much interested in

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68 "Graduation at Black Mountain College."

69 Minutes of faculty meeting 26 April, 3 May 1937, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

70 Duberman, 91.
developing students as in developing personalities" and that Black Mountain sounded "less like an educational institution than a sanitarium for mental diseases, run by optimistic amateurs who substitute for psychiatric training some mystical ideas." These were the very ideas against which the college was fighting: to Black Mountain, the student was indeed a personality, not just an intellectual mind. They were not going to hide from the lessons that they could learn from the intimate interaction within a small community. As one student described:

Anybody who has lived in that kind of situation knows what kind of problems are involved. How much tension is there, and what kind of problems are going to erupt. But still it's worth it. People learn an awful lot about people. And I think, maybe, that's the most important thing."

When Black Mountain was considering a student for admission, it would give serious consideration to judging him or her as a whole person as well. For instance, when two brothers applied, the college decided that the older brother dominated the younger too much, and the college refused to accept the older.

Rice had in mind his own criteria: the ability to live in and profit from living in such a community as ours . . . capacity for personal depression; a student ought to say to himself every once in a while, "I'm no damn good," feel like the devil about himself, then get over it and try to be better; and with that, achieve a sense of elation, which, from our experience here is the process by which people make something of themselves . . . a capacity for indignation . . . injustice, whatever he thinks of as

72 Jane Stone, Interview by Mary Harris, 27 March 1971.
73 Jack Rice, Interview by Mary Harris, 12 June 1972.
injustice, must make him furious...

sense of order, sense of form, love of truth?4

Although the college attempted to admit a variety of characters, it did have its limitations. Rice's reasoning for not accepting a transvestite was that "there are groups of people who don't belong together."?5 This prompted historian Duberman to comment: "we innovate here, we shut the door there."?6

The college wanted candidates with high school degrees and College Board scores, but it would be willing to waive these requirements if the student was willing to take a Black Mountain entrance exam and to provide recommendations of his or her quality and quantity of scholastic, extracurricular, and summer work. This entrance exam was, in a way, rather hypocritical of Black Mountain, which believed in meeting the needs of the individual student. The exam tested for adequate preparation, but adequate preparation to meet one's own needs? The school did somewhat compensate for this by asking the students for a piece of work, such as an essay, story, or poem, and a personal interview. Some of the questions on the application were also rather unorthodox: If you do not expect to graduate from high school, what is your plan? If your secondary school grades are poor, how do you account for it?"7

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?5Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.

?6Duberman, 78.

?7See information on students' backgrounds, geographical and
The sense of freedom and responsibility that Black Mountain College offered to the students was also given to the teachers. One teacher stated,

I'm surprised at the amount of independence and power that I have here as a member of the faculty. I compare it to Harvard where no member could conceive of standing on his own hind legs and getting away with it. One can here.⁷⁸

The teacher, though, had a twenty-four-hour-a-day job at Black Mountain. To Rice, teachers were "the central problem; that we could provide the students with a liberal education if we merely gave them the privilege of looking on while we educated ourselves."⁷⁹ One of the students at Black Mountain described the teacher as a "living tissue thing that was full of problems" and not "a unique never-never person, a voice on an intercom giving me instructions."⁸⁰ Rice would elaborate at length on his conception of teaching in his autobiography, I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century:

Teaching is a secondary art. A man is a good teacher if he is a better something else; for teaching is communication, and his better something else is the storehouse of the things he will communicate. I have never known a master in any field who was not also a master teacher; but to be a master teacher at Black Mountain one had to be a master man. In other places education was part of the day and part of the man; in Black Mountain it was round the clock and all of a man. There was no escape. Three meals together, passing in the hall, meeting in classes, meeting everywhere, a man taught by the way he walked, by the sound of his voice, by every movement...[it

otherwise in Appendix B.

⁷⁸Irving Knickerbocker, Notes from the Adamic meeting, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

⁷⁹Rice, quoted in Adamic, "Education on a Mountain."

⁸⁰Stan Vanderbeek, Interview by Mary Harris, 29 March 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
was] the education of the whole man by a whole man.\textsuperscript{a1}

Indeed, a professor who could not learn to "meet students as man to man, claiming no special privilege of reverence or respect could not be happy here."\textsuperscript{a2}

As for the curriculum, Black Mountain would differ from many of the contemporary colleges in that it would place the arts at the center of its curriculum as opposed to the outer fringes in an "effort to put the same faith in doing that [the student] was taught to have in absorbing."\textsuperscript{a3} Black Mountain believed that "by being sensitized to movement, form, sound, and the other media of the arts," the student could get "firmer control of himself and his environment than is possible through purely intellectual effort."\textsuperscript{a4} Black Mountain would be a place where

\begin{itemize}
  \item making is a central activity, every example hav[ing] value: making bread, making a sign, making a report, making a table, making a concert, making love, making tea, making a baseball game, making plans for next year, making.\textsuperscript{a5}
\end{itemize}

Arts were "simply in the air all the time."\textsuperscript{a6}

Josef Albers, who had come directly from the Bauhaus in Germany after Hitler had closed it, was one of the most outspoken supporters of art as the center of Black Mountain education. His courses were not for

\begin{itemize}
  \item Rice, Eighteenth Century, 322.
  \item Walter Locke, editorial in Dayton Daily News, 16 November 1934.
  \item Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.
  \item Black Mountain College Bulletin, 1933-34.
  \item Richards, 122.
  \item Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.
\end{itemize}
artists but for people, for the focusing of their personal powers. To Albers, art was the "only force which can bring emotions into disciplined relation to thought."\textsuperscript{87} Albers wanted to teach the awareness of everyday objects and their individual properties and the value of primary experience and action: "life is a moving, changing thing, demanding action as well as thinking."\textsuperscript{88} His class would sometimes have fifty students and fifteen faculty in it: "The bigger the class, the more everybody learned because he contrived to have everybody learn from everybody."\textsuperscript{89}

To Albers, art was "revelation instead of information, expression instead of description, creation instead of imitation or repetition."\textsuperscript{90} Albers believed that the "fundamental art problem was the discovery and revelation of the human soul,"\textsuperscript{91} and he would often quote John Ruskin:

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think but thousands can think for one who can see.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{87}Josef Albers, quoted in Grace Alexandra Young, "Art as a Fourth 'R'," \textit{Arts and Decoration} (January 1935).

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{89}Ted Dreier, Interview by Mary Harris, 8 May 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\textsuperscript{90}Josef Albers, "The Meaning of Art," Seven-page typewritten manuscript of a speech made at Black Mountain, 6 May 1940, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\textsuperscript{91}Albers, "Concerning Abstract Art," Lecture at Yale University, quoted in Mary Emma Harris, \textit{The Arts at Black Mountain College} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), 6.

\textsuperscript{92}John Ruskin, \textit{Modern Painters} (London: Smith, Elder, 1856), 3:268, quoted in Harris, 17.
Art would develop the will, and it is the will
that moves one from knowledge to action... that not only reveals
our wishes and needs... [but] puts our intentions and decisions
into effect and brings us into functional relationships to men and
the world. Without will, theory will not be applied, insight will
remain a useless possession.93

Black Mountain would use art to foster imagination in the belief
that from the child's capacity to imagine comes the adult's capacity for
compassion, his ability to picture the sufferings of others and to
imagine other ways of living.94 Rice agreed with the educator Alfred
North Whitehead that

imagination is a contagious disease. It cannot be measured by the
yard, or weighed by the pound, and then delivered to the students by
members of the faculty. It can only be communicated by a faculty
whose members themselves wear their learning with imagination.95

Rice did not want to create the individualist fighting against his
community, his environment. He wanted an artist whose only fight was
against his ignorance and clumsiness, who would be able to use his
painting, his musical score, or his words to express his integrity and
his relationship with his environment.96 Albers would express these
thoughts well: "Stick to your own bones, speak with our own voice and
sit on your own behind."97

93Josef Albers, "On General Education and Art Education," Lecture
at Denver Art Museum, Yale University, July 1946, quoted in Harris, 15.
94Richards, 115.
95Whitehead, 262.
96Rice, Eighteenth Century, 329.
97Josef Albers, Interview by Martin Duberman, 11 November 1976,
transcript, Martin Duberman Papers, The State Archives of North
Carolina, Raleigh.
Rice also did not want to make artists in love with themselves, their "private stomach-ache becoming the tragedy of the world." He did not expect "that many students will become artists; in fact, the college regards it as a sacred duty to discourage mere talent from thinking itself genius." These ideas sometimes backfired, however, and the college's opponents would criticize it for letting so-and-so believe he was the "most talented human being in the American theater." Some of the students would also feel excluded: "If you didn't have talent, you just didn't fit in."

Black Mountain College was not designed to be "The Black Mountain College of the Arts." It only placed art alongside the other disciplines. Its critics, however, often attacked the college for its lack of strong academics, of libraries, and of science equipment, and one critic was appalled at the lack of information students had, calling Black Mountain a "gallery of the higher neuroticism... exceptional people, yes, but exceptional only in their vividness." The courses offered by Black Mountain throughout its years, however, seem to

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100 Ruth Asawa and Al Lanier, Interview by Walt Park, 28 June 1968, quoted in Duberman, 245.

101 David and Liz Resnik, Interview by Martin Duberman, 14 July 1968, quoted in Duberman, 244.

102 DeVoto.

103 Alfred Kazin, Interview by Martin Duberman, 22 February 1967, quoted in Duberman, 222, 223.
comprise a rigorous academic curriculum.\textsuperscript{104} Indeed, the comments by many of the outside examiners were highly respectful of the intellect of Black Mountain students. It was up to the student to learn, though, and one student would argue that although he never learned any particular subject, he did learn a "new way of thinking and doing and living."\textsuperscript{105}

Defining the Absolute Form of Community

Inherent in this type of education of Black Mountain was the idea of learning to live in a community. Many of the original ideas for Black Mountain stemmed from the philosophy of John Dewey, author of Democracy and Education, who argued that the very process of living together educates. It enlarges and enlightens experience; it stimulates and enriches imagination; it creates responsibility for accuracy and vividness of statement and thought.\textsuperscript{106}

To Rice, John Dewey was "the only man I have ever known who was completely fit and fitted to live in a democracy . . . the only man I have known who never questioned the individual's right to be alive."\textsuperscript{107}

\textsc{It would be important for Rice to take heed to Dewey's advice that the remedy of education is not to have one expert dictating educational methods and subject matter to a body of passive, recipient teachers, but the adoption of intellectual initiative, discussion, and decision throughout the community. An elected rector was to lead the meetings of the college.}\footnote{\textsuperscript{104}For a listing of some of the courses that were offered and the degrees awarded at Black Mountain College, see Appendix C.}

\textsuperscript{105}\textsc{Patricia Lynch, Interview by Mary Harris, 20 January 1972.}

\textsuperscript{106}\textsc{John Dewey, Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1916), 7.}

\textsuperscript{107}\textsc{Rice, Eighteenth Century, 331.}
entire school corps.\textsuperscript{108}

The founders knew what they did not want from their Rollins experience: a President who was responsible to a Board of Trustees and a faculty who was responsible to the President. Holt had made it clear that although the classroom at Rollins was to be democratic, the government of Rollins was not: "if there is as much as fifty per cent disagreement between me and any member of the faculty on what I consider a fundamental matter, either he or I should go."\textsuperscript{109}

Black Mountain would attempt to instill democratic ideas not only into the classroom but also into the entire structure of the institution. There would be no outside control of the Black Mountain education: no trustees, no deans, no regents. As at Oxford, where the faculty controlled educational policy and student life, the faculty was to own and administer Black Mountain. Argued Rice:

The center of control in American education has shifted in the past century, from those who really know or should know something about education, the teacher, to those who, in most cases, really know nothing about it, the trustees; and the result is irresponsibility.\textsuperscript{110}

At this time, Black Mountain was the only college in the United States to be completely governed by faculty.\textsuperscript{111} The faculty would elect a Board of Fellows composed of faculty and an elected student representative. An elected rector was to lead the meetings of the


\textsuperscript{109} Holt, quoted in Lovejoy and Edwards, 421.

\textsuperscript{110} Rice, quoted in Adamic, \textit{My America}, 622.

\textsuperscript{111} Monroe, 124.
board; there was to be no President of Black Mountain College. The board would be responsible for making some of the administrative decisions, such as on the perpetually precarious finances.

The board's first act was to elect Frederick Georgia as acting "rector" and to establish tuition, room, and board at $1200 per year, with the emphasis that money was not to be considered in the evaluation for admissions. The board then created the positions of rector, secretary, and treasurer, all to be held by professors. The rector would be responsible for executing contracts and deeds, having been elected by the faculty for a term of one year. Rice had not been elected rector the first year because of the "rumpus" in Rollins; he would become rector the following year.\(^\text{112}\) The board was also responsible for establishing that professors would be provided with free room and board but no salary, although some money was made available for other needs (approximately seven dollars a month\(^\text{113}\)). The board declared that "the financial recompense which a man receives is in no way considered by them as the measure of a man's value in the College."\(^\text{114}\)

The entire faculty was responsible for "all matters pertaining to educational policy and detail and of student discipline," having the power to determine admission, graduation, enrollment, and the college

\(^{112}\)Ted Dreier, Interview by Mary Harris, 8 May 1971.

\(^{113}\)Adamic, "Education on a Mountain."

\(^{114}\)Minutes from special meeting of the Board of fellows, 23 October 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
The board amended the determination of student discipline in May of 1934, delegating this power to a committee of faculty and student officers. Amendments also included bylaws that allowed student officers to attend the faculty meetings and for the chief student officer to sit on the Board of Fellows. Issues affecting the whole community were discussed in general meetings, in which decisions would be reached by consensus and not by voting. The college would also have an advisory council, composed of educators, scientists, and artists from the "outside world," people such as John Dewey, Walter Gropius, Carl Jung, Max Lerner, Walter Locke, John Burchard, Franz Kline, and Albert Einstein. Their role, however, would be only advisory; in reality, the college relied on their associations with these people for credibility to the outside world; the only recorded meeting of the advisory council was on November 2,3 in 1945.

The community meetings provided opportunity for the community to act democratically. Rice, however, argued that not everyone had an equal voice, although economic status had nothing to do with who had the power. He argued that what resulted was a natural aristocracy, in which some people had more authority than others, the test being made all day long as to who would have the voice that was respected. Also, students had limited rights when it came to deciding educational policies. Professor Josef Albers believed that "in educational meetings, I think it is best to be a smaller and more intensified circle," and Rice agreed

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that teaching sometimes involved secrets that the student should not know ahead of time.\textsuperscript{116} The government, then, of Black Mountain would be a learning process itself:

The development of the habit of self-government is at first slow, but as principles of action are disclosed, skill and speed follow, both in the individual and in the social unit.\textsuperscript{117}

Black Mountain would extend its definition of democracy beyond the process of government and into the everyday community, following Dewey's assertion that democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience . . . the widening of the area of shared concerns, and the liberation of a greater diversity of personal capacities.\textsuperscript{118}

Everyone except faculty with children lived in Lee Hall, the faculty on one wing, and the students on the other wing (men on one floor, women on the other). The middle section was a giant meeting room one hundred feet by sixty feet where there were meetings, teas, dancing, plays, concerts, and classes. Everyone ate together for all the meals in the dining hall in the back of this building and took turns serving the food.

During the weekdays, classes would be held in the mornings, late afternoons after tea, and at night. After dinner, if there was not a seminar, there were always plays, orchestras, piano playing, or community singing. Almost five times a week, dinner would break out into a dance, as John Evarts, the pianist began to play, yelling "all

\textsuperscript{116}Minutes from faculty meeting, 12 October 1937.

\textsuperscript{117}Black Mountain College Bulletin, 1933-34.

\textsuperscript{118}Dewey, Democracy and Education, quoted in Harris, 1.
hands around."\(^{119}\) After twenty minutes of dancing, all would be refreshed, ready to attend class or just study. What dominated the day most, however, was the constant conversation among students and faculty. At Black Mountain, education did not consist of a couple of hour-long sessions meeting every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Education was continuous; students and faculty could learn from one another as they would see each other outside of the classroom, during meals, during concerts, or just simply passing each other in the lobby, learning how each other responds "to the various life and human situations."\(^{120}\)

At Black Mountain, it was not going to be the case that "you see your family . . . and then the rest of the people in your life are just departmental people."\(^{121}\) The educator Hutchins had earlier argued that the "contact with daily life in itself is not a guarantee of intellectual leadership, or even of intellectual activity."\(^{122}\) Albert Einstein, who had "followed since years with a vivid interest the development of BMC," responded to this argument eloquently:

"Education without a vivid personal relationship between all working together there, students as well as teachers, is far from the ideal even if the teachers are of highest standing. The University has not only to transmit knowledge from one generation to the other but is also a place where character and social coherence have to be developed . . . We have to prevent that mass-production is extended to human beings themselves."\(^{123}\)

\(^{119}\) Ted Dreier, Interview by Mary Harris, 3 May 1971.

\(^{120}\) James Herlihy, Interview by Mary Harris, 13 November 1972, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.

\(^{122}\) Hutchins.

\(^{123}\) Albert Einstein to Black Mountain College, 16 January 1954,
There were no employees at Black Mountain except the cook, the furnace man, and two cleaners.\(^{124}\) It was the responsibility of the community to serve the food, repair the roads, cut the wood, shovel the coal, serve the tea, fetch the mail, build the shed, and police the grounds. The college also developed its own farm, where many would work in the early afternoon. Students and faculty worked on the farm milking the cows, growing corn, running the tractors, driving the beef herds, pruning the apple trees, and cutting down firewood. They produced their own milk, butter, beef, pork, fruits, and vegetables. By the time they would arrive back for tea at four, they would be "bursting with a good feeling and good health . . . having been doing something different from the tremendous amount of intellect and talk . . . ."\(^{125}\) At Black Mountain,

you didn't stop working to be educated . . . you worked as you learned—just as later you hoped to go on learning as you worked.\(^{126}\) All members of the community were responsible for these daily activities; there were no special work study programs; no student would have to work his way through Black Mountain.

Black Mountain introduced this way of living in an effort to create community and to teach responsibility. This did not necessarily mean that the college forced the student to work on the farm or to do

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Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^{124}\)Adamic, "Education on a Mountain."

\(^{125}\)Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.

\(^{126}\)Clayre.
the dishes. Some of the work was not glorious, as one student reminisced: "I hated dishcrew. It was hard dirty hot work, nothing good about doing it. I hated it."\textsuperscript{127} Rice, himself, would say that no one should work if they did not want to: "Untoiling poets may sing of the dignity of toil; others know there is degradation in obligatory sweat."\textsuperscript{128} The last thing he wanted were crusaders. He remembered one conversation he had had with some of the students driving off to the farm: "what is this car for? . . . if you're going really to be farmers . . . you ought to walk. . . . Let's have no more talk about the flight from the city, from civilization, this rubber came from Malaya you know."\textsuperscript{129}

Black Mountain wanted the students to learn to take some part in helping the community to prosper. The college realized, however, that it was misleading to suppose that all students are equally alert in their responses. When the student learns to assume full responsibility, one of the principal tasks of the College is done. The emphasis is upon seeing whether the student is actually becoming responsible, not upon whether he acts as if he were responsible.\textsuperscript{130}

The college would invite the student arriving into the family of Black Mountain with the freedom to accept this responsibility, the permission to criticize teachers and to be criticized, and the power to create scandal or prevent it. Morals would be obtained within the group, not

\textsuperscript{127} Anonymous student quoted by Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.

\textsuperscript{128} Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{130} Black Mountain College Bulletin, 1933-34.
imposed on it. There were only three rules in the early years of the college: males were not allowed in female rooms, a "do not disturb sign" was to be respected (one student commented that since nobody would go past the "do not disturb" sign, nobody knew if anybody was breaking the first rule\textsuperscript{131}), and students were to return promptly after vacation.

M.C. Richards described the way of Black Mountain life as dissolving the ordinary dualisms of conventional education and community.\textsuperscript{132} There was not to be a clear distinction between faculty and student:

Teachers had no status other than as persons. They lived in spirit as one family with the students. Privacy was illusory. One came to one's class naked to the scrutiny of all.\textsuperscript{133}

There was not to be a clear distinction between men and women; their relationship was "to be, in the main, not one of opposites, but of those who live upon the common ground of humanity."\textsuperscript{134} To Richards, Black Mountain attempted to dissolve these dualisms and many others: school and society, thought and life, intellect and character, fine and useful arts, pass and fail, underclassman and graduate, work and play, riches and poverty, knowledge and inspiration, professional and amateur.\textsuperscript{135}

Black Mountain invited each member of the community to escape

\textsuperscript{131}Emil Willimetz and Suzanne Noble, Interview by Mary Harris, 17 April 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\textsuperscript{132}Richards, 120.

\textsuperscript{133}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{134}Black Mountain Bulletin, 1933-34.

\textsuperscript{135}Richards, 120.
these conventional dualisms and definitions and to find his or her "real self." The constant interaction with others helped in this process of self definition:

You are seeing people under all circumstances daily, and after a while you get to the point where you don't mind being seen yourself, and that's a fine moment.\(^\text{137}\)

The community was meant to be supportive in this process. One Black Mountaineer describes:

You realized this was a place where you really could do what you ... most wanted to do, because that's what people were most interested in knowing about.\(^\text{138}\)

People would constantly ask "What do you do?" and were "prepared to accept you as an individual."\(^\text{139}\) Louis Adamic, an author who visited the college for three months in 1936, saw the community at Black Mountain as the enemy of the superficial self and the friend of the real self. The community would help the individual realize his real self by appraising his virtues and condemning his faults with good will, candor, humor, and a desire to help.\(^\text{140}\) In this situation, Anne Chapin, one of the original students, could explain: "the real people came through (instead of the paper personalities), which was sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes perfectly delightful."\(^\text{141}\) Indeed, according to Rice, the individual was

\(^{136}\) Adamic, "Education on a Mountain."

\(^{137}\) Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.

\(^{138}\) Jack Rice, Interview by Mary Harris, 12 June 1972.

\(^{139}\) Ibid.

\(^{140}\) Adamic, "Education on a Mountain."

\(^{141}\) Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.
to be the end of the college, and the community, the means; the education in democracy, the means, and the education for democracy, the end.\textsuperscript{142}

This education for democracy was just one of the ideals and philosophies that have been presented in this chapter in an effort to introduce what the members of Black Mountain College were attempting to accomplish in their education and community. Most had come armed knowing what they did not want; some had arrived with goals in mind; few had come with concrete means. The translation of these ideas into reality comprises the rest of the story.

The story of Black Mountain is a story of an experiment in communal living, perhaps similar to the attempts made in the past American history: Brook Farm, the Oneida Community, or New Harmony. In the case of Brook Farm, Ralph Waldo Emerson ended his experience by declaring that "few people can live on their merits alone" and that "we must descend to meet."\textsuperscript{143} He lamented that

the only candidates who will present themselves will be those who have tried the experiment of independence and ambition and have failed; and none others will barter for the most comfortable equality the chance of superiority.\textsuperscript{144}

Would Black Mountain be able to prove Emerson wrong? Would a new system of superiority replace the systems of hierarchy the members had left

\textsuperscript{142}Rice, Eighteenth Century, 327.

\textsuperscript{143}Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England," quoted in Duberman, 12, 246.

\textsuperscript{144}Ibid., 246.
behind?

Could a community based on consensus survive? Indeed, it would have to remain small, as Rice had realized when he stated that if the college ever got too large, he would have to tell the next person to arrive to "go over on the other side of the mountain and start a college for himself." Also, in demanding a "sense of community," the community as a whole would act somewhat tyrannously in defining what behavior was acceptable and what was not. Often what resulted was that dissenters were forced to adopt this "unanimous decision" or leave. There were limits to the community's tolerance for "deviant" behaviors such as homosexuality, "deviant" politics such as communism, "deviant" social customs such as allowing blacks to enter the college. As Rice argued:

The college was seeking a level of comfort, which meant comfort for the majority. In the history of communities the only stop to that movement had been a religious sanction. We had none. Our sanction, we said, was intelligence. But human intelligence, a nice balance between intellect and feeling, is a young thing, younger than human love. Sometimes intelligence took leave."

What resulted was a fragile community that needed to accept quarreling and dissension but to learn tolerance, forgiveness, and courtesy if they were going to survive the intimate and abrasive contact inherent in an isolated community. There would be no impersonal organization to take the heat and to distance the members from one another. As M.C. Richards remarked.

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145 Rice, quoted in Young.

146 Duberman, 102.

147 Rice, Eighteenth Century, 324.
The idea of being involved in all those processes, and of being in a position to take the consequences ... it's very debilitating to be in a situation where you can blame others.\textsuperscript{14\textcircled{a}}

Black Mountain's history is marked by the failures of its members to learn the tolerance and patience needed and the resorts by many to just abandon the challenge and leave. Many students and teachers were not willing to remain in a place where "you had to love too hard, you had to accept too hard."\textsuperscript{14\textcircled{b}} Rice himself would be forced to leave, commenting later that "there was not enough love in Black Mountain."\textsuperscript{15\textcircled{c}}

One member of the community once stated that "this college will never go under because of the ideal it stands for, but it may go under because of the clash of the individuals it."\textsuperscript{15\textcircled{d}} He did not realize that the ideals it stood for and the community and education that stemmed from those ideals were the reason individuals would have the power to destroy the college. That the college survived twenty-three years through the many departures of students and faculty in addition to the constant financial problems, however, offers hope that a group of people were indeed capable of redefining their lives and constructing a community and education that would be more human than any of the other institutions with which they had come into contact. The examination of the college's failures to live up to the absolute forms of

\textsuperscript{14\textcircled{a}}M.C. Richards, Interview by B.F. Williams, 18 October 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\textsuperscript{14\textcircled{b}}Liz Resnik, Interview by Martin Duberman, 14 July 1968.

\textsuperscript{15\textcircled{c}}Rice, Eighteenth Century, 333.

\textsuperscript{15\textcircled{d}}Frank Rice, Notes from the Adamic meeting, March 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
communication, community, and education that they had defined, then, serves only as a testimony to the human spirit of Black Mountain College.
CHAPTER 2
THE BREAKING IN OF THE ABSOLUTE FORM
1933-1940

By December of 1933, the twenty-two students and nine professors that had assembled in September had begun academic courses, had established a framework of government, and had gotten the finances somewhat in order.¹ The community had also set up committees composed of faculty and students to run the everyday life of the college, including committees for discipline, health, library, admissions, finances, guests, and catalogue. The farm was in operation, providing almost half of the food for the college, and by the second year, the students had also set up a coop store, in which they sold such things as cigarettes, paper, candy bars, and colas.

The first problems that confronted the community were trivial: deciding if there should be two or three meals on Sunday (the "two-side" wanted to give the kitchen staff a break)² or deciding if the college should have tea with or without cookies (for financial reasons)³. The

¹See Appendix D for an example of Black Mountain College's budget.


³Emil Willimetz and Suzanne Noble. Interview by Mary Harris, 17 April 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
community called one meeting to discuss the presence of male and female
students in the same bedroom, a "stormy meeting," resulting in the
agreement that males and females could talk in the same bedroom as long
as the beds did not have sheets. This decision was not as trivial as it
may have sounded; by making the decision, the community had begun a
definition of the morals by which it would live. By demanding
consensus, the community would leave members that did not agree with the
decision the choice to leave the college or to lie to the college.

As most other human institutions have rules that codify what
behavior is acceptable and what is not, Black Mountain also had
boundaries to what was proper and what was not. At Black Mountain,
however, there were no written rules. Instead there were "unspoken
canons". These assumed that the students would attend classes, that
they would not leave school for more than an afternoon, or that all
would dress up for Saturday dinner. It was understood at Black Mountain
that the community members had freedom, but as Rice would say, "Inside
liberty you've got to have something else."5 To Rice, that something
else was courtesy for the others in the community. For instance, some
students had cars and could drive away at any time, "but they'd better
not do it very often if they had any regard of the opinion people had of
them."6

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5Betty Young Williams, Interview by Martin Duberman, 2 August
1967.

6John Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967,
transcript, Martin Duberman Papers, The State Archives of North
Carolina, Raleigh.

4Ibid.
Without carefully written rules, it was often hard to define what constituted behavior that was acceptable to the community. Some of the community would find out too late that they had gone past the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Such was the case when a group of four students, two male and two female, went hitchhiking to Florida during the spring break in 1937. When they returned, a community meeting was called in which it was decided by consensus that it was against acceptable behavior for a group of mixed company to make trips like that during the school year. One student would recollect that "they dignified the whole thing by not even having a vote;" she thought that it was worse if one were to go against a whole community's agreement than to go against a majority vote.\(^7\)

Some at Black Mountain were not willing to submit to the judgement of the whole community. In a student meeting, one student argued against this concept by stating that "I refuse to be geared down to the level of the group intelligence if that is a low one."\(^8\) Another student responded, "No one can go into a group justly and say 'I want your advantages but I refuse to follow the restrictions you place upon me.'"\(^9\)

A person entering the Black Mountain group, then, had to be willing first to find out what constituted acceptable behavior and then

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\(^7\)Mort and Barbara Steinau, Interview by Martin Duberman, 24 June 1967, transcript, Martin Duberman Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^8\)"Stella," Typed notes of student meeting, 2 June 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^9\)Nat French, Typed notes of student meeting, 2 June 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
live according to the consensus. It was not even the consensus, sometimes, that decided what was proper. One anonymous homosexual wrote how Rice had pulled him aside, making it clear to him that "only certain kinds of feelings could be considered worthy of expression by and in the community"; and homosexuality was not one of them.\textsuperscript{10} This same person would write that Rice had "shattered what new confidence in living and working I had gained . . . where we are under the relatively close scrutiny of each other, one is more than ever aware of the dangers . . . there was no escaping each other."\textsuperscript{11} Indeed there was no escaping anyone by being able to leave the office or the classroom at the end of the day to retreat to a peaceful home. At Black Mountain, the office and the classroom were home, and your classmates and coworkers were family.

One of the most serious decisions that the college was to make its first year helped to show further some of the strengths and weaknesses of Black Mountain's way of living. It had to do with the wish of the father of one of the students, Peggy Loram. Dr. Charles Templeman Loram, a Sterling professor from Yale and head of Yale's Department of Race Relations, had been travelling with a group of students, including one black student, and had asked to visit Black Mountain College with them. The question was where the black student would be housed: in the dormitory with the other students or with the cooks, Jack and Ruby
Lipsey, who were also black.\textsuperscript{12}

The first response from the college illustrated two aspects of the Black Mountain community: its relationship with the local community and the way in which important decisions were made. The contact with the town of Black Mountain that the college had was limited to an occasional movie and a trip to the local tavern for beer, or an invitation to the town to see a play or concert given by the school. The college, composed mostly of students and faculty from the Northeast or from Europe, was, at the very least, not quite as politically conservative or religiously fundamentalist as the community surrounding them. Throughout its history, the local community would often view Black Mountain College as "a hot bed of radicalism, communism, free love, and nigger-lovers.\textsuperscript{13}" In the belief that the college would be literally burned out if it housed the black student in the dormitories, the Board of Fellows decided without any input from the other faculty and students that the visiting black student would stay with the Lipseys.

Up to this point in late 1934, the students had "felt very important" at Black Mountain, believing that "we had all the power we were aware of needing."\textsuperscript{14} In reality, however, the Board of Fellows, consisting of Theodore Dreier, Rice, and Georgia (all professors from Rollins), had elected themselves board, had written the bylaws of the college, had elected the faculty, and had decided the salaries of the

\textsuperscript{12}Betty Young Williams, Interview by Martin Duberman, 2 August 1967.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
faculty. In this case, however, the students protested the board's decision with a petition written by students Meg Hinckley and Nat French, objecting to the decision making by a minority of the community and declaring that the community's attitude toward race should be discussed in a public meeting. The board agreed, but at the meeting, the college community upheld the board's decision. When it came down to choosing between making a striking blow for equality or insuring that the college survive, the college's survival won out. As historian Duberman argues, the decision to house the black student in the dormitory would have been "suicidal—or heroic . . . and neither tendency is ever likely to characterize a majority—even the smallest and best of communities."  

Ideally, Black Mountain did aim to invite each student to be a responsible member of the community and to take charge of his or her own education. For instance, when the students decided that they needed a drama teacher, they took charge of raising $1000 to get Robert Wunsch from Rollins to Black Mountain. The faculty thought that paying him a salary was unfair; the students convinced them that Wunsch needed the salary to support his ailing mother. One student described her feelings about her responsibility: "In a way that students very seldom have an opportunity to do—we felt—very important—we felt very much a


16Duberman, 79.

17Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.
part of the whole school."18 Another student would remember how important it was "feeling that you're... you're working for yourself and not for anybody else... which I truly did." She would argue, though, that "there was so much self-direction that I think it was too much for me. I think I wasted... a good deal of time, even though I think I worked very hard."19 Another student would say that the "implication that you were supposed to be grown up enough to live your problems" often allowed the college to forget that students were young and that they did sometimes need guidance.20 The college was not without its share of suicides; in its fifth year, Dick Porter shot himself, prompting a professor to lament that "when we realize that a person in the midst of a group has been lonely, a feeling of guilt arises in the community."21

One of the problems that Black Mountain would have throughout its history was in defining just when the student was an equal, responsible member of the community and when he or she was a student who had something to learn from the faculty. One student argued that "there never... was any differentiation much between the students and

18Betty Young Williams, Interview by Martin Duberman, 2 August 1967.

19Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971, transcript. Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

20Will Hamlin to Martin Duberman, 17 February 1967, quoted in Duberman, 86.

faculty." 22 If there wasn't any differentiation, perhaps there should have been. As May Sarton wrote to the students in 1940:

You have taken upon yourselves the freedom of complete equality with one another and with your teachers and by doing this you have created an artificial perfectly flat landscape in which I have not been able to discover a tree which might give a little shade from the burning equalizing sun, nor have I seen in the distance a mountain which one might climb in the evening and from where one might see (who knows?) a great river streaming to a boundless ocean. You have shut out from you hearts the possibility of homage . . . You have shut yourselves out from the springs of holiness which come from homage and from devotion and from the recognition of differences and degrees and the progress of souls and minds. And you have taken from yourselves the joys of being an apprentice and a beginner . . . you have succeeded in becoming the comrades of your teachers and by doing this you have lost for yourselves one of the deepest human intuitions and one of the roots of growth. 23

The students did have a lot to learn from the faculty, not only lessons in academics, but also lessons about relationships, about community living, about growing up. Said one student,

I don't suppose that I could have learned as much about people in any other college . . . the extraordinary quality of people . . . that the average student probably can't get to know among faculty in a large university. 24

Since Black Mountain was a college and a community, there would be an often precarious balance in the roles played by the students. At times, they were the learners and at times they were the compatriots of the faculty. At times, the students were even the teachers; the faculty often had a lot to learn from the students. Rice would say that

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22Betty Young Williams, Interview by Martin Duberman, 2 August 1967.


24Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.
although the "teacher is a very nervous and uncertain person and does not like to be criticized," he or she should get into the habit of being criticized by the students. Some members of the faculty were uncomfortable with this idea:

Nothing is more difficult than living together. It looks wonderful, ja? But it isn't. And in some way, being forced to live together, and especially the older people—the faculty with the students on almost an equal foundational basis—makes life more difficult.

Students, however, had thoughts and opinions that were as instructive as those of the faculty. One student, Tasker Howard, standing up in a faculty discussion about whether student officers should sit in on meetings about other students, stated that the "faculty should . . . feel that student officers have something to contribute... [they] may have more knowledge of the other students and a different viewpoint from that of the faculty."

That Black Mountain was a college and not just a community meant that it had a purpose that sometimes conflicted with the aims of establishing a community in which members were given equal authority. As Rice argued, Black Mountain was not preeminently a community. I say it is a college. And I say that the difference between this college and the so-called ideal communities that have been set up all over the world in times past is this: in any community which you set up, the idea is that people shall live in and continue to live in that community, and the aim

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25John Rice, Notes from faculty meeting, 12 October 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

26Erwin Straus, Interview by Mary Harris, 14 October 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

27Tasker Howard, Notes from faculty meeting, 12 October 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
is . . . happiness . . . whereas the job of a college is to provide a place into which people may come and get the kind of development which will enable them to leave it.28

Here was one of the central tensions at Black Mountain. Was Black Mountain a community whose aim was the happiness of the members who stayed or was it a college whose aim was to send educated and mature students out into the world? To follow both aims, Black Mountain would be forced to differentiate between student and faculty. Some decisions could not be made by a student body that kept changing year after year.

Most of the administrative decisions were indeed not made by the students. As one student argued, "We were allowed to be very vocal students, but when it came to who was pushing the oars, you know, it wasn't really we."29 It wasn't even a majority of the faculty, either. The Board of Fellows controlled important administrative decisions, such as the appointments and firings of faculty and the financial allotments. Moreover, the same men, year after year, held the board's positions. Josef Albers and Theodore Dreier held their position for 15 years; Frederick Mangold, Robert Wunsch, and Erwin Straus all remained on the board for at least seven years; Rice and Georgia both stayed on it for the five or four years that they were at the college.30

If the conflict between being a community and a college made the

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30Minutes of meeting of Board of Fellows and faculty, Volumes 1, 2, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
inequality in decision making between students and faculty inevitable.
what made the inequality in decision making among the faculty possible?
Many other faculty could have run for the positions on the board; also,
the faculty as well as the students could have demanded a larger voice
in some of the decisions made by the board. The faculty and students,
however, were finding that having to make consensus decisions on
everything, including how many meals there were to be on Sunday, was
exhausting. One professor would say that it was a "hell of a load for
everybody . . . endless committees," trying to schedule his own
research, his teaching, his faculty meetings, his committee meetings,
and the work program; he became "worn down by constant pressure."31
Indeed, one of the criticisms of the college made by DeVoto of Harper's
was that

the best use for an astrophysicist is in astrophysics, not
bookkeeping.

His job is to be a scientist and to teach . . . the times spent
at running the college takes away from being a teacher.32

One student would agree that "I think that perhaps a good many faculty
members may have begun to feel that an administration might not be so
bad."33 Rice would summarize their frustrations, "Here was the great
revolutionary society that started out talking about taking care of the

31 Dan Rice, Interview by Mary Harris, 12 March 1971, transcript,
Black Mountain College Project Papers. The State Archives of North
Carolina, Raleigh.

32 Bernard DeVoto. "The Easy Chair: Another Consociate Family,"

33 Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.
buildings and grounds."

Even when the faculty and students were willing to meet and to make decisions, reaching a consensus was exhausting. One student, Mort Steinau, realized that reaching a consensus meant "that if there was a minority the discussion had to go on until they were convinced; or if they were not convinced—until they left." A professor would comment that the issues at Black Mountain were "resolved in a pattern of growth . . . those who left should have left . . . those that were dominant stayed."

Perhaps, then, the exhaustion from the process of consensus decision making led the faculty to give up some of their decision-making power to the Board of Fellows. To Rice, however, the inequality in decision making existed because there were some people who naturally had more authority than others in their strength of personality:

the test is made all day long and everyday as to who is the person to listen to . . . In every community, not by election but by acknowledgement, somebody became the big man. He was the wise man, the regular. He was the fellow to go to if you were in trouble, or if you had a question."

He did point out, though, that Black Mountain offered the chance for anyone to assume that authority, leaving economic or social status behind.

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34Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.


36Jack Rice, Interview by Mary Harris, 12 June 1972, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers. The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

37Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.
In the first few years of Black Mountain, Rice was the big man. He realized this, remembering that "I was Authority. ... I represented Authority. ... I don't think you can have anything like [Black Mountain] without somebody being the Authority." He wanted, however, to make Black Mountain so that it would not need a central leader:

The problem is how to rid ourselves of the necessity of leadership. The paradox lies in the fact that it can only be done through leadership. ... Men must be taught, or somehow learn, to desire anonymity; to be willing to, and to know how, to merge their individual intelligence with the intelligence of others ..."

He told his friend, the author Louis Adamic, that

I am doing all I can to lessen my so-called importance to the college, and I think I am progressing. The first year I went away for a week and was called back by telegraph. ... Last year ... I was always wired to return. This fall ... I was hardly missed ... And in faculty meetings, I hinted if they wanted a one-man college, I don't want to be the man, nor remain here—I told them I wouldn't be committed to it for long ... and there was a moment of tense silence, but not panic, as there would have been two years ago.

Rice was attempting to create a democratic way of living at Black Mountain, but he realized the inherent contradiction: someone had to be the teacher. What Rice wanted was a gradual movement from his leadership:

the movement is from leadership to oligarchy, from oligarchy to democracy, and from within democracy to intelligent freedom of a self-disciplined humanity. I am trying here to skip oligarchy ...

He wanted the ideas of the college to "go on and develop beyond me,

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38Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.


40Ibid.

41Ibid., 644.
beyond what we are now. So the problem is, how to efface myself."

To efface the force of Rice's personality would not be an easy task. Rice was seldom in his office; he could almost always be found in the lobby with a crowd around him, laughing, asking questions, arguing, always talking and encouraging the students to think. He could begin a discussion that would continue for weeks by asking one of the students, "What are your grandchildren going to laugh at that you now consider sound and sacred?" As a teacher, Rice was known as the college's Socrates, constantly asking "What do you think about this?" drawing opinions out, expatiating on the illogic of some of the answers, getting the whole group to join in. John Evarts, the music professor, described Rice's Plato class:

He would start off with a word or a concept which most people thought they understood perfectly--a word like 'sentimental' or 'democratic' or 'aristocratic' or 'love' or 'honour' and the discussions on a single concept might continue for two weeks or more--the digressions were enormous; he would confuse the class showing some of them all too clearly that they didn't say what they meant and didn't mean what they said. . . . When a word or idea had been scrutinized, dismembered, tossed around for days, interlaced with anecdotes and reminiscences, he would, finally, pull all the loose ends together and by that time his listeners were at least a little wiser and less ready to throw words around which they only vaguely understood."

Rice wanted to learn from the students, telling them that "This is part of my own education, I've got to learn. I've got to know what

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42Rice, quoted in Adamic, My America, 644.

43Ibid., 635.

44Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.

these things mean. And I can't get it all myself." Rice would even submit chapters of his own book in his writing class for students to critique.

Rice was often a very harsh critic as described by John Evarts:

he loved to shock people in all ways—to provoke them to think. He would make sweeping condemnations—to watch people blink and see how they would defend themselves in their ideas. Like some psychoanalysts, he would 'break people down'—and not always build them up again. This applied to both student and faculty members. But he was always brilliant and could have the tongue of angels. He was loved, feared, and sometimes hated. A real father figure.

Rice did become the father figure to many. He wrote in his autobiography that "I, without intending to be, was the father: confessor, Oedipus's, Christ's, and just plain ordinary. I knew too much, for I let people talk themselves out." He would recall when a student came into his office and began to just talk and talk about nothing. Rice knew that the student was in love with a girl at the college, and he interrupted the student's babble, by asking point blank, "Well, why the hell don't you marry Betty?" Said the student, "Well, I don't think I can." To Rice's question "Why?", the student confided, "Well, there's insanity in our family." Rice calmly replied, "For God's sake, do you know of a family that hasn't got insanity?"

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46 Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.

47 Emil Willimetz and Suzanne Noble, Interview by Mary Harris, 17 April 1971.

48 John Evarts, quoted in Clayre.


50 Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.
There were problems with being a father figure, as Rice remembered. "I was the perfect father, permissive, happy . . . but after a while you get the same feeling about the substitute father that you did about the original . . . and when you had problems with the original. . ." Rice believed that Ted Dreier, Albers, Bob Wunsch, and Frederick Mangold, all professors and members of the board, looked to him as a father for advice but resented his authority at the same time. He remembered when Bob Wunsch would not like something, he would go six weeks without looking at Rice, until Rice would say "Come into my office . . . let's have it out."  

Rice was human, however, and full of contradictions, as one critic would describe him: "a theoretical democrat, he instinctively assumed authority, an advocate of self-trust, he could mercilessly chop down a student for lazy thinking." Rice would say things one day and claim the next day that "I am not responsible for what I said yesterday." He would argue that decision-making positions should rotate, yet he would keep his rector position for the entire time he was at Black Mountain. He often made decisions on his own; for example, he decided that the school would admit a student whom the admissions committee had rejected because they thought that the student would not be able to contribute to

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51 Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.

52 Ibid.


the college. Indeed, the student spent the entire semester at the local
tavern.55

Rice could be destructive in his criticism. Rice told one
professor that

you have no business teaching, you have no real interest in
philosophy, you don't give a damn about philosophy, and you're not
interested in teaching and you can't be if you don't give a damn
about it.56

All of this may have been true, but Rice was not constructive in his
criticism, recommending to this same professor that he ought to become a
golf pro. Another professor would criticize Rice's constant opinions
about who belonged at Black Mountain and who did not, remembering Rice's
statements: "So-and-so is not in accordance with the spirit of the
place" or "so-and-so is a lovely person to have around."57 One student
described Rice as a "gadfly . . . [who] hurt people's feeling, hurt
their vanity, hurt their pride, which was often unfortunate;" she did
continue, though, that this behavior was often productive.58 Said Albers
often of Rice, "Rice is not a good example, he preached what he didn't
do himself."59

In the first few years, however, the faculty and students did not
challenge Rice's authority and his shortcomings. The event that brought

55Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.
56Ibid.
57Zeuch.
58Anne Chapin, Interview by Mary Harris, 26 October 1971.
59Josef Albers to Theodore Dreier, Theodore Dreier Collection, quoted in Harris, 57.
some of his inconsistencies to light was an article on Black Mountain by Louis Adamic that appeared in Harper's in April of 1936. Adamic had come to Black Mountain early that year, planning to stay for a couple of days; he ended up staying for three months. In his article, Adamic painted Black Mountain as a place where there was no malice, only cooperation and cohesion. He also called Rice Black Mountain's "center, its core," describing Rice in glowing terms: "dynamically intelligent... fanatically honest . . . almost recklessly courageous . . . optimistic."60 Adamic stated that "questions of educational policy were left almost entirely to the leader, John Rice, whose head bristled with ideas."61

Before the final draft was to be published, Adamic asked the college to meet to review what he had to say in his article. Rice believed that this was the first time that the college began to be aware of itself and its shortcomings. In a letter to Adamic, he wrote that the college was jittery and terribly self-conscious about the publication of the article . . . it is the first time since the College began that there has been any indication of a generally panicky feeling . . . now there is a more critical attitude toward what is being done here.62

In the meeting, the students attacked Adamic's portrayal of the utopian community. An excerpt from the meeting shows the beginning of a


61Ibid.

self-consciousness:

Martin (professor): I don't think we're as good as Adamic says.

Evarts (professor): I believe that there is malice.

Hendrickson (student): Sometimes group influence causes a person to stiffen his back and become obstinate.

Rice: Yes, but group influence should order the lives around it, laying considerations before the individual; it doesn't tell him what to do—just asks him to make an intellectual judgement.

Hendrickson: Yes, but group influence doesn't know where to stop.

Barbar (student): I don't care how hard I am kicked. I have been kicked so much that I have acquired a case-hardened backside. I can take it. I am however worried about those who can't . . . you have to give the individual a chance . . . you can't reduce him to a pulp and let him stay on his own.63

At one point in the meeting, Rice urged the community to "say what you mean. Stand up. Don't mutter and gripe in little groups."64 The student George Barbar responded, directing his comments to challenging Rice's power, arguing:

--Rice can pass judgement and it becomes public property
--Rice either deliberately misuses power or doesn't realize his own strength, but there are also too many damn sheep in this place.
--I want more active proof and less verbal intellectualizing that Rice means what he says.
--If he wants a thing done, it just happens.
--Rice can virtually make or break anyone here. He shouldn't have that power.65

Rice challenged the rest of the community to learn to make decisions and stand up without him, saying,

I admire Barbar; the student officers this year are worth less than

63Minutes from Adamic meeting, March 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

64Ibid.

65Ibid.
nothing ... they bring countless problems to me instead of solving them themselves. Everytime I straighten out a problem, that gives me power. Let me alone and I'll have less power ...

Sometimes I kick a person too hard ... I don't like some people here; some I dislike intensely ... I'm not under obligations to like everyone; my obligation is to be just. I am sometimes unjust. The college should deflate my power. This place will go on if people can get up and fight and not sit back and complain ... if I'm in the way, make me take it. I have certain good qualities. Get hold of them and bring them out ... Sit on my shortcomings ...

I am impatient ... but the difficulty is that when a physician fails to heal himself, it is hard for anyone else to heal him.  

Adamic's article went to press unchanged, but the meeting had opened up the consciousness of the community. Before the meeting and the article, Rice believed that "I ... had kept the secret, had let everyone, from the greenest freshman to the oldest and best teacher, believe that he was [leader]"; now he had challenged the community to take some of his power away from him. Perhaps he believed that this would be the way to a more democratic community.

A challenge to Rice came the year after the Adamic article meeting. On April 14, 1937, Rice had given Professor Irving Knickerbocker and Professor Robert Goldenson letters stating that the Board of Fellows was "pessimistic about the possibility of Mr. Knickerbocker's and Mr. Goldenson's developing into the kind of teachers we want here permanently." Rice had been especially critical of Knickerbocker, who had always been opposed to Rice's candor in the

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66 Minutes from Adamic Meeting, March 1936, Black Mountain College Papers. The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

67 Rice, Eighteenth Century, 337.

68 Minutes from a regular meeting of the Board of Fellows, 14 April 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
judgement of students. Knickerbocker believed that Rice's criticism was destructive to the young student; Rice believed Knickerbocker was a coddler of students, out to win disciples, and to Rice, discipleship was "the graveyard of ideas." 69

The students and the other faculty, however, resented the decision of Rice and the Board to fire Goldenson and Knickerbocker without consenting them. Said one of the students, Jack Fahy, "this has been one of the basic difficulties here: the manner in which the student opinion [is] gotten ... it was a pretty empty gesture to ask students on the last day what they thought." 70 George Alsberg and seven other students presented a petition to the board stating that they believed that the college was failing to follow some of its beliefs in community decision making, that the "government of the place has tended to concentrate more and more toward the center" and that "we can't end up by having only the people who get along well together socially, as you would in a club." 71 The students called for a meeting; they were ready to show that they had found their voice and that they were part of the community.

At the meeting, John Harrington, a student, declared to Rice that "you must give students responsibility; you are assuming no students are responsible." Professor Zeuch chimed in that the decisions were "not

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69 Rice, quoted in Adamic, My America, 643.

70 Jack Fahy, Minutes of faculty meeting, 7 December 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

71 Typed two-page petition, 5 February 1937, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
always made by persuasion here, but rather by authority." Rice responded, "well, we had a majority of the intelligent supporting the ouster of Knickerbocker and Goldenson . . . there are some people who are incompetent to have opinions; democracy is not just counting noses." 72

At this point, George Alsberg asked one of the crucial questions at Black Mountain: "Who determines intelligence and how do you measure intelligence? by voting?" Replied Rice,

The board has the capacity to appoint . . . In any kind of society you should try to get the best people to perform the jobs which they can perform. The matter of judgement of people is a very delicate thing and one which also requires experience, as a rule.

"But isn't one of the assumptions around here that no one knows what he is capable of until he tries it?" queried a student, John Harrington. George Alsberg supported him, "But you said students are good judges," and another student, Beverly Coleman, asked, "Why are faculty better judges?" Alsberg added, "We can choose faculty, too." Frederick Mangold, one of the board members, argued that the students only stayed at Black Mountain for a few years and did not have the time-invested interest that the faculty did in who should be appointed and who should not.

With this statement, Mangold had reintroduced the tension of the college for the students versus the community for the faculty. It seemed that Mangold was saying that Black Mountain was a community for the faculty, and the students were merely the tools for their hobby. Moreover, Rice's actions and words had made some faculty more equal than

72 All meeting quotes from this paragraph and the next are from Minutes from general meeting, 17 February 1937, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
other faculty. The students and some of the faculty resented how Rice determined who had authority and who did not by determining who was "intelligent" and who was not. In June of 1937, the eight students who had signed the original petition protesting Knickerbocker and Goldenson's firing, decided that they were leaving the college for good. In a twenty-four-point critique they left behind, they charged Black Mountain with intolerance and gossip, too much emphasis on social development, a low level of academic work, puritanical morals, and a concentration of power in the Board of Fellows. They blamed Rice for browbeating students, meddling with personalities, and creating a one-man school. They protested the salary system at Black Mountain, in which salaries were based on the individual's worth and need, solely and secretly determined by the school's treasurer, Theodore Dreier.73

As another result of the conflict, Knickerbocker and Goldenson submitted their resignations and four other professors left, each leaving behind their own message. Professor Georgia left after being scolded one too many times by Rice for his conventionality; Professor Portell-Vila left after having learned that he was receiving the lowest salary at the college; and Professor King departed, stating that the "government of the place has tended more and more toward the center . . . Black Mountain should rely more on the majority of the community and not on the board."74 Professor Zeuch wrote his own five-

73Twenty-four-point critique, 1 June 1937, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

74Written resignations of King, Portell-Vila, Georgia, June 1937, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
thousand-word critique before he left, protesting Rice's abuse of authority and how it hurt the students:

The only new educational element the school represented was an inability to escape from a destructive teacher once class time was over. . . . Some of the students appear like caged birds, hypnotized and paralyzed by fear, because of a huge cat just outside the flimsy bars, licking its chops and lashing its tail.\textsuperscript{75}

By 1937, then, Black Mountain had reached a self-consciousness that had begun when it had seen itself described by an outsider. The community had discovered that Black Mountain was as human as the people who had founded it were; its government was not exactly the democracy they had envisioned; everyone did not have an equal voice in the community; some had more authority than others; some abused this authority; egos were constantly bruised; and there was no closet of privacy in which to retreat when things got rough.

The students and faculty that had left had seen too many flaws in the Black Mountain community and were not willing to expend the energy to correct them. They were not ready to realize the importance of flaw, as written by May Sarton in her letter to the college in 1940, "At the heart of life is the flaw without which there would be no motion and no growth."\textsuperscript{76} There would always be an ideal, an absolute form and freedom that each individual would come to Black Mountain desiring. What no one seemed to realize, though, was that Black Mountain existed because perfection could never be achieved; Black Mountain was to be a process toward a better way of living; it could never be an end. Again, as May

\textsuperscript{75}Zeuch.

\textsuperscript{76}Sarton, 119.
Sarton wrote to the college, without a flaw to be perfected or a perfection to be attained, there could be no community bound together in time, no sound and no silence, no life and no death. And it does not matter by what name you call absolute freedom within absolute form as long as you recognize its existence and allow yourselves to be united in awe before it.77

Black Mountain would not unite when presented with the basic humanness of its community; the people who could not accept the flaw would simply leave and the others would stay and begin over again from scratch. One professor would write,

Every morning the world seems to start all over again. Every bit of past experience, of tradition, of accepted rule and law is questioned continuously.78

The community that remained after the Knickerbocker episode was worn out. Rice, especially, was exhausted: "After five or six years ... I got so tired ... I would never know when I got up in the morning whether it was going to be a bright, cheerful happy day or one crisis after another."79 He himself brought on the next crisis in the fall of 1937 by having an extramarital affair with a student. Rice remembers, "I didn't like her, I didn't admire her ... it was terrible ... and of course everything was open at Black Mountain, everybody knew it."80 He believed, "I was Authority. I said Yes or No. In a crisis, I decided. But when I myself became the crisis, there was nobody to

77Sarton, 120.
79Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.
80Ibid.
The community, however, was indeed ready to decide. Both the students and the faculty came to Rice and suggested that he take a leave of absence for the sake of the reputation of the school. One anonymous letter to Rice stated that "our education has to be based first on educating ourselves... we cannot demand from others what we are not willing or able to do ourself." Rice agreed to stay away from the college from March of 1938 until September of 1938.

Rice went to Folly Beach, South Carolina, believing that the college would need him back soon: "the college needs an aggressive person. I predict, that if I resign, within two years [it] will be inert as a college." Without Rice, however, the college found that it no longer depended "even under very severe strains upon any one person." Even Rice had to agree that the "faculty as a whole... and students... assumed a degree of responsibility for the running of the college that they had hitherto left on my shoulders." When Rice did return in the fall of 1938, he did not retake the position of rector; the board voted in Robert Wunsch instead. Rice became very withdrawn,

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s1Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.


s3Rice, quoted in Robert Wunsch to Theodore Dreier, 12 February 1940, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

s4Frederick Mangold to Louis Adamic, 18 March 1938, Frederick Mangold Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

s5John Rice to Louis Adamic, May 1938, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
turning his attention to the autobiography he had begun at Folly Beach. The next year, the board asked him to take a sabbatical for the academic year 1939-40, believing he was not living up to his teaching duties.

While he was gone, the board finally decided that they would ask Rice for his formal resignation. Robert Wunsch came to him at his retreat in Southern Pines to ask him for it, stating the "college could no longer accept your promise . . . you have promised so earnestly and so many times before the same thing . . . that you are willing to live cooperatively with people."\textsuperscript{86}

Rice was not willing at first to resign; he wanted to redeem himself . . . he thought he could "put the College on its feet. I know I have the power to make the place an exciting place again and I believe I can go out now and raise money."\textsuperscript{87} Black Mountain, however, did not believe that it needed to be put back on its feet by Rice. When this had been clearly communicated to him, and when he had been informed that his wife, Nell, did not want him back at Black Mountain, he at last turned in his resignation, warning the college that

you have to watch yourself . . . that you don't cut off the heads of the best people and the heads of the worst people in order to make the place comfortable for the mediocre.\textsuperscript{88}

These are words to which Rice himself should have paid more attention.

After his resignation, Rice continued writing his autobiography. He realized he was indeed tired of the way of life at Black Mountain:

\textsuperscript{86}Robert Wunsch to Theodore Dreier, 12 February 1940.

\textsuperscript{87}Rice, quoted in Wusch to Dreier, 12 February 1940.

\textsuperscript{88}Rice, quoted in Wunsch to Dreier, 1 March 1949, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
I got so tired, not of people, but of the terrible crosses that humanity has to bear. You get the notion that you can fix things and then it's too much . . . nothing can be done.\(^{32}\)

He had been more and more disappointed in the role of the teacher at Black Mountain: "we weren't good enough to give students all that they needed and we didn't improve on it."\(^{30}\) He felt that his original ideas of what the college should be had been lost, and it was time for him to leave:

\(X\) has an idea. He explains it as best he can to \(B\), and \(B\) listens very carefully but he doesn't get it all. He gets some of it, and then he fits that into what he already is himself and he passes it on to \(C\) . . . \(X\) is now out of the picture.\(^{31}\)

Perhaps Rice had succeeded with what he had orginally intended to accomplish. Now that the college did not seem to need a leader, perhaps it would be closer to the democracy he dreamed it would someday become. The irony is that Rice's strong personality could not permit him to stay to enjoy the success.

In its first years under Rice, the college had not been able to incorporate the presence of tension into a learning experience. There were lessons to be learned from dealing with the tensions of defining acceptable behavior, of determining how Black Mountain was to be both a community and a college, of determining who had authority in certain decisions, and of deciding what to do about the outspoken Rice. Black Mountain, however, did not accept these tensions as valuable learning lessons that could be solved by patient communication; instead the

\(^{32}\)Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.

\(^{30}\)Ibid.

\(^{31}\)Ibid.
tensions were seen as flaws that had to be quickly discarded.

Rice himself would look back on Black Mountain and see only its flaws:

There was not enough love in Black Mountain, and when there is not enough love there will be not enough affection. Here we were on the mountain about to make a new society, withdrawn partly through hate but mostly through the desire for affection, and we lacked the one thing that can create affection, love.²²

Rice himself forgot that Black Mountain was a process. He would be one of the many who would leave Black Mountain because the college would not accept that there would always be flaws in the structure of the education and community of the college as well as in the individual personalities that comprised the college. Rice, however, would not regret the years he had spent at Black Mountain, and would still believe in his importance to Black Mountain:

I was glad that I had not read of Brook Farm, New Harmony .... I would never have gone near Black Mountain. That would have been a loss greater than the final loss, great as that was.²³

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²³Ibid., 324.
CHAPTER 3

LOSING SIGHT OF THE AWE
1940-1949

And it does not matter by what name you call Absolute Freedom within Absolute Form as long as you recognize its existence and allow yourselves to be united in awe before it.¹

In its first years, Black Mountain College succeeded largely because of the excitement that comes from starting any new adventure and largely from the sometimes clear vision and energetic inspiration of John Andrew Rice. In 1940, the honeymoon was over; Rice had been asked to leave; exhausting lessons had been learned about accepting the humanness of the Black Mountain endeavor; and there was no one clear person or idea to which to turn for the next step in using the lessons to make a better Black Mountain College. There was definitely not a lack of ideas or enthusiasm, but no one seemed to have the talent to focus the various ideas into a sharp image. As Theodore Dreier, the school's treasurer, remembered,

the real change . . . took place when Rice left. We didn't see it right away . . . [earlier] there was enough homogeneity in the community, and he was able to pull things together enough so that there was a basic trust throughout.²


In the 1940s, this lack of focusing ability resulted in the pattern of different factions being unable to reconcile conflicting goals, the losing faction being forced to leave, and the winning faction staying on to welcome the next disruption. Some of the conflicting goals were old questions. Was Black Mountain to be foremost a community or a college? Rice had always argued that Black Mountain was preeminently a college, "a place into which people may come and get the kind of development which will enable them to leave it." The new rector, Robert Wunsch, argued that Black Mountain was to be "first a community, then a college."

This question led to further questions that were addressed in the 1940s: If Black Mountain was to be a community, was it designed primarily for the faculty, with the students there merely as the faculty's hobbies? If Black Mountain was to be a college, was it to be a college focusing on the arts as an end or were the arts only the means for a more general education?

As important as these questions were, they should not have resulted in the constant departures of the losing faction. Black Mountain would never learn how to compromise in its quest for perfection. Moreover, the drawing of differences in educational goals or means often disguised another conflict of personalities. Black Mountain, like so many institutions, had rules about what kind of

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3John Andrew Rice, Notes of general meeting, 17 February 1937, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

4Robert Wunsch to Stephen H. Forbes, 18 November 1942, quoted in Duberman, 169.
personalities were acceptable and which were not.

After having lost its first rector, the college soon lost its first campus. In 1937, the owner of the land and building Black Mountain had been renting warned the college that the five-year lease it had just signed for the grounds was not set in stone. The owner, Willis Weatherford, wanted to be able to sell the property at anytime. The college decided then that it would be wise to invest in their own land. In June of 1937, the college payed $35,000 for a summer resort called Lake Eden three miles away, consisting of a large dining hall, two large lodges, several cottages, and a man-made lake.5

In the winter of 1939, Weatherford notified Dreier that he had indeed gotten a better offer for Lee Hall and its grounds. It was time to move, but there was not enough room in the lodges and cottages of Lake Eden to sufficiently house the seventy-five students and twenty instructors that comprised Black Mountain in 1939. Before they would agree to leave the original campus, the college community decided that they needed to build a large studies building on the Lake Eden property, and they asked the prestigious Walter Gropius, a friend of Albers, to be their architect. Gropius designed an elaborate building, but when the college realized it would cost over $500,000 to build, they turned to another architect, Lawrence A. Kocher, editor of the Architectural Record, who designed a much cheaper building.

In the spring of 1940, however, funds were not readily available

5Minutes from Special Meeting of the Board of Fellows, 17 April 1942. Black Mountain College Papers. The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
no matter how inexpensive the building was going to be. Roosevelt was clamping down on spending in preparation for possible entry into war. The only way the building was going to be erected was for the students and faculty to build it themselves.

Build it they did with the help of a contractor, Charles Godfrey. They began building in the fall of 1940, classes being held only in the morning and evening, the rest of the time being spent on draining land, collecting stones, digging ditches, driving piles, mixing and pouring concrete, and insulating the building. Throughout this time, the faculty sacrificed their salaries, and everyone participated in the constant fund raising. The energy of the community was extraordinary, and their efforts were chronicled in newspapers and magazines across the nation.6

By May 1941, the new studies building was habitable and the move from Lee Hall began. The new studies building had fifty-five individual studies, two classrooms, a periodical reading room, an art room, and two faculty apartments. The building was in no way finished, though, and for at least the next ten years, a work program involving building and maintaining the grounds would be part of the community's everyday activities.

The process of erecting the studies building had been an education in itself. It taught the community how to rely on each other, giving

6The community building effort was chronicled in such periodicals as the New York Times, Time, Newsweek, Christian Science Monitor, Chicago Daily Tribune, Eleanor Roosevelt's column "My Day," in New York World Telegram, San Francisco Chronicle Magazine, to name a few.
Black Mountain more than ever before a "quality of oneness." It also
gave the community a sense of permanence that had not been the case at
Lee Hall. Rice himself had been against the Lake Eden move for this
very reason. He was glad that he was leaving because, "as soon as we
got a place of our own, the institution won, not the individual." Rice
always believed that Black Mountain would only succeed when it was
allowed to start from scratch year after year, with the new and old
members joining together to make their own Black Mountain. Rice would
quote none other than the educator Robert Hutchins, whose other ideas
Rice had so often criticized: "Colleges should be in tents . . . when
they fold, they fold."*

The Black Mountain College of Lake Eden was now going to be very
different from that of Lee Hall. No longer was there going to be a
circular process of restarting each year, having to pack up the college
before the summer and unpack it in September. Each year was now a part
of a linear process, with mistakes left intact. Also, Lake Eden with
its scattered buildings, would not foster the cohesion that Lee Hall
had. As one student put it, at Lake Eden, it was "easier to get away;
you didn't have the sense of being apart from others so much."** It was

*Walt Park, Interview by Kenneth Kurtz, 24 June 1968, quoted in
Duberman, 158.

**John Rice, I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century (New York: Harper
and Brothers, 1942), 321.

***John Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967,
transcript, Martin Duberman Papers, The State Archives of North
Carolina, Raleigh.

****Wilfrid Hamlin to Martin Duberman, 21 July 1971, quoted in
Duberman, 162.
also interesting to note the psychological difference between being on the top of a mountain with a majestic panoramic view as was the case at Lee Hall and being in the valley as was the case at Lake Eden.

During the building of the studies building at Lake Eden, the United States entered World War II. In 1940, a student would remark that life at Black Mountain was "secluded and in many ways isolated from the turmoil of the rest of the country."11 By 1942, however, even Black Mountain had been touched. During the next couple of years, Black Mountain became a "kind of girls' community, you know, with refugee teachers all sort of holding each other together."12 There was only one male student in this period, and he had polio; the only teachers left were mostly European refugees or American males that were too old for the draft. The college hung on with the help of the money that the U.S. government offered it and many other universities to run military training programs. In its request for the money, Black Mountain had argued that

the world situation seems to demand small colleges like Black Mountain, where the psychological and spiritual needs of a harried, cynical or war-wrecked generation may better be met and where a reaffirmation of human values may better be lived.13

Even on a new campus, during a war, without the young males, and with many new faculty members, Black Mountain still continued in many of

11Betty Brett diary, 7 December 1941, quoted in Duberman, 164.


its old patterns with many of its old problems. One of the ever divisive problems was the question of the college's treatment of blacks. Since the debate over whether to allow a black student to stay in the dormitories, the college had not progressed much. They had continued to follow the standard separate but equal policy that most of the country's other universities were following. The newer faculty members that had arrived since that time, however, were eager to make changes, especially one Clark Foreman, a political science professor and a strong advocate for Southern civil rights. being President of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. Foreman proposed that the college should admit black students, stating that Black Mountain should "exclude no one because of race or color."\(^{14}\)

Some of the older members of the faculty were not willing to go that far, believing that the move would jeopardize the college's existence; they thought that the outside local community would respond with violence toward the college personnel, possibly arson against the college property and a boycott by the local Asheville and Black Mountain merchants.\(^{15}\) Philosophically they were not against admitting blacks, but as Theodore Dreier argued, the school should sometimes follow "practical policy, not fundamental belief."\(^{16}\) Remarked one professor, Kenneth Kurtz, "It is not the business of a college to embroil itself in social

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\(^{14}\) Theodore Dreier to Clark Foreman. 20 July 1944, Clark Foreman Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
Black Mountain argued about this issue for months through 1943 and 1944, sometimes with much hostility: threats, counter-threats, and name-calling. Interestingly enough, the older members who were against admitting blacks had the support of both the black cook, Rubye Lipsey, and a leading black anthropologist, Zora Hurston. Lipsey questioned the practicality of the plan to admit black students and wanted to respect the misgivings of the local community: "Black Mountain College is a part of the community; therefore, the community must be considered." Hurston wrote to Wunsch:

Even at this distance I can see the dynamite in the proposal to take Negro students NOW . . . some of these left-wing people get me down. They always want to spring some sensation that gives them great publicity, but which does us no good.

By the spring of 1944, no consensus within Black Mountain had been reached, and the community relied on a majority vote to approve a compromise that they had derived. They decided and approved by majority vote that Black Mountain would invite one or two "specially chosen Negroes . . . as visitors only, and then for periods not to exceed three to four weeks." What resulted was that one black woman was admitted to

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17 Kenneth Kurtz, Minutes from faculty meeting, 17 April 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.


20 Minutes from open meeting, 24 April 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
the summer art institute that Black Mountain ran in 1944.

The inability to reach a consensus in this issue was the first sign of the tensions that would erupt in the fall of 1944. To the older faculty, including the Alberses, Robert Wunsch, Theodore Dreier, Erwin Straus, Franz Hansgirg, and Edward Lowinsky, the newer and younger faculty did not realize all the work that had gone into starting and maintaining Black Mountain. Most of the older faculty had been at Black Mountain for at least six or seven years, while the younger faculty had arrived well after the move to Lake Eden. To the older faculty, Black Mountain was home, and they would be far less willing to risk losing Black Mountain; to them, it was security.

In their case, however, security also meant rigidity in the ways of Black Mountain. They were not about to accept the criticisms of one newcomer, Eric Bentley from Oxford University, of the educational methods that had been tested for thirteen years at Black Mountain. They were especially upset with Bentley and with another new professor, Frances de Graaf from Holland, whom they blamed for propagandizing and coddling students. Dreier labelled the new faction the "least competent, least mature, least responsible group since we began."21 Albers's view was that the newcomers were undermining the education at Black Mountain:

When these young faculty members came and said that there shouldn't be that kind of form, that the students should be allowed to do what they wanted to do—see, that's really cutting the ground right from beneath all their teaching.22

21Dreier to Foreman. 20 July 1944.
22Josef Albers, quoted by Molly Gregory, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 December 1967, cited in Duberman, 196.
What Bentley was actually proposing, however, was an even more conventional curriculum, with grades, more exams, lectures, and more memorization. He described the teacher as a "surgeon at the operating table, and the students stand looking over his shoulder, watching HIS work." His opponents did not note his educational philosophy carefully. They responded to his impertinent behavior and disrespect for many of the Black Mountain customs by labelling him and his cohorts as Bohemian and Communist and by arguing that there was a "fundamental difference of educational policy which will tear the College to pieces if it continues."

The old members of the community had become protective of the Black Mountain College that had been developing since 1933 under their guidance, and they were resentful of any change to the status quo, an attitude which Rice himself would have attacked viciously. Black Mountain was to be a process, a movement toward the absolute form; to succeed, it would have to adapt to change, not ask it to leave. Instead, the old members reacted to the change by finding faults with the new faculty.

With Bentley, it was not difficult to dislike him. He was constantly making fun of the important values of Black Mountain. He was sarcastic about the work program, believing Black Mountain should be run

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24Eric Bentley to Frederick Mangold, 22 April 1942, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

25Dreier to Foreman, 20 July 1944.
by a professional administration:

Get in there and do your thing for old Black Mountain. . . . Drive that coal truck, man! Go on and get covered with coal dust, man! It's good for your soul, man!26

He was against the need for a consensus, which he thought was only good for postponing decisions, and he believed that the Board of Fellows was undemocratic. He refused to subscribe to any morals the college might have, and he used his youth to taunt the older members of the community, constantly testing how far their patience would hold. He would put on raunchy, tasteless skits on Saturday nights, just in order to "shock Erwin Straus."27 He would all but brag of his sexual prowess in sleeping with several of the female students.28 In later years, an older Bentley would look back and criticize his lack of respect for the older members:

We didn't give them the deference they needed; we really whipped them, made them suffer—unconsciously, not deliberately . . . when you're very young, you always think the older people have confidence" 29

With Clark Foreman, the older members believed he would choose to close the school, which they considered their home, if it meant a move toward an improvement in civil rights. They accused Paul Radin of communism, and he believed he was fired in 1944 for this reason only.30

26Eric Bentley, quoted by Jane Robinson Stone, Interview by Mary Harris, 27 March 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

27Eric Bentley, Interview by Martin Duberman, 12 June 1967.

28Ibid.

29Ibid.

30Paul Radin, quoted in Robert Wunsch to John Evarts, 9 June 1944,
They blamed Frances de Graaf for coddling her students, not "forcing her proteges to take the consequences of their actions," thereby stifling the "development of mature, responsible people."\(^3\) In February of 1944, the Board of Fellows charged de Graaf with propagandizing the students, making "unethical bids for discipleship."\(^3\) De Graaf stood up for herself at the next faculty meeting, arguing that "it is our task as human beings to tell students what we think, what we believe, and why."\(^3\) She believed that the older members were jealous of the support she had from the students. She actually lived in the studies building, and was constantly helping students with problems. She thought that Albers was really angry with the newer faculty for supposedly steering students away from art and toward the social sciences, which was what Foreman, Radin, Bentley, and de Graaf taught; many students had indeed shifted to Bentley and de Graaf from their earlier advisers.

Tensions between the two factions continued through the spring of 1944. Wrote Wunsch, "there can not be two colleges on a single campus, two groups of people with deeply divergent educational philosophies."\(^3\) With the compromise of accepting the black student to the summer institute and with the summer departures of Foreman and Bentley and

Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^3\)Dreier to Foreman, 20 July 1944.

\(^3\)Minutes from Board of Fellows meeting, 1 February 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^3\)Minutes from faculty meeting, February 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^3\)Wunsch to Evarts, 9 June 1944.
final departure of Radin, though, tensions seemed to wind down by June of 1944. Wrote Wunsch, "the older members of the faculty have things pretty well in hand now and are pretty wary on guard now against unbridled ambition."[^35]

The storm soon broke loose again in July, when two students, Barbara Anderson and Jeanne Wacker, were arrested in Chattanooga for loitering, a euphemism for prostitution. They had been returning to Black Mountain after having visited Bentley, who was spending the summer at Fisk University. The two girls, who in reality had just been hitchhiking, were forced to undergo what they called a "sadistic" physical exam, in which it was determined that one had gonorrhea. This fact, combined with the fact that they were from Black Mountain, considered in Chattanooga to be a "red menace", won the women no sympathy; they were sentenced to sixty days in prison. Theodore Dreier, however, managed to convince the police that the two students were not prostitutes and brought them back to Black Mountain.

In the usual Black Mountain style, a committee was set up to determine what to do with the two women. This committee, which was incidentally composed of Dreier, Wunsch, Professor Jalowetz, and Straus, who were all members of the older generation at Black Mountain, recommended that the college suspend the women for the hitchhiking affair. De Graaf spoke up for them, arguing that there had been no rule against hitchhiking, although she herself had warned them that it was a bad idea. She pleaded with the committee to reconsider their

[^35]: Wunsch to Evarts, 9 June 1944.
recommendation, but Dreier and Wunsch replied that although they were "not condemning [the girls] on morals . . . the college has to support the conventions of society in the main . . . and [we] must protect the college." 36

The committee then pointed to de Graaf, declaring her responsible for the irresponsibility of the students, preventing "a student from suffering any consequences of her mistake." 37 They promptly sent her a communique signed by the Alberses, the Strauses, Dreier, Molly Gregory, Professor Hansgirg, Professor Kurtz, Professor Lowinsky, and Professor Miller (the whole "older faction"), stating,

It has become clear to us that we can no longer have confidence that you support that kind of education in which we believe and which we are trying to give. 38

The Board had finally found a circumstance that they could use to ask for the resignation of the younger members, especially Bentley and de Graaf. When Bentley returned in the fall of 1944, the Board asked for both his and de Graaf's resignation, stating that both of their views were "so at variance with the essential aims of the College, that working together with them has no longer become possible." 39 This was the final straw for the other younger professors. Foreman later wrote,

36 Dreier to Foreman, 20 June 1944.

37 Wunsch to Evarts, 23 August 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

38 Minutes from special meeting of the faculty, 17 July 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

39 Minutes from special meeting of the Board of Fellows, 1 August 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
"I went there thinking it was an up-and-up democratic experiment.... [now] I felt it was a fraud."\(^{20}\) In August 1944, Foreman, Bentley, de Graaf, and the Cohens resigned.

Some of the members of the community realized what a mistake the board had made by firing de Graaf and Bentley. Professor Jalowetz was disgusted with the older faction's use of ideologies: "Ideologies are always strictly excluding, asserting themselves by discrediting any different opinion."\(^{21}\) He warned that the forced departure was an "amputation in which the body of the College will lose more young blood than can be good for its healthy survival."\(^{22}\) John Evarts, a former Black Mountain professor who had been keeping in correspondence with Wunsch throughout 1944, wrote.

When I think of the weight in the decision carried by the Alberses, the Hansgirgs, the Strauses and other members of the community, I shudder a little.\(^{23}\)

The professors' resignations were not the end. The student body had not been asked once for input. Eleven students, including all of the officers, had become so disgusted by the whole show that they decided to resign also. They wrote their own communiqué, protesting the abuse of power by the older members of the community.

\(^{20}\)Clark Foreman, Interview by Martin Duberman, 2 October 1967, quoted in Duberman, 204.


\(^{22}\)Heinrich Jalowetz to Board of Fellows, 14 August 1944, Lisa Jalowetz-Aronson Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^{23}\)Evarts to Wunsch, 25 September 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
It was the students who were the wisemen in the whole fiasco. They were the ones who envisioned an absolute form, who realized that Black Mountain should be constantly trying to reach the ideal, who knew Black Mountain could not survive by rejecting change and maintaining the status quo. The message that the departing students left behind them in the communique provides the most potent summary of the Black Mountain situation in 1944:

"We are outraged that pedagogical differences have been made the front of a purge aimed directly or indirectly at those faculty members who, in our opinion, could best realize the democratic ideals of the college. We are deeply disillusioned by the contrast between theory and practice; the theory that the current community makes the college, and the practice that older members of the community demand complete assimilation to their ideas. This we consider supreme intolerance. We have been accused of destructive criticism. Our criticism was aimed at the imperfect actuality, and not at the potentiality of Black Mountain College. Its purpose was therefore constructive, and meant to further those potentialities. Because of recent events, we no longer have confidence that these potentialities will be realized."

It was the students who were in awe of the potentiality, in awe of the absolute form that Black Mountain could represent. They knew they would never reach it, but they knew they had to keep moving. That movement would be halted by the resignation of the younger professors and the eleven students.

Throughout 1944, Black Mountain seemed to have become primarily a community for the faculty, with the students there merely as something to keep the faculty busy during the day. It was ironic that the students would be the only ones to realize May Sarton's lessons about being in awe before the absolute form; about recognizing differences;

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and about growth. It was also ironic that the manner in which the remaining faculty chose to regroup from the 1944 split was to take even more voice away from the students. In the fall of 1944, the faculty decided that it was too distracting to have students in meetings and that faculty meetings would hereby meet without students, with the exception of the annual business meeting, at which only the student moderator could sit.\textsuperscript{45} One student's response to the rules sums up the frustrations well:

\begin{quote}
Aw . . . I see through it now. Really the college belongs to the faculty; it's the faculty's college, let them run it. I spent a lot of time with nothing to show for it, trying to believe what they said about "we're all in this thing together," you know? It just ain't that way, baby.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

By the fall of 1945, though, Black Mountain was pumping in enough new blood to enable it to start over again, seemingly forgetting about the lessons it had just learned. The GI Bill of Rights brought the enrollment of Black Mountain to sixty students, and money was now available to replace the faculty that had left; ten instructors were hired in subjects including psychology, philosophy, writing, history, mathematics, biology, and literature. In the spring of 1946, the enrollment would rise to seventy-five students, and in the fall to ninety, half of which were now male. Under the GI Bill, the government also donated money to build housing, student studies, and classrooms. The new and improved Black Mountain was becoming more organized and more

\textsuperscript{45}Minutes from special meeting of the faculty, 29 September 1944, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\textsuperscript{46}Unnamed student. quoted by John Wallen, Interview by Martin Duberman, 19 January 1968, cited in Duberman, 239.
traditional; it now required placement tests in English and math with remedial course work for those who did poorly. The college also began to schedule exact hours for classes to meet, determining that each class should be exactly fifty minutes.

Even with all of its new faces, the same age-old problems still haunted Black Mountain. In the late 1940s, there would be the question about admitting black students; the question of the treatment of "deviant behavior" (i.e. homosexuality); the question of whether Black Mountain was first a community or first a college; and the question about whether Black Mountain should lean toward the arts or toward a more traditional curriculum. With each question, past lessons were forgotten; solutions consisted of the Black Mountain pattern of the losing faction being forced to leave. Over and over again, the importance of being united in awe of the absolute form would be forgotten.

In May of 1945, the college made a renewed effort to further integrate the campus of Black Mountain. The college community decided that it would allow the black student it had previously accepted for the summer to stay for the whole year. The college also hired a black professor of biology, Dr. Percy Baker, for the 1945–1946 school year. Dr. Baker and the student, Sylvesta Martin, were accepted warmly as fellow members of the Black Mountain community. Baker remembered Black Mountain fondly, as "one of only two place I have been in my life when I was unconscious of race."47 Problems would arise, however, when the

47Percy Baker to Edward Lowinsky, 14 August 1947, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, quoted in
blacks wanted to go into the town of Black Mountain or Asheville, where segregation was still the expected behavior. Wrote one student, the blacks on campus might as well have been in prison. Their very lives were endangered if they stepped outside the gate. They couldn't go to Asheville on our rare visits with us—or anything."^4

In 1946, the students of Black Mountain still wanted to forge ahead, and they campaigned for more black students. They succeeded in enrolling five black students and rewriting the college handbook to say that "admission will be open to all students of all races."^4 In the fall of 1947, however, only one of the black students returned, and no other blacks wished to enroll. It seemed that the hostility of the outside community was too much. Percy Baker pointed out another important factor in the failure of the school to attract blacks:

"College for us serves a very economic purpose: our students expect after four years to be in a better position with reference to employment possibilities."^5

After 1947, the Black Mountain community would stop trying to force the black issue. It is important to realize, though, that their efforts to integrate this time were made "without pressure, without

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^4 Alice McCanna Stark to Martin Duberman, 20 March 1968, quoted in Duberman, 459.

^5 Minutes from special meeting of the faculty, 22 July 1947, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

agitation, without divisiveness.”

Perhaps Black Mountain was growing up.

The college, however, still would not be prepared to deal with behavior of which it did not approve. Perhaps the saddest story of Black Mountain is the case of Robert Wunsch, who had been at Black Mountain since 1935, replacing Rice as rector in 1940. In June of 1945, Wunsch was arrested in Asheville for "crimes against nature," a euphemism for homosexuality. The judge, "being a sensible person instead of a good judge" (as described by John Rice), just passed over the case. The college’s response was a little more hostile. The general feeling was "How could Wunsch have done this to us?", and Dreier would state, "our social customs give us no way of distinguishing between people in his class who do harm and those who do not." When Wunsch returned to the campus, no one came out to greet him; he got into his car and disappeared, never to be heard from again. Judd Woldin, a student, remembered the day with shame: "Why didn’t we all come and embrace Bob Wunsch and tell him to stay... everybody was acting... like an Old Testament group."

Even after such an experience, Greg Masurovsky, a student would

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51Lowinsky to Fred G. Wale, 14 August 1945, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, quoted in Duberman, 212.

52John Rice, Interview by Martin Duberman, 10 June 1967.

53Dreier to Stephen H. Forbes, 12 July 1945, quoted in Duberman, 226.

still believe that the atmosphere at Black Mountain was

for certain students . . . almost therapeutic, that they could live
in a community which tolerated their presence and accepted it, went
beyond toleration, whereas they might have real problems in the
outside world . . . .55

Perhaps in some ways, Black Mountain had become too tolerant, although
certainly not when it came to accepting homosexuality or for that
matter, different political philosophies: in 1945, a Professor Niebyl
was asked to leave because he was too "Marxist";56 earlier, Paul Radin
had been asked to leave for his belief in communism.57

In the mid 1940s, the college began to seem more like a form of
therapy for students and professors who were not tolerated in the
traditional universities than a form of education. Students seemed to
be coming for the wrong reasons. Said one student, "All I knew was that
it was a progressive college, whatever that meant . . . . no required
courses . . . nobody would hassle me about credit."58 Wrote another
student, "I came to write and to find out something about what kind of
form living could take for me, and I wasn't at all interested in the
courses."59 Some students came more for the community experience:

I think probably for a lot of people, Black Mountain was not, in

55Gregory Masurovsky, Interview by Christie Rucker, 9 October
1972, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State
Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

56Board of Fellows to Karl Niebyl, 27 March 1947, Black Mountain
College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

57Jane Stone, Interview by Mary Harris, 27 March 1971.

58Ibid.

59Irwin Kremen, Interview by Christie Rucker and Huston Paschal,
23 June 1972, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives
of North Carolina, Raleigh.
terms of intellectual education. THE thing. People learned a hell of a lot about other people.60

The college also had more than its share of neurotics: one student remembered a girl that was at Black Mountain for four years, never saying much to anyone, just sitting in the same corner and watching people all day.61

Despite all the appearances, however, there were teachers that were strong enough to maintain the high academic standards that Rice himself would have demanded. Albert Levi, a philosophy teacher, expected rigorous discipline in his classes, teaching that "there was a body of disciplined thought and disciplined standards that were available to be employed if one stayed open to them."62 Natasha Goldowski, the physics and math teacher, would ask one student who was having trouble with algebra, "Look, I know there are no rules and regulations in this school, but I feel this. Will you do one hundred algebra assignments each night for two months?"63 The student later recalled that "if it hadn't been for Natasha, I would have just gone on sampling here or there and then left."64 M.C. Richards expected her
writing students to learn the rules first:

There was a body of grace, of rhetoric, of formulation, that has emerged in the English language that is not to be dispensed with without an acquaintanceship with it at least.65

It was only then that the student could begin to write and learn about his or her life. Rice would have approved of Richards's esteem for teaching:

Teaching always seemed to me relevant to the lifelines of the people involved... wherever I taught... I have always felt... there is no unactive student, if that's the kind of relationship you create.66

Like Richards, John Wallen, the new psychology professor, wanted to find a balance between intellect and personality. Hints of Rice show through Wallen's criticism of traditional liberal arts education:

The basic reason... that colleges fail to bring about a more significant and genuine personal development in students... is that the control of most colleges does not rest with those most directly concerned with the quality of education, namely, the students and faculty... that we have been overly concerned with what our students know and what they can do, but we have ignored what kind of persons they are becoming.67

Needless to say, when Wallen first heard of Black Mountain, he was enthusiastic. Within the first year, however, he was already disappointed with what he saw as the reality at Black Mountain:

They have spoken of it as an experimental college for twelve years, but they have really done no experimentation... The educational philosophy is quite confused, with almost no constructive effort to work out a consistent viewpoint... the actual situation is

65 Richards, quoted by Arthur Penn, Interview by Martin Duberman, 13 July 1968, quoted in Duberman, 294.

66 M.C. Richards, Interview by Martin Duberman, 20 February 1967, quoted in Duberman 295.

laissez-faire on the surface (pride in no rules, etc.) and a concealed authoritarianism behind. For example, a student who takes the talk about freedom seriously may eventually transgress against the community in some way (in one instance it was getting drunk and getting into a fight). Then, the faculty steps in and makes a ruling for the individual case. This is called "considering the individual instance." To me it seems more like authoritarian legislation ex post facto. 68

Wallen was against what he called the European older group, led by Albers, who, Wallen believed, was only interested in maintaining the excellence of art and cared nothing for the other facets of the community. Indeed, in a few years, Dreier and Albers would attempt to make Black Mountain exclusively a school for artists.

Instead of leaving, as many disgusted faculty had done before him, Wallen was determined to change Black Mountain, making it more of the college that Rice had once envisioned. He began in his psychology classes, in which he would take current crises at Black Mountain and make the students play them out, attempting to find solutions by learning to be honest with one another. He demanded that his students have a "manifest concern for [the] environment you inhabit"; and that environment was both the community of Black Mountain and the local outside community. Each of his students was required to take part in some kind of volunteer work, one student working with a local schizophrenic woman, one working for the Southern Negro Youth Congress. 69

Wallen wanted a community in which all were involved in decision

68John Wallen to Carl Rogers, 1 January 1946, quoted in Duberman, 236.

making, not just a select few. In 1946, he introduced a plan for a community council, which would be responsible for selecting committees to deal with all the everyday responsibilities: publications, concerts, library, housing, cleanliness, and so on. This was not a new idea, but for the last few years, more and more authority had been falling to the older members of the staff, namely Dreier and Albers. Wallen wanted the idea of the whole community making decisions together to return, and he believed that all it would take was learning how to communicate: "there are no disharmonies that aren't faulty communication or not understanding needs that lay behind others' positions."  

Most of the members of Black Mountain were reluctant to share Wallen's optimism. Pessimistic students would argue that "some hostilities between people are not reconcilable through adjustments in communication."  

One student argued that "there would always be a point in terms of competition or sexual life or something . . . where a person would withhold and would not collaborate . . . [or] cooperate."  

Another added that "Wallen's" way left no "rational grounds" for the feeling of dislike. Moreover, the glories of the work program, of campus cleaning, or of keeping the library running were not apparent to

70 Wallen, Interview by Martin Duberman, 19 January 1968, quoted in Duberman, 243.
71 Charles Perrow, Interview by Martin Duberman, 29 June 1968, quoted in Duberman, 256.
72 Richard Spahn, Interview by Martin Duberman, 13 July 1968, quoted in Duberman, 256.
73 Charles Perrow, Interview by Martin Duberman, 29 June 1968, quoted by Duberman, 256.
many of the members of the community. Perhaps Wallen should have heeded the advice of a former "ideal community member," Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote:

It is my opinion . . . that a man's soul may be buried and perish under a dungheap or in a furrow of the field, just as well as under a pile of money.\(^7^4\)

After three years of obstinate students and faculty, Wallen left in 1948 for Oregon, where he planned to begin his own community.

Meanwhile, another tension was stirring. Since 1944, Black Mountain College had become well known for the art and music institutes it had been running each summer, attracting such artists as Walter Gropius, Robert Motherwell, Roland Hayes, Willem de Kooning, Buckminster Fuller, and many more. The art students and faculty who participated in the institutes raved about how ideal the college and community was in the summer. One summer visitor spoke about the "complete unselfishness and devotion, directed with never-tiring patience toward putting into practice . . . the ideas of constructive educational values."\(^7^5\) It was easy to assemble a mini-Utopia, as long as it was only going to be two weeks long.

The summer institutes attracted money and students to Black Mountain, though, and Albers and Dreier began to believe that Black Mountain should become more of an institute for the arts year 'round.


\(^7^5\) Lyonel Feininger, "Perception and Trust," Black Mountain College, a special issue of Design (Columbus, Ohio) 47 (April 1946): 6-7.
Both had been at Black Mountain for fourteen years and were weary of experiment. They proposed a new plan for Black Mountain; it would now become "a place where an artist could get a well-rounded education." In order for it to run as smoothly as the summer sessions, Dreier and Albers believed that there would have to be more administrative control and less community participation. In their proposal, they suggested that there should be less faculty, salary should be based on tenure and performance, enrollment should be increased, scholarships should be decreased, students would not be allowed to participate in discussion or in evaluations, and the emphasis should now be on producing artists.

The newer faculty, many of whom were professors of the social sciences and natural sciences, were outraged at the idea of a Black Mountain College for the Arts with its call for less community participation. M.C. Richards, Albert Levi, and Theodore Rondthalier all submitted their resignations. Wrote M.C.,

> Perhaps Black Mountain is not an adventure anymore. Maybe it has outgrown its experimental phase and it is now on the threshold of... maturity? If so, so, but ... let's be clear about it and not get people into the place under the illusion that they are going to be shaping its future.

The ideals were now structure and order. One faculty member criticized Levi and the others that left with him: "Levi and those that were behind him were completely unstructured in their teaching and in

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76Minutes from general meeting, 14 January 1949, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

77M.C. Richards to the Dreiers, 25 July 1948, quoted in Duberman, 299.
their approach to running the college."\textsuperscript{78} Dreier stated that Levi and the others were "bent on exploring their own ideas even though that meant repeating mistakes we had been through and learned from in the early years."\textsuperscript{79}

Albers and Dreier were tired of the same old mistakes made over and over again; they wanted order now. M.C. Richards would leave stating that this was fine, but that Black Mountain was not a place for her anymore, and that Dreier and Albers should "admit they have put years into this—that they no longer think equal rights is wise—that they want an art school—that they are tired of democracy."\textsuperscript{80}

Albers and Dreier proceeded with their planning. They called for a professional administrating body, to be called a Board of Trustees and to be composed of individuals that were outside of the community of Black Mountain and of only a few faculty members. This board would take over the Board of Fellows' jobs of appointment, salaries, and publicity. In addition, the college would raise tuition from $1200 to $1800, organize alumni support, hire additional instructors in art and music, and hire faculty in the other non-art academic disciplines only as visiting teachers on a monthly basis.\textsuperscript{81} Dreier also wished to hire a

\textsuperscript{78}Trude Guermonprez, Interview by Martin Duberman, 12 June 1967, quoted in Duberman, 301.

\textsuperscript{79}Theodore Dreier, Mimeographed fifteen-page "report," 10 May 1949, cited in Duberman, 297.

\textsuperscript{80}M.C. Richards to the Dreiers, 25 July 1948, quoted in Duberman, 299.

professional administrator. N.O. Pittenger, who would be in charge of putting these plans into effect and running the art institute; Dreier supported the art institute idea, but he was tired, writing that he would not stay on, that art "wasn't really my cup of tea."^{82}

The plans laid by Dreier and Albers would never be put into effect. Their appeals for money to foundations such as the Whitney Foundation were rejected. Stephen Forbes, who had supported the college for years, refused to continue funding Black Mountain if it was going to become the institutionalized art school Albers and Dreier proposed. Furthermore, the social science students began to leave because no professors were left to teach them. In 1948, the enrollment had dropped from ninety to fifty. Remembered one student, "Practically everyone I had intended to study with had gone."^{83} Another recalled, "Here I'd just come down to the college and all of a sudden the college is disappearing out from under you."^{84}

Some of the remaining students and faculty, including Nell Rice (former wife of John Rice) and Frank Rice (son of John and Nell Rice), finally found their voice in January of 1949 and asked for Dreier's resignation. They believed Dreier had abandoned ship; they were against his and Albers's ideas of the Board of Trustees, the loss of a regular

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^{82}Theodore Dreier, Interview by Mary Harris, 8 May 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

^{83}Mel Mitchell Kelly, Interview by Martin Duberman, 2 April 1967, quoted in Duberman, 304.

^{84}Charles Perrow, Interview by Martin Duberman, 29 June 1968, quoted in Duberman, 304.
social sciences faculty, and the decline of student rights. They wanted the old Black Mountain back, and they believed Dreier no longer supported its original goals.

Dreier had become easier to target than Albers because of the disclosure of an extramarital affair he was having with one of the female students. Albers understood, though, that with the request for Dreier's resignation, the students and faculty also no longer supported his ideas, and he, his wife (Anni), and two other arts teachers submitted their resignations.

Both the Alberses and Dreier were completely exhausted after having been at Black Mountain for fifteen years. As Anni Albers would explain, they were exhausted by

the constant tension, and the constant lack of privacy, and constant lack of money, and the constant friction with every faculty member in having the same voting voice that you had.\[54\]

The Alberses and Dreier were no longer willing to spend the energy it took to live at Black Mountain, but others were. In the fall of 1949, Levi and Richards returned to Black Mountain, along with nine other new faculty members. Richards came bearing many of the old lessons she had learned at Black Mountain. She knew what she was getting into:

We were very undeveloped in the arts of cooperation... there was a lot of talent, and a lot of individual bias, and a lot of high feeling, and a lot of controversy... In times of controversy, there were often very inadequate resources to draw on... old

\[54\]Minutes from special meeting of the faculty, 12 July 1948, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

patterns were then employed: violence, warfare, winning and losing, eliminating, secession, schism.  

In the fall of 1949, though, Black Mountain was new again. The last of the original Black Mountaineers (with the exception of Nell Rice) had left. Black Mountain now had the opportunity to regroup and continue a learning process that had been interrupted time and time again by the feuding, the eliminating, and the schisms so familiar to Black Mountain. One student would scathingly describe the familiar pattern: "You killed off the roses and then the dandelions grow, and they live on each other's leavings." True, the leavings would always be around with their lessons to be learned, but the rose replacements were far from weeds and far from dead.

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87M.C. Richards, Interview by B.F. Williams, 18 October 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

88Vic Kalos, Interview by Martin Duberman, 20 June 1968, quoted in Duberman, 271.
M.C. Richards returned in the fall of 1949 prepared to work with Black Mountain again. She knew Black Mountain's patterns well:

The college split apart time and again over non-negotiable principles. Individuals would rather be without a college than without what they considered their integrity.¹ She wanted Black Mountain to learn to survive the differences, to "make boundaries permeable."² Richards wanted to believe that "when conflict arose between two positions, we should continue to work together to discover a third."³ She was willing to take on the challenge of Black Mountain, its rawness, and its lessons.

Black Mountain College would soon need Richards's conviction and grace as the faculty once again found themselves in a fight to define the ideals of Black Mountain College. The new faculty who had arrived in the fall of 1949 included four Quakers who found themselves uncomfortable with the lack of order in the educational and community structure at Black Mountain. They sided with some of the more conventional faculty members, arguing that it was time to shape up Black

²Ibid.
³Ibid.
Mountain College. They were looking for the stability that Black Mountain had always found so elusive, and they believed that stability came from respectability and respectability from a more conventional structure.

In October, they proposed a plan that called for an outside Board of Overseers, in charge of hiring an outside rector. The job of the rector would be only in fundraising, hiring, and firing. He would no longer be a teacher; he would be a professional administrator. Government from now on would be by the Board of Overseers, with input from faculty but not from students. Students, they felt, were not ready to have a large voice in their own education. The Quaker group did support community participation in all other activities, believing that this was the one "unconventional" aspect of Black Mountain College that was worth saving.

M.C. Richards and her supporters on the faculty (about seven altogether) would not accept these conventions; her side argued for the government of the college by the college, with no outsiders intruding into the learning process that she claimed to be the essence of Black Mountain:

The beauty of Black Mountain was that there wasn't anybody to blame except ourselves. There was nobody else, just us. And that's why it was such a challenge, you know...  

M.C. and her supporters, however, did not sit on the Board of Fellows. The board would decide that the best way to solve the conflict

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between the M.C. faction and the Quaker faction would be to ask M.C., her husband Levi, and a supporter, Joe Fiore, to leave. M.C. was outraged: "My love of the place and my loyalty to it in my own mind was so unquestioned that I couldn't imagine being fired." It was the seemingly forgotten students that came to the faculty's rescue once again. They presented the board with a poll that showed a large majority of students wanting M.C., Levi, and Fiore back, and demanded that the board comply. The board, having been reminded that they would need students to call themselves a college, accepted the students' suggestion and rehired the three teachers.

Tensions within the community seemed to ease a bit, and the proposals for outside control were temporarily put on the back burner. Stability had arrived without the imposition of a more conventional structure on Black Mountain; money had come to quiet the storm. Stephen Forbes, who had supported Black Mountain College since it had begun, donated $6000; Paul Williams, a recent benefactor, gave $5000; and tuition from thirty-five students brought in another $5000. With this money, the work program would have two of the most productive years perhaps in its history: activities included building a science building, buying and maintaining a beef herd, building a tobacco barn, and maintaining a productive farm.

As for academics, there were still professors teaching the traditional fields: history, economics, languages, sciences, and mathematics, but the emphasis was more and more toward the creative

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5Minutes from faculty meeting. 23 March 1950, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
process in art: music, pottery, painting, creative writing, and sculpture. Black Mountain was becoming for many students somewhere to go to withdraw into their own world of artistic endeavor. More and more young people were coming to Black Mountain first as artists and last as students. Described one student, "One could definitely identify people as being art students . . . that was their identity . . . everything else was subordinate to it."

Withdraw became the word: withdraw from the outside world, withdraw from any values that may seem conventional, and withdraw from Black Mountain itself, all in the name of art. In the 1950s, it became in style to be have uncut hair, unkempt clothing, and infrequent baths to show that one was completely absorbed in his or her work and worrying about nothing else. One former student remembered that the students must have "looked like freaks to [the townsmen of Black Mountain]...to the point where they wanted to punch us in the face."

Students began to lose interest in raising funds, in recruiting students, or in maintaining the buildings and grounds. No one was interested in taking any non-arts classes, either, and gradually, the non-arts faculty left. Even M.C. Richards had had enough by the end of 1951 and left for New York to continue her studies in pottery. In later years, she would remark on the college's failure:

It wasn't money . . . no, it was character . . . we were very undeveloped in the arts of cooperation . . . there was a lot of talent and a lot of individual bias, and a lot of high feeling, and

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7Ibid.
a lot of controversy. In times of controversy, there were often very inadequate resources to draw on. Old patterns were then employed: violence, warfare, winning and losing, eliminating, secession, schism. Other resources of sacrifice were not at our command—hadn't been developed.\textsuperscript{8}

These were remarks that applied to the Black Mountain College of the 1930s and 1940s, but not to the 1950s. In the 1950s, no one seemed to have an ideal or a definition of Black Mountain for which they thought worth fighting. The operating word became freedom, but the word remained undefined. Richards would describe this Black Mountain as a "pack of individuals so obsessed with their. . . freedom that they would destroy the place."\textsuperscript{9}

Black Mountain, however, still had a few years left and one last weapon: Charles Olson. Olson had been a visiting professor to Black Mountain since 1948, commuting from Washington D.C., where he had been in the Roosevelt administration and was now writing literary history and poetry. In the fall of 1950, a student wrote to Olson, "There is no total person here now of large enuf \textit{sic} stature to define B.M.C. or even to carry out its traditions."\textsuperscript{10} Another student would warn: "the college exists in an embryo state and will be molded and shaped by the next good man who comes along or else it will bust."\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{8}Richards, Interview by B.F. Williams, 18 October 1971.

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{10}Nick Cernovich to Charles Olson, [Fall 1950], Charles Olson Papers, Literary Archives, Homer Babbidge Library, University of Connecticut Library, Storrs, quoted in Mary Harris, \textit{The Arts at Black Mountain College} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), 172.

\textsuperscript{11}Mark Hedden to Charles Olson, 22 October 1950, Charles Olson Papers, quoted in Harris, 172.
Perhaps Black Mountain would have folded had it not been for Olson. His energy for his life, his passion for his writing, and even his physique, standing at six-foot-seven, often overwhelmed the college, but his energy was infectious. One awed student, Fielding Dawson, would describe Olson's presence:

Charley gave [Black Mountain] everything he had; in his humanity, he was occasionally inhuman; the Ahab in him . . . the kind of man that suddenly realized maximum power, he became a whirling wind of himself realized . . . Charley was red hot, and Black Mountain rose into a tower of realized force of us at work.\(^{12}\)

Dawson would also argue that "the story of Black Mountain from 1949 until 1956 is Charley's story."\(^{13}\) Another student described him as "Big Daddy . . . he articulated . . . the reason for its [Black Mountain's] existence";\(^{14}\) another would simply state, "He was the College."\(^{15}\)

Although he became rector in 1953, Olson directed most of his energy toward teaching his writing class and writing his own poetry. He was first an educator, who conceived of education as a force, "the primordial & [sic] phallic energies & methodologies which . . . make it possible for man . . . to take up, straight, nature's, live nature's force."\(^{16}\) His writing classes would often last from 7:30 P.M. until one


\(^{13}\)Ibid., 90.

\(^{14}\)George Fick, Interview by Mary Harris, 4 February 1972, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^{15}\)Cynthia Homire, Interview by Mary Harris, 4 February 1972, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

\(^{16}\)Charles Olson, "The Gate & The Center," *Origin*, No. 1 (Spring
or two in the morning. He would ask students to submit their writing in
the basket he placed outside of his door and then would start talking
about the papers in class. He never gave formal assignments, being able
to start a vivid discussion on an event that happened that day or
something he had just read. He did demand that the students find their
own style; one of his students, Joel Oppenheimer, recalled Olson's
scolding: "Let me write [my poems] and you start writing yours."17 He
wanted to learn from the students as well, as Oppenheimer described: "He
wanted us to bang heads with him ... didn't want 'yes, Master.'"18

Oppenheimer called Olson the "most magnificent teacher I have ever
had."19 Other students were not so enamored of Olson. One student
called him "basically a charlatan," arguing that "my own interest in
Pound came almost in spite of Olson rather than from him."20 Another
complained about the rambling discussions he led, stating, "I was rather
annoyed by his lack of precision and clarity."21 The "poetic" students,
however, believed in the "order" of Charles Olson. Wrote Oppenheimer of
 Olson,

the one value a poet can have to his society, aside from the ones we

1951): 41.

17Joel Oppenheimer, Interview by Mary Harris, 10 June 1972,
transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers. The State Archives of
North Carolina, Raleigh.

18Ibid.

19Ibid.

20Mel Mitchell Kelly to "Andy," 20 November 1949, quoted in
Duberman, 369-370.

21Francine du Plessix Gray, Interview by Martin Duberman, 24 March
1967, quoted in Duberman, 374.
know about . . . is the man who finds the juxtapositions that make sense.22

As rector, Olson was full of ideas on how he could make Black Mountain a "strong force" again. He just did not have the patience to put the plans into action, administering the minute details from day to day. As he acknowledged in 1956, "I am a great planner. I can ride ideas like a dolphin. And I have had to learn to lay back from such things, in order to go on from day to day, and from foot to foot."23

One of Olson's ideas, the institute plan, was his answer to the rapidly disappearing faculty and to his belief that the "existence of knowledge lies between things & is not confined to labelled areas."24 He attempted to organize Black Mountain's year into five institutes, each lasting eight weeks, and each taught by a visiting professor. The themes of the institutes reflected the increasing emphasis on arts: (1) crafts (2) art: drama, dance, writing, music, painting (3) the new sciences of man (4) natural science and (5) the summer art program. The 1952-53 catalog describing the plan was thirty pages long, offering all kinds of classes, the number of which would be respectable at any state college. The only problem with this was that Black Mountain did not have the faculty to teach all of those courses, nor did it have the students to enroll in them.

22 Joel Oppenheimer, Interview by Martin Duberman, 8, 17 January 1968, quoted in Duberman, 378.

23 Attachment to the Rector's Report, 29 February 1956, Charles Olson Papers, quoted in Mary Harris, 174.

The professors that Olson wanted for his plan did not come, and Olson himself lost interest as the student enrollment dropped from a low thirty-five students in 1952 to fifteen students in late 1953. Black Mountain was beginning to unravel. The college did not take care of the beef herd, which consequently got sick, forcing the college to sell the herd at a very low price. No one wanted to work on the farm, so that closed down. The GI Bill ran out, taking away half of the students and reducing the faculty's salaries to close to nothing. Two buildings caught on fire (in two separate incidents) because the community had been careless in ground maintenance. The dining hall closed, and students had to buy and cook their own food.

In 1952, Black Mountain attempted to set up a Community Council of students and faculty in order to govern and maintain Black Mountain, but by 1953, their quandaries reflected the disintegration of community decision making: what to do about the dog mess in the Studies Building, should they keep the campus clean, whether Professor Goodman's dog should be kept, or whether dressing up as cowboys and going into town was proper. One of the last decisions the council made before disbanding was to cut down a whole forest of dogwood trees for money, only to find out that it had cut them down at the wrong time and the trees were virtually worthless.

As disorganized as it was in community and campus, Black Mountain still attempted to have some semblance of an education. Olson would

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26 Ibid.
reason, "such poverty-stricken ambience is the one fit for living, for working." Another student would remark,

Financial support would have killed the place. It would not have been the same thing . . . Part of its temper was heroism in the face of a non-comprehending milieu. And that was good.  

As Rice used to say, "The deader an institution is, the more tenacious it is of existence."  

Students still came to Black Mountain demanding to learn. In a faculty meeting in 1954, hours were spent squabbling over who was to get paid and how much, how many acres of wood were to be cleared, and what to do about the beef herd, until a student got up and announced,

I'm here to get an education . . . What about the . . . student? I'm a student. I'm representing the students. Why can't you teach us and give up on this shit? Let's disaffiliate the student body from the faculty if that's the problem.  

The nine or so professors that did remain into the last few years were still teaching. One student, Joel Oppenheimer, challenged the view that Black Mountain had completely fallen apart by 1950:

It wasn't a bunch of freaky teachers teaching a bunch of freaky kids in a bunch of freaky ways. It was some very good teachers, some competent teachers, and a couple of bad teachers trying to teach in the way they felt most comfortable.  

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27 Charles Olson to Bernard Leach, 19 March 1952, quoted in Duberman, 363.


30 George Fick, Interview by Mary Harris, 4 February 1972.

31 Joel Oppenheimer, Interview by Mary Harris, 10 June 1972.
There was respect for the teacher, albeit in a different kind of way than the Black Mountain of the 1930s and 1940s, and there was still pressure to give it the best effort you had, as Fee Dawson described:

"[you] go to class or face the wrath of the teacher; the . . . prevailing faculty attitude was if you missed my class well fuck you--classes were tough, we couldn't miss them--homework, heavy as it was, then doubled . . ."³²

Another student remembered that if he missed class, he was not scolded, but the "teacher would make sure it was very difficult for you . . . it was not a case of freedom to do anything you wanted to do."³³ One student remembered the response of Paul Leser, an anthropology professor, to his class's penchant for telling jokes:

Look, as long as we have a fresh supply of jokes, I'm perfectly content. But I'm not gonna worry about teaching you. Either you want to learn or you don't."³⁴

There was a pressure both from the teacher and the fellow students to produce the best work possible, as Fee Dawson would write,

"[There were] no academic rules and regulations, but that made it worse, the burden was on us, and the faculty maybe getting plastered with us the night before no matter, we had to produce. . . . [Our] lives changed in those classes, the competition was personal, and many times my student friends said, after class, 'You better quit fucking around and get to work,' . . . pointed fingers at each other, and the simplicity of language made reality spin."³⁵

In Black Mountain's last years, reality did spin; the sole effort seemed to be in becoming the most creative regardless of rules, of

³²Dawson, 77.

³³Dan Rice, Interview by Mary Harris, 12 March 1971, transcript, Black Mountain College Project Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

³⁴Joel Oppenheimer, Interview by Mary Harris, 10 June 1972.

³⁵Dawson, 77-78.
manners, or of rationality. The college under Rice had stressed creativity and freedom, but they had realized that there had to be some rules, some efforts at respect in order to prevent people from doing their thing and hurting others. In the last years, doing your own thing became the rule, as described by one teacher, a "strong impulse toward dropping all limitations, as localized in a group who responded blindly to the philosophy of sensation."36 Another teacher felt the disorder: "We resemble a bag of jumping beans and our chief characteristic is disintegration on the intellectual, moral, and physical planes."37 Yet another commented that "there's not enough character here and there's too much personality . . . there is a great deal more self-expression at Black Mountain than selves to express."38

Madness and hostilty began to reign. It became acceptable for one student to dance in front of a mirror all day; for another to give up all of his classes in order to paint; and for another to burn all of his paintings and writings.39 One of the community projects was a cowboy and indian war, three days of chasing and ambushing each other in the woods, under the rationale that "when you did something, you did it right."40


37Victor Sprague to Flola Shepard, 31 December 1951, quoted by Duberman, 341.


40Joel Oppenheimer, Interview by Mary Harris, 10 June 1972.
Fielding Dawson captured the madness well in his work, *The Black Mountain Book*:

I walked into a different world; a beautiful and violent world of change, and the major thing I learned was . . . how to resent. We were all crazy. I was afraid of everybody . . . the whole bunch of us were bewitched . . . several of us tried suicide, but it never worked. We died differently. Nobody from Black Mountain could kill themselves. Sleeping pills, alcohol, drugs, auto accidents, etc., all planned, all deliberate, failed in strange and sometimes brutal ways and we are all alive.\(^1\)

Indeed, there was at least one suicide attempt; for the first time, drugs had arrived on Black Mountain's campus; and there was an eerie car accident. Tom Field, a student, had been driving three other students, who had been teasing him, telling him that "he'd never make it" in the world. As they neared campus, Field refused to put on the brakes, and they all barreled into a building. Fortunately, no one was killed; the worst injury was a broken back. One of the riders, George Fick, believed Tom was trying to "prove [his] own worth by destroying other people."\(^2\)

The reputation of the college as a haven for "freaks and subversives" was beginning to catch up to it.\(^3\) One critic would call it the "scene of a long-running carnival," a "glorified summer camp, where art freaks and diet freaks cloistered together through long nights of beer and talk and community singing."\(^4\) By the winter of 1954, only

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\(^1\) Dawson, 2, 3.

\(^2\) George Fick, Interview by Mary Harris, 4 February 1972.

\(^3\) Eric Weinberger. Interview by Martin Duberman, 4 June 1968, quoted in Duberman, 399.

eight or so remained, giving the campus a ghost town atmosphere. The foundations started to refuse to give any money. None of the alumni who had known what Black Mountain had been was willing to give money to the Black Mountain that was now, calling it chaotic, bizarre, demented, and decadent. Most of the former faculty members were angry about the $45,000 in back-salaries due to them that they were not getting. Stephen Forbes threatened to sell all of the property that he had bought for the campus.

The college managed to stick it out one more year by a gift from one former teacher and by renting out some of its land to a Christian boys' camp (that land became the "land of the angels" and the remaining campus, the "land of the sinners"). The college was bound to close soon, as one student put it: "The college was teaching itself to survive and that's not what the prime function of a college is. The college is supposed to teach."

Fielding Dawson came back to visit the college in 1955 and remembered,

There was no order, and everything I had loved, even worshipped—all my secret places, were deserted jungle, and it wasn't mine any more."

Olson himself was worn out; he was tired of teaching, resorting to one class a week called "The Present" in which students would bring in one newspaper article and talk about it. He had withdrawn from the community in order to begin his work of poetry that would be entitled The Maximus Letters. Dawson described his teacher's withdrawal:

He gave Black Mountain him—in fact he was Black Mountain. But when

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45 George Fick, Interview by Mary Harris, 4 February 1972.

46 Dawson, 20.
he couldn't interpret a dream he had had around 1950, and when the
school began to go broke in late 1955, he made a move which foretold
the end. He withdrew into his house working completely on the
Maximus Letters.47

By the fall of 1956, only Olson and one other teacher, Wesley
Huss, remained. Most of the land had been rented out. The college was
overgrown with kudzu vine. The college was also threatened with a morals
charge when a pregnant wife reported to Travelers' Aid that her husband
was living at Black Mountain with another woman and that Olson himself
was having an affair with a student. Furthermore, two student with
prescriptions for speed had introduced the psychotic world of drugs to
Black Mountain. One day, Huss and Olson went into Asheville and
promptly decided that "it was time to go, time to make a new thing."48

To Olson and a few others, however, Black Mountain would never
die. Even as he was closing the college, Olson called it "expelled and
imploding . . . there's no end to the story . . . her flag flies."49 The
students and faculty of Black Mountain would go on to become part of the
San Francisco beat poets, part of the New York Cedar Bar crowd, and part
of the "The Black Mountain Poets" movement. One student, Eric
Weinberger, credited Black Mountain College for anticipating even more:

Black Mountain was somehow doing it a few years before everybody
else did. And therefore in some sense caused it, although obviously
this was where everything was headed with or without a Black
Mountain . . . There is a river . . . and you either dam it or you
help it flow . . . A seed may sprout or may not sprout, but if it's
help it grow . . . A seed may sprout or may not sprout, but if it's
given the right conditions, a daisy seed it's going to grow a daisy; given the right conditions,
it's going to grow a daisy. The fact that you watered it, isn't

47Dawson, 26.

48Wes Huss, Interview by Martin Duberman, 11 September 1971, quoted
in Duberman, 411.

49Charles Olson, quoted in Duberman, 412.
what made it turn into a daisy rather than a radish. But you helped grow that daisy by watering it . . . It's not important whether a particular daisy grows, but if there were none, it would be a catastrophe . . . And in a sense, Black Mountain watered the post-historic plant that was growing . . . [And you can look on that plant] as the last flourishing of the human spirit before the end or . . . the beginning of the flowering of what one of the founders of SNCC used to call 'the beloved society.' The beloved community. The decent society. Goddam it—sooner or later human beings are going to live in a decent society.50

Even those who had survived the last few years of Black Mountain would be able to look back and see that it had in some ways succeeded, as a professor Hilda Morley wrote:

Now when I think of Black Mountain, all its darker, unsatisfactory sides were on the outside. whatever was sordid, or peevish, or disgruntled about it—unlike most institutions where the dirt and nastiness are concealed under a smooth, bland surface . . . Though in a sense, Black Mountain failed, in another sense it didn't fail. This we know, who share a bond of love between us because of it, even especially, perhaps, those who survived its last, diminished, somewhat isolated years, the hard years or no, or half-salaries, or only "food allowances," . . . frozen meat . . . a few green vegetables or eggs, and finally, nothing . . . It wasn't a failure because there was an exchange, an exchange of personal goods: this weighted against that, this touching the other to change it . . . It was beautiful after all.51

In its final years, Black Mountain had lost sight not only of the awe for the ideal but also of the ideal itself. All efforts at building community and education were lost for the sake of individual creativity. In living for the moment, Black Mountain lost its grasp on reality, and the college's sole aim became survival. Fielding Dawson, however, would defend the last years at Black Mountain eloquently:

Our love was serious and risked irrationality . . . the creative power of working and learning at work lives in us, not in the school. There is no school. And we are of the world. Black

50 Eric Weinberger. Interview by Martin Duberman, 4 June 1968, quoted in Duberman, 408.

Mountain gave that to teach of us—also to me and I took it, and gave myself in return—to Black Mountain, vulnerable, gladly, laughing, full heart, green, and growing, dying, to learn.52

Charles Olson's response to the closing of Black Mountain College would be more succinct and more optimistic. "Now," as he said to M.C. Richards, "ARISE."53


53 M.C. Richards to Howard Adams, 13 June 1966, quoted in Duberman, 412.
EPILOGUE

Black Mountain College, 1933-1956, is a story of an experiment in education and community that failed because it could not accept the very humanness for which it had been founded. The founders of Black Mountain College had gathered in 1933 looking for something they were not finding in their conventional universities and communities; they knew what they did not want, a "mechanized, mass-production university system" that left no room for the individual. Black Mountain is a story of how these people came to the mountains of North Carolina to start over again, to take what they knew they did not want, and to make something more human than they had ever known.

To do so, first they had to develop goals and ideals of education and community. Black Mountain is a story of the development of an absolute form in education and community. It is a story of John Andrew Rice, who articulated many of the original goals of the community, who had a genuine interest in teaching the young how to become, not how to be philosophers, and who wanted a place where young people could come and have the space and support to develop their own ideas and beliefs. It is a story of the many others who came to Black Mountain with their own goals: of Josef Albers and his ideas about art, of John Wallen and his ideas on developing a community, of M.C. Richards and her ideas on teaching, of Charles Olson and his ideas on education, to name a few. It is a story of the conflicts that resulted from the different ideas of
what the absolute form of Black Mountain should be: was it foremost a
community or a college? if it was a community, was it primarily for the
faculty with students there only to give the faculty legitimacy? If it
was a college, was its primary focus on arts or social sciences or what?

Black Mountain was a place for developing a conception of the
absolute form of education and community. More importantly, it was a
place that the ideals could be translated into reality, when more than
often the college found that the ideals themselves were less than
perfect. They found that living in such a small, open community was not
easy; they realized that perhaps there were strong arguments for a place
where the community was more voluntary, where someone's love life was
not the business of the whole community, where privacy and reticence
were more respected. They often found the community consensus as
tyrannical and as hypocritical as the worlds they had left and that even
Black Mountain had limitations on and prescriptions for "acceptable
behavior."

The process of translating the absolute forms into reality was not
easy. Students came and found that they did not have such a big voice
in running the community; faculty members found that some people were
more equal than others in decision making. All discovered that the
tasks of running a community, obtaining a consensus, and administering
the decisions were not easy. To live at Black Mountain required
patience, compromise, and tolerance, all attributes that tended to be
less than prominent throughout its history. As one professor would
remember, "you have to be always willing to really give ground and

adjust and change and evolve. And that gets to be very tiring."¹

The fact was that the process of defining absolute forms and of translating the forms into reality was human; it was bound to be flawed; it was bound to be replete with the tensions from conflicting philosophies and personalities. It was flaw and tension that should have given Black Mountain the reason to continue. As May Sarton had written to them.

At the heart of life is the flaw, the imperfection without which there would be no motion and no reason to continue.²

Flaws and tensions should have been learning opportunities to the college; there were lessons to be learned from dealing with the tensions of determining how Black Mountain was to be both a community and a college; of defining "acceptable behavior"; or of determining who had authority. Black Mountain would never be an end; it existed because perfection could never be achieved; it was a process, a process toward a better way of living.

Black Mountain College eventually failed because it refused to accept that tension, flaw, and imperfection were inherent and inevitable. It failed to be in awe of the absolute form, to realize that imperfection was its very reason for existence. Again, as May Sarton had written to the college:

We must be united in awe before an Absolute Form and an Absolute Freedom of which . . . you can meet a part but never the whole, and


I would like to see you bound together in awe of this secret part of the Absolute Form and the Absolute Freedom without which there would be no flaw to be perfected, no perfection to attain, no community bound together in time, no sound and no silence, no life and no death. And it does not matter by what name you call Absolute Freedom within Absolute Form as long as you recognize its existence and allow yourselves to be united in awe before it.\(^3\)

Instead, the community dealt with the tension, the flaws, and the imperfection by forcing the people they determined were the cause of them to leave. As a result, no lessons were learned. Black Mountain became a story of people leaving because they could not live up to the college's demands of perfection, and of new people coming in only to start the lessons all over again. It would continue only as long as it had fresh recruits who were willing to start over and over again. It would continue only as long as it had absolute forms to reach.

In the end, Black Mountain ran out of fresh recruits and it lost sight not only of the awe and respect for the ideal education and community but also of the ideal itself. The one goal remaining, to survive, would not be enough to save it. In the words of John Rice given in the introduction, Black Mountain had attempted to conquer, to conquer perfection, and had died in its attempt. It never found the respect for the process toward the ideal and instead demanded the ideal itself:

'Die and conquer,' those are the words and the order. Humility, the wise have said, is the beginning of life. We had no humility, not a tittle.\(^4\)

Black Mountain College was human; it was imperfect; many of its

\(^3\)Sarton, 119-120.

ideals were flawed; many of its methods led to tensions in the community that were almost impossible to overcome. The story of Black Mountain College, however, offers the lessons of learning to accept flaw, to accept tension, and to accept imperfection. The story of a people that saw what they did not like in their education and community and had the strength and inspiration to start over to create an education and community of their own offers hope. Perhaps there WILL some day happen to us what has happened to men before, when after struggle and failure and struggle again a moment of magic came, and there was the picture or the book or the statue or the sound of a note, and they knew that it was good; not all that they dreamed and hoped it might be, but still, good. Perhaps this will happen to us who want to consider the world and humanity as material and remake them. Perhaps some day we will see a humanity to whom one can say, "You're good. No doubt about it, you're good. But you're not so good as we'd hoped you'd be. It's up to you to make yourself better, and those who come after you still better." Then humanity will be on the way..."
APPENDIX A

EXAM SAMPLE

Examination for Admission to the Senior Division
Given: October 13, 1941 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

[Note: parts of exam are missing]

Candidates are requested to answer all ten questions as thoroughly as possible.

The facilities of the library, laboratories, textbooks, notes, music records and scores, and pictures may NOT be used.

Return these questions with your paper.

1. What difference is there between a disciple and a pupil?

2. To what extent should freedom of the press be limited today?

3. A crew of three is working installing a ceiling in the Studies Building. One student, a girl, trips on a loose two by four. In order to regain her balance she clutches suddenly at a scaffolding causing it to shake violently. Another student, a boy who is in charge of the job, is on the scaffolding driving nails to attach the ply-wood ceiling. The shaking of the scaffolding causes him to swallow some nails which he has been holding in his mouth. He drops his hammer on the head of a member of the faculty who is kneeling picking up ply-wood strips under the scaffolding. The girl sprains an ankle, the boy has to go to the hospital to get a nail out of his throat, and the faculty member is incapacitated for a week with a minor concussion. Would you attribute these accidents, individually and collectively, to carelessness or fate and why? Who is responsible for the accidents and why? (Note: personal responsibility is referred to and not legal liability).

4. What do you think should be done about the Negro problem in the United States?

5. Answer the following: (1) How do you know that the sky is blue?

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(2) How do you know that the Philippine Islands exist?
(3) How do you know that stealing is wrong?

6. What are the problems which will face the United States after the present war? Discuss in terms of the two or three outcomes which you consider likely.

7. Two honest men are traveling together, carrying with them a monkey and a bag of oranges. They put up at an inn for the night. In the middle of the night one of them, troubled by insomnia, decides to push on without waking his companion. Before leaving he takes his fair share of the oranges. Early in the morning the second traveler wakens. Not wishing to disturb his companion, who he thinks is still asleep, he too decides to be on his way at once. He takes what he considers to be his fair share of the oranges and leaves.

Each man considered himself entitled to half the oranges. But not wishing to cut any oranges or to take more than half, if either (or both) found an odd number in the bag, he gave one to the monkey and then took half the remainder.

In the morning the landlady came in and found the monkey had two oranges, and also found five oranges left in the bag.

How many oranges did the men bring with them? (Note: show the method by which you arrived at your answer. Also note: no calculus, geometry, or algebra necessary for the solution).

8. Describe an experience which made a vivid impression on you.

9. Describe by words or drawings, or both, how you would like to furnish your study.

10. Describe Black Mountain College in 1951.

PART II. Psychology

I-III. Take any three of the following topical questions:

A. Conceptions of how the brain functions have varied between the two extremes of highly-specific-localization and action-as-a-whole. Illustrate this by referring to such as Flourens, Gall, Fritsch and Hitzig, Broca, Wernicke, Franz and Lashley.

B. A brief sketch of the historical development of the Reaction-Time experiment. (Hints: Maskelyne and Bessel, Hipp chronoscope, prior entry, Helmholtz' nerve conduction rate, Doner's subtractive procedure, Wundt's 'muscular' and 'sensorial,' Cattell's refinements of apparatus and methods)

F. Psychophysics. Its origin in what (whose?) experimental investigations? Its philosophical application—and hence the name—(by
IV-VI. Write a short paragraph on the following topics.

a. Descartes and his dualism.
b. Locke's primary and secondary qualities.
c. Locke's mental atomism of simple ideas.
d. Leibnitz's psychophysical parallelism.
e. The new point of approach to psychological questions inaugurated by Spencer and Darwin, and carried on by Romanes and Lloyd Morgan.
f. A great American development that follows from the work of Galton.
g. A method introduced by Tachen for the experimental study of esthetics.
h. The primary colors according to Helmholtz.
i. Ebbinghaus' contribution to the experimental study of memory.
j. The principal contentions of the Wuerzburg School. (The school of Kuelpe, Marbe, Watt, et al. — you need not discuss these different ones.)

VIII. Give the names of the authors and approximate dates of the publication of:

"Handbuch der Physiologischen Optik"
"Elemente der Psychophysik"
"Grundzuge der physiologischer Psychologie"
"Inquiries into Human Faculty"
"Expression of Emotions in Man and Animal"
APPENDIX B
STUDENTS' BACKGROUND

Geographical (1933, 1936, 1939)¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1939</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid West</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</table>

Most students tended to be from the New England and Middle Atlantic states, especially New York and Massachusetts.

Secondary School Background (from 1933–1943)²

- 26% from private schools
- 20% from progressive educational schools
- 46% from public schools

How the students heard about Black Mountain (1933–1943)³

- 25% from former students or family
- 21% from the Adamic article in Harper's
- 14% from headmasters, teachers, staff
- 9% from Black Mountain faculty
- 1% from catalogue
- Others: speeches, articles, Bauhaus and other exhibitions

¹"Black Mountain College Newsletter," No. 6, November 1939, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

²Garren, 71.

³Ibid., 73.
APPENDIX C
COURSES OFFERED AND DEGREES AWARDED

A very small example of some courses offered throughout the years at Black Mountain:

Philosophy: Plato I, Plato II, Logic, Ethics, Esthetics, Philosophical Classics, Philosophy of Science


Music: Music Appreciation I, II, III, Nineteenth Century Opera, General Singing, Choral Singing, Instrumental Music

Literature and Languages: Creative Writing, Journalism, English Literature, Historical Survey, American Literature, Form in Literature, Problem of the Novel, General Introduction of the Linguistics

Foreign Languages: French, German, Spanish, Greek, Latin


Sociology: General or Introductory Sociology, Educational Sociology, History of Social Relations, Anthropology


Physics: General Physics, Elementary Optics, Electricity, Mechanics, Physics of Musical Sounds, Atomic Structure, Radioactivity, Electron Physics, Theory of Relativity

Chemistry: General Chemistry, Qualitative Analysis, Quantitative Analysis, Organic Chemistry, Physical Chemistry, Advanced Inorganic Chemistry

Biology/Botany: Introductory Biology, Animal Biology, Comparative Anatomy and Embryology, Plant Morphology, Field Biology and Ecology, Ecology in Relation to Man, Introductory Botany

Degrees Awarded from Black Mountain:

1935: 4 English literature, 1 History
1936: 1 English literature
1937: 1 American history and economic theory, 1 Economics
1938: 1 English literature
1939: 1 American History, 1 English literature
1940: 4 Arts
1941: 1 Drama, 1 History, 2 American literature, 1 Arts
1942: 1 Politics, 2 Music, 1 Anthropology, 1 Philosophy, 1 Psychology, 1 Music, 1 History
1943: 1 History, 1 English literature, 1 Psychology
1944: 2 History 1945: 1 Arts, 1 Art and Textile, 1 Music
1946: 1 American History, 1 Arts
1948: 1 Economics, 2 Arts, 1 Music, 1 Textile Design

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2Graduate file, Black Mountain College Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.
APPENDIX D
FINANCES

Examples of some of the finances of Black Mountain College:

Budget of 1933¹

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<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>4200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>4200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Equipment</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 salary (Albers)</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>3800</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receipts</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifts</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room and Board</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Black Mountain was more dependent on student fees than most American universities and colleges. In 1935, student fees provided 87% of the operating expenses of Black Mountain, and in 1941, 88%.² On the average for American universities and colleges at this time, student fees provided 21.5% of the operating expenses.³

¹Minutes from meeting of the Board of Fellows, 12 December 1933, Black Mountain College Papers. The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.


A Sampling of Gifts Given to Black Mountain 1933-1942

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie Endowment for the Arts</td>
<td>$5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberlaender Trust, Philadelphia</td>
<td>2700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William C. Whitney Foundation</td>
<td>9000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adele R. Levy</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Hill Foundation</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Frederick Mangold to Ruth O'Neil, 7 July 1942, Frederick Mangold Papers, The State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.*
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Hurst, Zora to Robert Wunsch, 21 February 1944.

Lipsey, Ruby to Robert Wunsch, 21 February 1944.

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Rice, John to Louis Adamic, 29 April 1936, May 1938.

Wallen, John to Black Mountain College, 16 May 1940.

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