



Forty-one years ago, Robert F. Kennedy traveled to Appalachia to bring attention to a part of the country that desperately needed help.

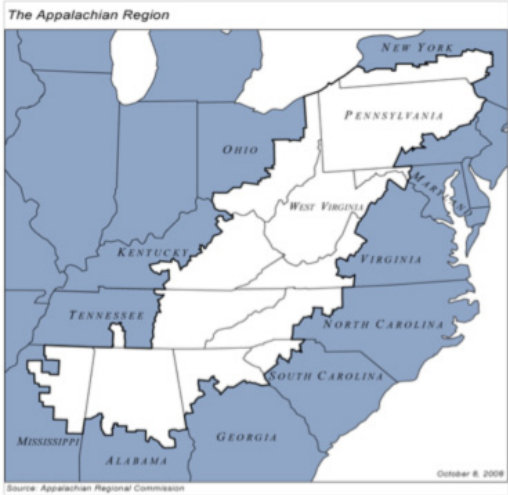
McDowell County (where Hope Force International is now focusing) is considered one of the core counties in Appalachia on which the national War on Poverty focused, a national effort started during President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration. McDowell County is now the second poorest county in the nation.

McDowell County is a county located in the U.S. state of West Virginia. As of 2000, the population was 27,329. Its county seat is Welch[1]. McDowell county is the southern-most county in the state, geographically

McDowell County was nationally known for its prominence in the coal mining industry-- setting records for coal production -- and was a major player in the state's economy. Before the industry's decline that began in the 1950s, McDowell's population was almost 100,000 residents, the third highest in the state.

In 1950, the population declined at a rapid pace in the following decades, setting the highest percentage in the state for population loss with each new census, as younger residents moved out of the county to

seek better futures, leaving behind an older and increasingly impoverished population.



During the decade of the 1980s, the central Appalachian region lost more than 70,000 coal mining jobs. Between 1981 and 1992, according to the U.S. Department of Energy and the United Mine Workers union, coal mining employment in the state of West Virginia decreased by more than 53%. No county in the Appalachian region was more severely distressed by these losses than McDowell County.

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 1980, the rate of poverty in McDowell County was 23.5%. By 1990, the poverty rate in McDowell County had climbed to 37.7%, the highest rate of poverty for any county in West Virginia. By 1990, 50.3% of all children in McDowell County were living in families below the poverty level, up from 31.2% in 1980.



The major losses in McDowell County during this period were the result of the closing of all mines and facilities operated by the United States Steel Corporation, terminating more than 1,200 jobs.

Roughly 40 percent of Appalachia's population in the hills and hollows remains stuck in poverty, still searching





for the road to success. Families face unthinkable conditions, living without “necessities” that most Americans take for granted. Isolated pockets in Central Appalachia have **three times the national poverty rate!**

Appalachia is the home to America’s toughest soldiers. The region has produced the fiercest military soldiers the U.S. has ever seen. On a proportionate basis, Appalachia has lost more people to foreign wars than any other part of the nation. These people are proud to be Americans fighting for their country.

People in Appalachia die younger than most other Americans.

These are the oldest mountains in America, settled by the original pioneers.

ABC with Diane Sawyer did a piece on Appalachia in February, 2009, which was two years in the making. It was watched by 11 million viewers and was the highest rated 2020 episode in 5 years. The piece was called: A Hidden America, Children of

the Mountains. Click here to watch a preview, which includes a link to the full program:

<http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=6885766>

This area is where the movies October Sky and The Last Sin Eaters were filmed.



The Hope Force headquarters is about a 7-hour drive to Central Appalachia. We have prayerfully chosen to focus some of our efforts into a “domestic complex disaster of chronic need” where on-going chronic need has existed for generations. It’s a place where Americans live in the kind of poverty that would exceed many developing nations. We see this as a privilege to give back to “the least of these” in need on our own American soil.

Our goal: To offer the two hands of the Gospel -- meeting physical and spiritual needs -- through improving and rebuilding homes in a specific area where a proud population is looking for a “hand up” – not a “hand out.”

