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# THE TRIAL OF LEE BROWN

An African American Labor Leader Imprisoned  
Under The Taft-Hartley Act

By Lee Brown and Robert L. Allen

PART 1

(First Draft 3/30/94)



CHAPTER ONE



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## Chapter 1/Childhood

My mother took me to live with my grandfather when I was five years old. Grandfather owned a farm of many acres in Marrot, Louisiana. He raised cattle, chickens and hogs. Grandfather was well known, loved and respected by everyone who lived in Marrot, Louisiana. His name was Lee Brown, Senior. Everyone called him Uncle Lee Brown. When I was born in the Charity Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana, May 28, 1921, I had been named after him, Lee Brown,

Grandfather's farm was so huge he had to hire men to help with the work around the farm. Some of the happiest moments that I can remember were when I would sit up front alongside my grandfather in his buggy and ride fast across those rugged dirt roads. I went everywhere with my grandfather. I went to church every Sunday with him. Some Sundays we would go to the church and take food and stay all day talking with the neighbors and exchanging food. Grandfather was a solid, strong man. He would stand with me by his side looking over his land, and say to me, "As far as your eyes can see--one day this land will be yours." I looked up to him for guidance, wisdom and knowledge,

To me there was no wiser or beloved a man than my grandfather. Grandfather taught me to share with others who were less fortunate. I shared my toys or whatever he gave me with my friends,



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We lived among hardworking farmers who were very poor. Grandfather delivered freight. He met the train for supplies, and then delivered the goods back to different stores.

I sincerely loved my grandfather, and he loved me. Every morning we had our breakfast on a long diningroom table: my grandfather sat at one end and I sat at the other end. Living on the farm, listening to different farm sounds, were my happiest moments.

My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. My father was a light-complexioned man and very tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches. He wore size 14 shoes. My father was killed when I was very young. On his way to work one morning he stepped on a live electric wire that had fallen down on the ground during the night after a terrible thunderstorm. He was killed instantly. I didn't really get to know my father. Little do I know about him, except what I was told.

We lived in the countryside where people were very friendly, and concerned about each other. Neighbors would come to my grandfather's home every night and they would discuss issues such as farming, church affairs, money problems and health. Listening to these old people taught me a lot about life and how to make a living for myself, and especially respect for others.

One morning my mother came to the farm to take me away from my grandfather. When we arrived at the hotel where she was staying, I cried and made such a fuss all night that she was asked by a lady if I were really her son. This lady thought my mother had stolen me. The very next morning my mother took me back to the



farm. My mother was born in Boton, Mississippi. Her name was Janie Davis.

My grandmother's name was Hannah. She was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida. She lived on the farm with my grandfather and I. Aunt Hannah didn't talk very much to anyone but everyone loved her. Her long black hair hung to her waist. Aunt Hannah was a kind lady. Grandfather didn't believe in banks. He would let his neighbor (one that he trusted) keep his money in an old sack until he got ready to use it.

One day some neighbor's children and I were playing in my yard when suddenly I heard someone scream. Grandfather came out of the barn bent over, blood running down his leg. He cut his leg while working in the barn. Aunt Hannah came out of the house, and helped him get into bed. Aunt Hannah doctored his leg day and night. Hospitals were miles away. Grandfather didn't realize how seriously he was hurt. Months passed; his leg got worse, and he still wasn't seen by a physician. Things weren't the same on the farm anymore. The neighbors would leave the house with worried looks on their faces. I soon realized my grandfather's leg wouldn't heal, and it kept getting worse. In the meantime, Aunt Hannah had taken ill and soon died.

My grandfather hired a housekeeper to take care of us. Later he married her. The housekeeper's name was Betsy. I called her "Aunt Betsy". Little did I know at that time what heartbreak Aunt Betsy would bring to me. It wasn't long after my grandfather died. One night Aunt Betsy woke me up and told me my grandfather had died. I remember hanging onto his neck and screaming. The people that



were in the room at that time had to pull me away from him. My grandfather was such a kind man. Everyone, Black and white, liked him.

My grandfather was given an Odd Fellows burial. This was the name of a secret order organization. The men who attended the funeral wore white gloves, and also carried swords--a symbol of the organization. All the women wore white. I also was dressed in white. I was so hurt, and feelings of loneliness and emptiness filled my heart, since he had been the most important person in my life.

The death of my grandfather was the turning point of my life. I remained with Aunt Betsy on the farm. She was a cruel woman with little education or knowledge. I never knew anyone could be so cruel and selfish. We never had much contact with each other, either before or after grandfather's death. She was never pleased with me or anything I tried to do.

One evening some men came to the farm. Aunt Betsy had a long conversation with them. Later I found out Aunt Betsy was giving all my grandfather's tools away.

Weeks later a man whose name was Buster came to live with us on the farm; he also brought a wife. Aunt Betsy gave Buster fifty head of cattle to sell for her. Weeks passed. She was waiting for him to bring the money back, but Buster never came back to the farm. The only news she heard about him was that he had died. Later Buster's wife left the farm. In addition, since Aunt Betsy had no education, men would count her money and shortchange her all the time. Finally all her money was stolen by these people she had trusted.



The remainder of the inheritance grandfather left her was gradually given to her sisters and brothers. But my grandfather left all his land to me, When Aunt Betsy didn't have anything else to sell or give away, she tried to sell my land. But little did she know my grandfather had fixed it so no one could sell it. Finally, Aunt Betsy went to a court in Apalousie, Louisiana to try to get my land. But the judge told Aunt Betsy that all the land belonged to me, and the land couldn't be sold.

My land couldn't be sold until I reached the age of twenty-one: by that time I would be old enough to decide (legally) what I wanted to do with the land. When Aunt Betsy came from court she was frustrated with me. She went around the farm with frowns all over her face. Then she really started mistreating me. The little food she gave me to eat wasn't served on the long dining room table I was so accustomed to eating upon. All my toys and clothes disappeared. I never knew whether she gave them away or burned them up. I wasn't surprised anymore over any stupid thing she did. There were times when I would walk around crying and longing for my grandfather. She would often beat me for no reason. My grandfather's friends stopped coming to the farm. They didn't have anything to do with such a weak woman.

Everything that my grandfather had of value was sold or given away. Then Aunt Betsy brought her sister to the farm to live with us. Her sister was a mean old woman just like her. Neither of them had any consideration for me or any one else.

Later Aunt Betsy sent me to live with her brother. He was very friendly towards me: moreso than his sister. But my visit was cut



short. Aunt Betsy came and took me back to the farm. With little food to eat and the mistreatment of these old ladies, word began to spread throughout Marrot, Louisiana about the way they were treating me.

One night in 1927, we had a bad rainstorm. High water was everywhere. All the homes were flooded out with water. People, Black and white, received lots of assistance from the Red Cross. When the water kept getting higher, some soldiers came and took everyone to Camp Burguard. We stayed there three days. When the water went down, we went back to our homes; we were transported back by the soldiers. On our way back home from Camp Burguard, we saw dead cattle all along the roads, and in people's yards, and scattered around their farmhouses. It took weeks before all the dead cattle were burned.

Things began to shape up for me. Finally news reached my cousins who lived in a small countryside of Lamond and Marrot, Louisiana. My cousin was named Tot Howard and his wife Rosetta Howard. Tot Howard came to the farm and took me away from Aunt Betsy and her sister and he took me to live with him and his wife. (At this time, I found out Aunt Betsy didn't want me to leave the farm. She intended to have me stay until I reached the age of twenty-one, so she could try to influence me to sign my land over to her.) Tot Howard and his wife were very poor people, but they tried to do all they could for me.

Tot wanted me in school. I had never attended school before. I was very excited about the idea of going to school with kids my own age. This was the beginning of a new experience for me.



All the children in this small community went to the same school. Most of the children were from the the families of the Howard people around the same plantation. I went to school three months out of a year. We didn't learn too much in that small length of time. Yet, this was quite some experience to look forward to. All of these Black families were sharecroppers. Mrs. Ida, our teacher, respectable as she was, taught one hundred children, which included all primary grades up to the fifth grade. When I became older I was transferred to another school in Lamond, Louisiana. This school was about six miles away.

I walked the six miles every day, in cold weather and in rain. School buses weren't available for Black children. Clearly then, I realized for the first time I was living in an evil Jim Crow, discriminatory, and racist society. School buses were available only for white children. For this reason, I had to learn what was behind these problems that existed for Black people.

I learned how to read remarkably well. Then reading books became very interesting and enjoyable. After the three months of school were over, I went back to help my cousins. When we weren't farming, we chopped wood for some white people's homes. The money from chopping wood helped out in the winter months. One thing I couldn't understand was why my cousin didn't chop wood for us and prepare for winter. Instead we would wait until it got real cold, then we would gather wood every day for the fireplace. I didn't complain about anything that was done around the place.

Sometimes when the neighbors were out of food, a lady named Jew Mama, who operated a grocery store in the Black community,



would let Black people have credit and tell them to pay whenever they got some money.

The sharecroppers were very poor but I appreciated what my relatives were doing for me. My appetite was so big I wanted different kinds of food to eat. My cousin Aunt T-Bay gave me pork and beans and a cinnamon roll to eat every day for lunch. I noticed one day when I was walking down the street that some people were coming out of a building carrying bags of food. I asked the people if I could get some of that food. They told me to go on in and ask for some. When I got inside the building and asked for the food, a lady, who was sitting behind a desk, told me to sign some papers. When I signed the papers, I got the food. I was so glad to get this food I couldn't wait to get home to show Aunt T-Bay and Uncle Tot what I had. When Uncle Tot saw the food, he got very angry at me. Apparently, the building I went into to get the food from was the Welfare Office. Uncle Tot explained to me I shouldn't go to the Welfare Office to get food because that food was for people who were out of work and didn't have any other means of support. Even though I didn't quite understand what he was talking about, I didn't go there ever again. Nevertheless, I had been given some cornmeal, flour, plums and grapefruits.

One evening passing the dock I noticed some men were giving away bananas. They gave me some, so I took them. I didn't know what reaction Uncle Tot would have. But he didn't say anything to me about that. I just wanted something different to eat for a change.

One night Uncle Tot and Aunt Bernice went to a small bar in the community. While they were sitting at the table a white man put



his hand on Aunt Bernice's breast. As soon as this was done, the light in the bar went out. Then a shot rang out in the bar. The white man was shot. Before he died, he called out that Uncle Tot had shot him. This man didn't know who shot him. Uncle Tot didn't have his gun that night. But, of course, everyone believed Uncle Tot killed this man.

From then on, white men rode horses all night in the rural communities looking for Uncle Tot. At night the neighbors gathered all their children and put them in one house, until morning. This went on for three weeks. Uncle Tot escaped the riders' hands. Uncle Tot had hidden out in a church for two weeks. Later, with the help of friends, he escaped to the train station and made his getaway to Texas. Soon afterward, Aunt T-Bay moved to Evergreen, Louisiana, and took me along. We went to live with her brother. Later, we heard a white man did the killing in the bar that night.

I started school again in Evergreen. I got along fine with the other kids. One time I was playing on some thin ice and fell into a hole. The kids had to pull me out. Another time when my little cousin and I went to a grocery store, I stole a grape and put it in his mouth. When we got home, my cousin told Aunt T-Bay and she gave me a good spanking.

Aunt T-Bay decided it was time for me to get baptized, so I was baptized, in the local Baptist church one Sunday morning with three more children. I won't forget now the preacher gave a long sermon over us, as if he were at a funeral. After the baptism the three other children and I changed our clothes in one of the member's houses. From then on I went to church every Sunday and also had Communion.



At about the age of 10, I decided it was time for me to go out and find work to help support myself. I was still a young boy, but quite large for my age. I was lucky to find work as a houseboy, working for a German family, although this job didn't turn out well. The salary was too low for all the work that was required. So, I left and went to live with Dad Howard, and his family, where I worked every day in the fields picking and chopping cotton. With the little money I received I bought some clothes. Dad Howard had a large family. Everyone had to eat a cooked meal and drink milk every morning. He treated me as one of the family.

The field hands' days off were on Saturdays. One morning a boy in the neighborhood wanted someone to work in his place, selling meat door-to-door on Saturdays. The job was paying one dollar and fifty cents. I took this job and saved enough money to hobo to Melvin, Louisiana. I went looking for other relatives and a cousin named Joe Reeve. When I caught the freight train to Melvin, other hobos were in the boxcar with me. They told me when the time came to jump off.

Suitcase under my arm, little money in my pocket, I finally made it to Melvin, Louisiana. I started walking down the street asking everyone I met whether they knew anyone by the name of Joe Reeve. I ran into one lady who knew him. She asked me what my name was. I told her Lee Brown. Then she started mentioning some of the Brown's names to see if I knew any. I recognized some of the names she mentioned. It turned out this lady was my second cousin. She took me home with her. It so happened she lived only a short distance from Melvin. When we arrived at her home, I was



introduced to her husband, daughter and other relatives. My cousin's name was Esther; my other cousins were Jessie Brown, and Henry Brown. I got so excited meeting so many relatives. After dinner we talked about other relatives who lived in different cities. I didn't know any of the relatives mentioned, but was glad to hear I had a large family. When time came to go to bed, cousin Esther prepared a bed in the back of the house. She told me to stay as long as I wanted.



Lee Brown, 3/17/94

001

My name is Lee Brown. I am going to make a report by during the time when I was released from Texarkana, Texas. It was the United States District, Southern District of Texas in Texarkana, Texas. I, Lee Brown, was released July the 11th, 1960. I was released to a relative of mine in Texas, Hitchcock, Texas, in that area, the place that I was picked up at when the FBI finally caught up with me. 013

In that year, and I was taken back to New Orleans, the State of Louisiana, and stayed in the jail there for one year before I went to trial. But I'm going to talk about from the date that I was released, in July 11th, July the 11th, 1960, the year of 1960. 021

And I repeat I was released to my, one of my relatives, one of my relatives, and Hitchcock, Texas, in that area. And I stayed there a while till I served out the time. I think I had about nine months to serve that time out in that area. It was something like on the parole. I was paroled in that area until I served, and I remained there until I served the time. 030

And I left there and came back to New Orleans. I happened to get in touch with my former wife. That, I wanted to see my son, Brownie, where I called him Brownie. And I had a chance - she told me to come over and see him, and I went over there, and I set down and talked with her, with my son. She fixed me a dinner for that night, and we set up and talked, and I talked with Brownie. And I want to say that evening when I was there talking to her, I could look out and see Brownie setting outside, all alone. And I would



a new trial I'd - my attorney had filed a new trial, which my attorney's passed now, Earl Amadie, in New Orleans, the late Earl Amadie. And he advised me, he say, "If I was you, I would serve my time. I would not accept a new trial because you may go and come back with more time than you got." Said, "You don't have too [inaud. - 132] but serving, all but three years. Do these three years. I would just advise you cuz I've been around these institutions, and I have some knowledge." 135

During that period, I did not have long to stay in the institution. My time was very limited. And I think during that time I only had 261 days total. The I'd have been free. It was no need accepting. They wait till the last minute when my time had got down very low. Time had got down very low, and they said word - it was in the newspaper there - and the warden called me in, and during that period I was in segregation. They had separated me. Causing some of the conflict they claim we was talking, discussing. We was [inaud. 148] different issues, and a young man, when the officer walked up that day, we was all - about six of us setting on the grass, discussion. Some men may was playing ball. Some was playing baseball. Some of them playing body ball, and whatever. And six of us was concerned of discussing issues [inaud. 152] that was confronting us, and we were down talking. And one of the guards walked up, and one of the young men was there, and the guard was talking, say, "I, how's the weather? How you all fellows doing today?" 156

One of the young men say, "It's cloudy." As I had some knowledge of [inaud. 158], I understood that symbolic talk, that symbol talk. That mean that somebody was in there that was talking



things that, that he was not allowed to talk. We were discussing our own opinion and freedom, freedom of speech, and we were discussing the condition that we were living in, the condition that we confronted with outside, and why it was so many of us black people in the institutions, federal and state. And in the city jails, and the state prisons and the federal institutions. 167.

And the next morning, one of the guards had him blew his whistle, said, "Brown, now, all the way out." That mean that I getting ready - they was going to take me out. He say, "You going this morning. We're going to put you in, in the segregation." That mean they going to separate me. And I didn't know what it was the first time, wasn't [inaud. 174]. When I did find out, they put me in a cell by myself, and they - which I've been in a cell by myself in down in New Orleans, during before I went to trial. [inaud. 177] In a court, which I was tried by a Judge Skelly Wright, during the early '50s, or the late '50s. 180

And when I got into segregation at Texarcana, Texas, I was locked up in it long that one of the inmates come by who was a trustee. He says, "You need any books or whatever you need, commissary, just, you know, I got the slips. If you got commissary, I'll put it down, you sign the slip and I'll bring it to you, your books." And the segregation was not bad. The onliest thing about segregation is I couldn't go out on the yard. 188

So they - I was working out in the garden. The little garden, the garden that they had on the outside. The institution. Which I had taken up vegetable growing. I got [inaud. 192] on that. I wanted to study vegetables because in my studies and research, that



I begin to learn that vegetables was same as human. They had to have a food, water, and oxygen, same as the human being. I said if I studied vegetable life, I can find, have the knowledge of human life. So I taken up and complete it, and I received a certificate for vegetable growing, and I also taken up general education, and I received a high school diploma, and I learned there, certificate on education. 205

And that day when I was released, at first they called me in before I released, about five days, and measured me for a suit, give me some shoes, new shoes, new hat, and give me, I think it was - either \$75 or \$100 and some odd, I don't [inaud. 212] now, and I could [inaud. 213] the, the - the one who said to me getting out, one of the direction officers, I say, "I," I think his name is Mr. Anderson. The chief classified and paroler. I say, he say, "Well, take you to the bus station," which is in Texarkana, Texas, "and put you on the bus for Hitchcock, Texas." I give me my ticket and they give you a change in clothes, work clothes, not khakis like they showed you. It was in the little magazine they give you - when you first go there, they give you a little booklet, give you information on how you're supposed to do and what you do when you get ready, to what you're going to [inaud. 226]. So they say you could take notes, and as I was reading and going into different subjects, the labor movement, the religious movement, the political movement, and I taken up - I said it had one large book they call Social Science Encyclopedia. That cover everything dealing with human beings. And I studied that, and I put down notes and had a young fellow there from New Orleans. He worked also in the education department. 234



registered Muslim. Just take this letter to any mosque. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon you. A salaam alechem. I am your brother. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad." 294

I'm going to make sure I'm dealing with the era when I was in the federal correction institution in Texarcana, Texas also. That's before some of these happening, before I went to the institution where I was sent in institution. I also was in the Nation of Islam. That's when I began to study history, reading the paper they called Mr. Muhammad Speaks. I learned quite a bit of history, going to the Masonic store there in New Orleans, into buy some books dealing with black history, somebody was not deep history like I can find here in San Francisco and also in Los Angeles when I used to do a lot of reading. I'm self-studying, self-educated, and whilst I was in the institution, I went to school, and I received - I taken up vegetable growing, general education, and I received some certificates. I received a high school certificate, and I - that got lost somewhere during the time I've had notes typed up as I before said by a young man who was from New Orleans, and when I was going to school, I go through the books. There's one particular book that I liked and was very interested, and I was studying it cuz they were telling me all about - the title of that book was - it was Social Science Encyclopedia, tell me about what the human race was dealing with, what people was all about. It was teaching me about the [inaud. - 327] on psychology, sociology, archaeology, biology, socialism, communism, colonialism - every subject that human being was connected with I was learning it from this book, studying it, studying many things. Study history, some black history that I would find in the institution.



from Africa, from Central America, Latin America, from Canada, the Soviet Union. Matter of fact, from all over the world. I've met people. I learned a lot of experience. I want to say I dedicate myself and I want to understand and the masses understand that I believe deeply in my heart to continue fighting for freedom and justice and equality. The liberation by the working people that we will have one world of peace, at last when the world can say we can have millions of jobs. When her an for president under the Republican party, he say jobs. And I want to say that we can still - friendship can save the world. Peace. Get rid of racism, white supremacy. We can do it. We will do it. We can do it. If we always have freedom, justice, and equality. Meaning that to every American, every person throughout the world, should no child, nobody should go to bed hungry. 718

Every child and person throughout the world should have a decent home, decent food, decent health, security. Those who are able to work should have jobs. The seniors, disabled should have . . .

END SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B

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Lee Brown is testing. Yes, I am testing. Lee Brown is testing. I am testing. Yes, I am testing, testing, testing. Testing. Monday morning, the 28th, 1994. I'm going to talk about putting together my manuscript for my life story. Thank you kindly. Thank you kindly. thank you kindly. 733



CHAPTER TWO

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## Chapter 2/Off The Plantation

I didn't want to look for support from my cousin, so the next day I went looking for work, and was hired as a houseboy for the LaBlonche family.

My duties were to shop and run errands for the oldest daughter of the LaBlonche family. The LaBlonches were a family of moderate income in this small town. They also had an upstairs maid. I was given a little shack in the back of their house to live in, which was part of my meager wages. The LaBlonches had children the same age as I. Their children and I got along fine together. Mrs. LaBlonche knew the salary she was giving me was small, so she told me to plant a garden in back of the house. The money I earned from selling whatever vegetables I grew would be mine to use for things like movies or pocketchange. I grew different kinds of vegetables in my garden. I gave Mrs. LaBlonche's family some vegetables and sold the rest up and down the streets. I pulled a little red wagon filled up to the top with vegetables.

There were times when I got very lonesome in this little shack, especially when the day was over and night began. One thing for sure, I did have a German shepherd, Laddie, who followed me everywhere I went, even to the movies. He stayed outside until I came out. I loved this dog. He really was a devoted friend.

One day I was walking along selling my vegetables, when a gang of white boys came up to me and wanted to start a fight. I told them I lived at the LaBlonche's home and worked for them. They



were quite surprised to hear this and walked on down the street. I didn't have that trouble anymore.

My salary was two dollars a week, plus meals. When time came for me to eat, they brought my food out to the yard. This went on until Mrs. LaBlonche's daughter, who had lived in New York, explained to her mother that she didn't like the idea of serving me food in the backyard. Having spent time in the North and overcome most of her prejudices, she wanted it stopped and wanted me to eat at the table with the other children. Mrs. LaBlonche's daughter further explained that she didn't believe in discriminating against any race of people. Afterward, I was treated better than before around the house. I continued selling my vegetables.

I got acquainted with the Black maid who worked upstairs. She was forty years old. She was a very nice lady. She fixed my breakfast every morning.

I worked for the LaBlonches for two years. One Sunday morning when everyone was attending church, I packed my suitcase and left to look for some work which paid more. I went back to cousin Esther's house to live. Things began to get unpleasant around the house. It seemed to me that cousin Esther's daughter was disturbed. Often we got into arguments. She slapped me in the face one day. I told cousin Jessie about how she was acting around the house when everyone was out. He didn't like it, and told her never to slap me again. I didn't want to make matters worse, so I left Melvin, Louisiana and went back to Dad Howard's plantation and stayed one week.



I went to a little farm to visit some friends of mine. When I arrived there, they were out in the fields planting potatoes. I stayed and helped them plant potatoes for about a week. When I finished I told them I would be back one day to help eat them, but the last news I heard about my friends was that they had died.

Before dawn I woke my cousin up and told him I was leaving; so, he gave me a chicken. When I walked down the street, I saw a man coming toward me who was dressed as though he was on his way to work. I stopped him and asked if he would like to buy a chicken. He answered yes. I sold him the chicken for forty cents. With forty cents in my pocket, I went looking for a friend's house to ask him to travel with me and show me the way to Galveston, Texas.

Oak Tar was his name. When I found Oak Tar he didn't have any money but he was willing to hobo with me and show me the way. First, we hoboed to Apalousie, Louisiana. There we caught a freight train for Galveston. Once inside the boxcar it was so cold we had to make a fire. As we traveled we didn't have anything to eat all the way. When Oak Tar and I finally arrived, the cold wind seemed as though it went straight through our bodies. Uncle Tot and Aunt T-Bay were so happy to see me, they hugged and kissed me and prepared our dinner. When dinner was over, Oak Tar went back to Marrot, Louisiana.

It was so nice being with my uncle and aunt, but jobs were hard to find. No one was hiring. A government agency had a work project called the Civilian Conservation Corps. This project was designed for young boys who wanted to work. I signed the necessary forms so I could begin working. However, the next morning when I was



supposed to report to go on the job, I was walking down the street and pains started in the lower part of my stomach. I feel unconscious in the streets. Some one called the ambulance. When I became conscious I was laying in bed at John Seely Hospital. Hanging in front of my bed was a chart which read "C.C.C boy." I was uncertain about the nature of my illness. Before I realized what was happening to me, a team of doctors were wheeling me down the corridor toward the operating room. Luckily, I passed an old doctor who recognized me. He asked me what was wrong. I told the doctor I didn't know. Then he asked me if I wanted an operation. I told him no. The doctor told the team of doctors to take me back to my room. Then he came in carrying in his hands a catheter, which he inserted and pulled out. It was later that I found out my urine had stopped. One thing for sure, I didn't have any more trouble of that kind. When I thought about that job which I had signed up for at the C. C. C. camp, I decided not to take it, because the government was only paying twenty dollars a month. Five dollars would be for myself and they would send the rest of the small amount to my aunt.

There were times when I went to the Hall of Justice, and listened to cases that were scheduled for that day. I was interested in finding out about the administration of law, and how it was carried out. Before long this became one of my special past-times.

Every morning for three weeks I went to the dry docks to look for work. On the dry docks there were crowds of men looking for work and waiting in line to be called. Finally, I was called from among the crowd. Thirty men were hired that day. We were examined and signed up to work as a labor scaling and painting ships. Each man



was given iron toe shoes and a helmet for safety. Payday was on Fridays.

When I was working for a few weeks, it came time for the common laborers and workers to organize into a union. Union workers walked off the job. We the common laborers respected the picket lines and didn't cross their lines. This was in 1938. I walked the lines every night. The strike lasted three months. Before the strike, the common laborers were receiving thirty cents an hour. When the strike finally was settled, the wages were fifty cents an hour. Afterwards, all common laborers had to join the union. Now this was my first involvement with any union activity. All the workers had to join the union which we paid four dollars to join. Then the workers went back to work.

This job lasted six months, then work began to slow down. The president of the union told the young men who were working that they had to go find work some other place. My union book was stamped "paid in full". Then I left.

I started working part-time on ships with the crewmen and part-time on the railroad in Galveston. This job on the railroad ran out, so I went back looking for work. I was willing to try any kind of work. Jobs those days were hard for a Black man to find, except on farms and plantations, where wages were so low you could barely live off of it.

Black people were sharecroppers for white plantation owners and homeowners. Black families stayed on some of their land and picked and chopped cotton at just above starvation wages. The living



arrangements mostly created hardship since large families were forced to live in one- and two-room houses. There was no running water, only outdoor toilets, and many were forced to sleep on floors. Families didn't have enough money to buy new clothing. The white plantation owners sold them hand-me-down clothing.

Some Black families moved off the plantations to get jobs in the cities. Some were lucky; others went back to the farm. Black children worked in the fields with little or no education. Naturally, I was determined to stay off the farms and plantations. Therefore, I went looking for work all that week; with no luck. I left Galveston and went to Crosby, Texas seeking another cousin. I didn't have any luck finding my cousin. So I went walking down the old highway between Crosby and Houston. I walked for about an hour, when I spotted a brickyard right off the highway which was Green Bayou. I went to the brickyard and asked the foreman if he was hiring. Sure enough, he was hiring and needed two more men. I thought about my cousin in Galveston who was also out of work. I told the foreman I had to go back to Galveston to get my cousin, but I would come back with my cousin and take the job.

When my cousin and I returned to Green Bayou, we were put to work. I worked this open field until twelve o'clock noon. About this time I was tired and most of all very hungry. I didn't have any money to buy any food, so a white fellow-employee asked if I was hungry. I said I was; then, he took me to a store for some food and told me he would cover for it until I got paid. I worked in the open field the rest of the day. I didn't have any place to live, but I heard about a boardinghouse that was renting rooms. After work I went to



the boardinghouse and inquired about a room. I took the room with board for one-fifty per week.

The salary at the brickyard was twelve cents an hour. Payday was on Saturday. The next morning when I went to work, the foreman took out the fieldworkers to work in the brickyard. Once I started working inside the brickyard, I realized this work wasn't as hard as the field work.

Most of the single men would go to Houston every Saturday to shop. One Saturday I went to Houston to do the same. I bought a pair of pants and some shirts. As I was waiting for the men to take me back, I fell asleep on a bench. When I woke up, my bag with my pants and shirts was gone. Someone had stolen it. I looked everywhere and couldn't find the bag. Then I saw a policeman standing on the corner. I asked him if he had seen someone pass by with a large bag in his hand. The policeman said, "I've seen lots of people with big bags." When the fellows finally came back to pick me up, I was so heartbroken and angry that I told them about what had happened. This was so amusing to them they laughed all the way back.

Coming from work one evening I met a girl named Alice. I asked her if I could go home with her. She said it would be all right. When I got to her house she didn't have any food in her house, so I went out and bought some food and took it back to her house. She seemed to me to be a very nice person. After that day we began to be good friends. This relationship lasted a long time, until one night I took her over to some friends' house and told her to stay until I came back. I went gambling and was lucky that night. I won fifty dollars. I



was so excited about my winnings, I rushed back to tell Alice and pick her up. When I got back to her house I knocked on the door. No one came to the door. I repeated the knocking until finally my cousin came out of the house. I didn't say anything to him, but I asked Alice what took so long for her to come to the door. She didn't say anything to me, but she had an expression on her face that told me right off that she had been unfaithful in my absence. I left Alice at the door. I felt so hurt about Alice, I went home and went to bed. The next morning I went to work. Later on in the day I saw Alice carrying a suitcase, but I didn't know she was leaving town. About two weeks later I was sitting in a bar drinking with some friends and a girl came through the door. My friends told me she was Alice's sister. When I started talking to her, she said she was Alice's sister and Alice was doing fine. Alice's sister and I started dancing. When she got ready to leave, she kissed me. I never heard from her until three months later. I was told Alice and her sister were living in a small town someplace in Texas.

One morning on my day off from work, I was standing near the brickyard in front of the gas burner. Suddenly my pants caught on fire. The flames were all around my legs. After a few minutes I was able to put the flames out. But my leg was burned so badly I went and asked the brickyard manager if he could send me to see a doctor. The company managers said they couldn't send me to see a doctor because I got burned on my day off and not when I was working. On my own, I managed to get to Houston. I didn't have any money but when the doctor saw how badly my leg was burned he treated me the doctor said I could pay him later and I should come back in



two weeks. As days passed, my leg began to get worse, I didn't have any money to travel back and forth to Houston to see the doctor, so I caught a freight train and went back to Galveston. Uncle Tot and Aunt T-Bay sent me to another doctor. It took my leg three months to heal.

Meanwhile, I kept on working steadily in the brickyard. I was about sixteen years old now. Everyone on the job thought I was much older. For entertainment after work, I learned how to box, gamble, and drink corn liquor. I learned how to box after being knocked out a few times. Then, I got so good at boxing that whenever I boxed I could knock out the other fellows.

Evenso I was lonesome for a girlfriend. The only woman near the brickyard was a much older woman and a good cook. She cooked at the brickyard. I asked her if I could come to visit her. She said, "Come any time you want to." I went to visit her every day after work. Soon, I became very fond of her. When the fellows that I worked with found out I was seeing this older woman, they teased me about her. But, that didn't have any effect on me. I continued seeing her until she went back to Beaumont, Texas.

Immediately I started looking for a job in Galveston. Jobs still were scarce the same way it was when I first left. So I put in for my unemployment insurance. I worked on odd jobs in hotels, working on trucks, and cleaning yards. It took months before I heard from the unemployment insurance company. When the answer came by mail the letter read: "We the company of the brickyard can't pay your unemployment insurance, because you weren't fired off the job." After getting this answer, I returned to the brickyard.



I was back on the job for a month. Then one of my fellow workers whose name was String took ill. He had been going back and forth to see his doctor. We didn't know the nature of his illness; but, we did know his doctor told him not to drink alcohol as long as he was taking shots. One day he went to visit his doctor and had a shot. The same day, he drank some alcohol and died instantly in Houston. We brought his body back to the brickyard. The fellows and I didn't know any of his relatives, because he never spoke of any. We took up a collection; each one gave two dollars. We then buried his body in a nearby poppy field. I spoke the last words over String's body.

Before long Aunt T- Bay sent me a letter from Galveston in which she told me to come back to Galveston, to pick up my unemployment checks. I went back to do so and also returned to work at the brickyard. I worked for a few months and left.

I went to Houston to live with Aunt Bernice. In the meantime I went to the unemployment office and registered for work. A week later they gave me a job working in a cafeteria in the shipyard. This shipyard wasn't too far from Houston. I rode the bus to work until I met a fellow who had a car, then I rode with him. Wages were five cents an hour, paid on every Friday. The job wasn't paying much, so I left and went looking once more for a job.

I heard men were needed in Arizona to work on the railroad. I signed up for the job. Before I left, I was examined and given three days to get ready to leave for Arizona. Then I was given a pass to catch a train. I left Houston one night about ten o'clock to go to Tucson, Arizona.



When I arrived in Tucson, I was sent to a commissary in the train station to buy some food and whatever I needed to take into the camp with me. As I entered the camp, I noticed rows of tents were up for the workers to sleep in. One of the foremen pointed out a tent for me to sleep in. Then he left. Since it was so quiet and all the men had gone to bed, I went into my tent and went to bed.

Before dawn I could hear a loud whistle ringing in camp. I presumed it was time to get up and get dressed for work. When I pulled the entrance of my tent back, I saw the men standing outside of their tents getting ready for breakfast, so, I joined them. I introduced myself to some of the men. When breakfast was over, I went to work on the railroad. All the men in camp were Black men, except the timekeeper, the foreman, and a few Chinese cooks. All the employees were given three meals a day . This was my first time eating Chinese food, but before long Chinese food came to be one of my favorite dishes.

Before ten o'clock in the morning the hot sun was beaming down my back. No house to be seen, no people passing by, just me out in this hot desert working on the railroad. When the day was over and the men were back in camp for the night, we sat around together and talked about the things we planned to do when we got home. Sometimes we gambled a little; other times we took trips to Mexico.

The very first time I went to Mexico I had the time of my life. Although I couldn't speak Spanish, I ran into a little Mexican boy who spoke Spanish for me. This little boy was about six years old. He took me any place I thought I wanted to visit. In and out of different



restaurants, theaters, and to see plenty of girls. The boy told me that if I didn't like the girls he took me to see, he would take me to see his two sisters and his mother. I didn't like the idea of going to his house, so I told him I would settle for some of the other girls he took me to see. He did all these things for one dollar.

One night when I went to a room with a girl, this little boy was still waiting until I came out. It amazed me how this boy knew his way around town. He walked down the street with me smoking a big cigar. No one seemed to pay any attention to him. When I was ready to leave Mexico this little boy took me to the immigration office to let the authorities know I was leaving. After my first visit to Mexico, I made several more trips and each time I went this little boy would be waiting for me to show me the town.

My job on the railroad was going alright until one morning 150 Black men, one white foreman and one white timekeeper went out on strike. A Black fellow-employee named San Antonio was standing on the handcar before the car started down the tracks. The white foreman told San Antonio to sit down in the car. San Antonio refused to sit down in the car because, as he told the foreman, there was water in the car. But the foreman told him to sit in the water. When San Antonio still refused, the foreman fired him.

My fellow-employees called a meeting to put San Antonio back to work. The men wouldn't go back to work either. The very next morning all the men ate their breakfast and got ready for work; but, when the foreman blew the whistle, the men stood up by the tracks and wouldn't move. Finally, the men chose me and two more men to speak for the rest of the men. I told the foreman if he didn't put San



Antonio back to work no one was going back to work. When we still couldn't get any satisfaction from the foreman, I told the foreman that I would call in the roadmaster, if San Antonio wasn't put back to work. In the meantime, the men standing near the tracks were waiting until we brought news back to them about San Antonio. Finally, the foreman agreed to put San Antonio back to work. Then, all the men went back to work.

After this experience was over, I realized that unity with other employees was what made the foreman act. If all employees united together on jobs there would be less trouble and less firings would come from the employer.

When I came to work on the railroad, I left my sweetheart, Ruth, back in Houston. As time passed I never heard from her or even got a letter. So I began to worry about her and wanted to see her. I made up my mind I would go back to Houston, Texas and try to find Ruth. So I told the foreman I wanted a pass to go home. He gave me a pass and I left Tucson and went back to Houston. When I first arrived in Houston I went directly to the house she was living in when I first left; but, the people who were living in the house told me she didn't live there any more. Weeks passed. I went everywhere I thought she'd be, with no luck. I never found Ruth. Lonesome and heartbroken, I left Houston and went back to Galveston.

I didn't stay in Galveston very long with the work situation being the same as when I left. Men were still being sent to work on the railroad. I signed up once more for the job. I worked on the extra gang for a while. Then I went to work on the section hand. I left the



extra gang and went to Phoenix. I hadn't received any money from working on the extra gang.

When I went to the train station, I sat down on a bench and my mind started wandering concerning what I should do next. I only had one nickel in my pocket. After I sat awhile, I got up from the bench and went and asked the ticket agent if they still needed a man on the section hand. The ticket agent looked on a list and asked if I wanted the job. I told him, "Yes, I want the job." After the ticket agent signed me up for the job, he gave me a pass on the train and a letter to get some food from the commissary. I bought a loaf of bread, some cans of beans, a can of wieners, mackerel, packs of cookies.

I was on my way to a small town not too far from Los Angeles, California. As I sat in this small train station waiting for the train to arrive, I noticed I was sitting next to an old man and his wife. They asked me if I was hungry. I told them I wasn't hungry, I had some food. But they insisted on giving me a slice of watermelon, which I accepted. By this time the train pulled into the station. Sometime late that night I arrived in this small town. I stayed in the station all night. The next morning I walked from the little town to the section houses. I gave the foreman my work slip and started to work that Monday morning.

That evening, I got acquainted with two Black families. Their homes were in Los Angeles. They lived in section homes that were given to all employees who worked on the railroad. Often these families traveled back and forth to Los Angeles.



CHAPTER THREE

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### Chapter 3/Los Angeles

Every time both the Black families went to Los Angeles, they would come back and tell me how large and crowded the city was. One time they brought me a newspaper back from Los Angeles. I didn't ask the families too many questions about Los Angeles, because I didn't want them to know I would be traveling to Los Angeles one day. I only said the city sounded like a good place to live.

A Mexican fellow who was working on the section gang brought his family with him. We talked together all the time about Mexico. He said he took his family every place he went to work, because he didn't have a house where they could stay and he didn't know how long any of his jobs would last.

As time passed, Los Angeles kept coming more and more to mind. I hadn't ever been in California before; so, after careful consideration I decided to travel to Los Angeles. After working on this job for three months, I left one morning after being paid. I arrived in Los Angeles, California at four o'clock that evening. When the train pulled into the station, I was astonished to see how large and beautiful the station looked. I wandered in the station for a while, then I saw a Black man standing in the station. I went and asked him if he could tell me where the Black people's section of town was. The man said: "Central Avenue. Catch the Central streetcar. When you see a crowd of Black people that is Central Avenue!"



In all the excitement in this crowded city, I caught another streetcar but transferred to the Central car. I stayed on the streetcar until I came to a crowd of Black people who were standing on the corner. I got off the streetcar at Twelfth and Central Avenue.

A lady was sitting at a table registering people to vote. I went up to her and asked if she knew where I could find a hotel that was renting rooms at a reasonable rate. The lady said: "I have a friend who is renting rooms at a hotel and she is my good friend." Then the lady gave me a note to give her friend. I went to the hotel and gave the note to a lady who was behind the desk. This lady said: "The lady who gave you this note is my friend. I have a room for rent. When I paid for the room, the lady gave me a key. The room number was twelve and the price was three dollars a week. I went to my room, hung my clothes in the closet, and went back out onto the streets.

I walked the streets for hours, looking at some parts of Los Angeles. I was looking at different faces to see if I recognized anyone I knew. I didn't recognize anyone, so I started talking to some fellows on the streets. I asked them what the job situation was. The fellows said: "If you can't find a job, the newspapers carried jobs or the employment agency." I bought a Sentinel newspaper. The fellows and I began looking through the "want ads". Finally, I picked out an employment agency located on Jefferson Avenue. I went back to my room, put the newspaper on the bed, wrote my room number on a slip of paper, and went back to the streets to look Los Angeles over.

The street on Central Avenue was crowded with Black people; some were shopping; bars were crowded inside and out. Children were running up and down the streets. Central Avenue reminded me



of some streets in the South. When I finished looking these places over, I decided to go to a movie. I hadn't eaten all day, so I stopped in a restaurant and bought two hamburgers and a coke. I took my food and ate it in the theater. I stayed until it closed.

As I lay in bed that night, I began to wonder if the people in California would be friendly to work with and what kind of job I might find...After thinking about these things, I finally felt so exhausted I fell asleep.

Early the next morning, I woke up feeling rested. When I looked out the window, the weather was foggy. I realized Los Angeles would be a very foggy place to live.

One hour later, I was out on the streets. I went looking for the employment agency. All employment agency offices were open on Sunday. I walked for a while and finally I found the employment agency. As I entered the office, I was astonished to see a Black man behind the desk. Naturally, since I had been working on the farms, plantations, and railroads, it was a good feeling to see a Black man working behind a desk.

I inquired about a job. The agent had a job in Corona, California. The fee was ten dollars. I paid the fee, then the agent telephoned Corona to find out what type of work they had available. When the agent finished talking on the phone, he told me: "A man is needed to work in the dining room and wash dishes" He asked if I could leave that evening to live on the premises. I told the agent I could live on the premises and I would take the job.

I went back to the hotel and told the landlord about the job I had gotten in Corona. The landlord was surprised to hear I had found



a job so quickly. She said: "Some people have been living in Los Angeles for years and haven't found a job yet; but, you just arrived in California two days ago and you were able to get a job!!" I felt independent and still had a little money in my pocket and a reasonable room.

I packed my suitcase to head for Corona, sixty miles from Los Angeles. I caught a train that evening. When I arrived at the station, I was uncertain as to who was going to pick me up. Then a Black couple drove up in a stationwagon. The man asked me: "Are you Lee Brown?" I answered him; "Yes, and are you the one who came to take me to the job?" The man said: " Yes, I was sent by the boss to take you to Corona. He introduced himself and told me the lady in the car was his wife, and they worked on the Fuller's ranch as cooks.

When I arrived, I didn't have any idea this ranch was so huge; a large fabulous house, with beautiful green grass, which looked as if someone had just finished cutting it. Tall trees surrounded the ranch. A garden, with different kinds of vegetables, was growing a distance behind the house. When I went into the house, I was introduced to other Black employees: the maid, the waiters. After I was shown around the ranch, I was shown where my quarters would be. I stayed one hour, then the man and his wife took me back to the station. This happened on a Monday, which I was told was to be my day off. I went back to Los Angeles, stayed that night, and reported to work Tuesday morning. Besides working in the dining room, and washing dishes, I had to help the cook bring in vegetables from the garden. My wages were twenty-five dollars a week, plus room and board.



It was two days before I met the employer, Mr. Fuller. Our meeting was brief; however, he seemed to be an understanding employer. The Fuller family entertained frequently. Sometimes, when a party was given, it would last for days. Well-dressed people with furs and diamonds on would come and go all day long. This job was a considerable change from my other jobs.

I worked a month before I got a chance to meet any other people, besides the ones I worked with on the ranch. Mr. Fuller hired a Black lady for part-time work. She was friendly the first time I met her. When she was working on the ranch for awhile, she invited me to come to her house on my day off for dinner. I accepted the invitation, went to her house, and met four of her daughters. I was glad to have met her family, because on my days off I wouldn't have to stay on the ranch. Sometimes this lady's daughters would take me shopping. Soon I began looking forward to my days off.

Everything was going along fine on the job, or at least I thought so, until one day the waiter went to town with Mr. Fuller. I didn't think anything about this at the time, because the waiter would go with him all the time. But this particular day they were gone all day. When the waiter and Mr. Fuller came back to the ranch he laid me off from work. The reason he gave was that the work was too slow; but, I personally believe it was something the waiter was telling him about me, because the work was the same as when I first started. Then I also thought it could have been that the waiter had gotten jealous, because the new lady Mr. Fuller had hired was friendly to me. Nevertheless, I didn't ask any questions. I just packed my suitcase and left. I went back to Los Angeles. I didn't waste any time



but went to the employment agency. I was sent to another job at a drive-in, working as a porter and washing dishes. This job was paying twenty-five dollars per week. I needed more money to live on, so I quit the job five months later.

Feeling discouraged about now, I soon found out a person living in California needed adequate wages to survive, i.e., for rent, clothing food, etc These necessities were higher than the money one was earning on the job. Some jobs were paying better, but those were the ones which required special skills. I was a common laborer and had to take whatever job I could.

Naturally, I was anxious to find employment, so I got a job from the dining car employment office, working on the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific and the Santa Fe dining cars. I used to make runs on these trains from Los Angeles to Omaha, Nebraska. I made a few runs from Los Angeles to San Diego. At first I was a 40 known as a dishwasher. Then I was a 30 known as a vegetable preparer and foodserver for the waiters, when they were serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner on trains. During the War the help on these trains ate better food than the paying customers.

This job was alright, except for the pay, which was forty-five cents an hour, plus medicine I might need. On my first run through New Orleans, Louisiana, thoughts came to mind about my mother and her relatives whom I hadn't met while living in New Orleans. After awhile since the windows were never pulled up at night when I slept on the train, it became hard for me to breathe. Soon I was forced to quit this job. However, I worked six months before I left.



I soon found out Los Angeles was a weak union town, especially the hotel and restaurant business. Wages on some jobs were paid according to what employers wanted to pay: low pay, poor working conditions, no pension plans, no sick leaves, no health plan for the employees. Who was hurt the most? Black people! And plenty of Black people were out of work. Now I know why families left Los Angeles, to try to find work in other cities. One day I was standing on the streets talking to some fellows. I overheard them talking about work in Hollywood. I didn't hesitate to go and inquire about the job. It was my luck that this job was still open, working in a restaurant for forty dollars a week plus meals. Mostly Black help worked in the kitchen. One Black busboy worked in the dining room. My job was working in the storage room, cleaning stoves. I handled all the keys to the storage room, and helped the head waitress close the restaurant at night.

Working in this restaurant, I soon realized how prejudiced some white people were toward Black people in California. Particularly the time when five white people and one Black lady came into the restaurant together and sat down at the same table. All of them ordered dinner. The white waitress served soup to each one, except the Black lady whose soup was served after the white people had finished. Then the waitress refused to serve her dinner.

The Black busgirl came into the kitchen, told the Black help what had happened, and all the Black employees became angry. They called the head waitress to inquire why the waitress refused to serve the Black lady. I was surprised to see white people still prejudiced in California. I thought I had left all that hate behind in



the South. I talked with other employees about what had happened in the dining room and suggested to all the Black employees that they come to work one hour early to discuss this matter with the manager. The regular time to be at work was eleven o'clock a.m. The next morning all the Black employees came to work at ten o'clock. A fellow employee came with me to the manager's office. We told the manager precisely what had happened and that if this waitress hated Black people so much, the Black employees wanted her fired. If she wasn't fired, the other help wouldn't come to work the next morning. So, the manager talked to the waitress and told her that she had to serve Black people at all times in his place of business. The waitress started crying and told the manager she was so upset, because she never had to serve Black people before and it would never happen again.

All the Black employees were standing outside the restaurant waiting until the manager, a fellow employee, and myself came out and gave an explanation as to the reason the waitress refused to serve the Black lady in the dining room and what the manager intended to do. When the manager came out of the restaurant to speak to the employees, he said: "This refusal to serve Black people will never happen anymore and I would like all of the employees to come in and go back to work." The manager went back into the restaurant. The Black employees talked this over and decided to return to work.

This poor white waitress refusing to serve Black people! If she had any true knowledge of herself, she would have acted more intelligently. A worker is a worker. It doesn't matter what color your



skin might be. The bosses will stick together. Why won't the poor workers stick together on jobs? On this job the workers were organizing to stay off the job, although some workers couldn't afford to stay home, but were willing to fight for what they believed in. If Black and white poor workers would take more time to fight the bosses for better working conditions and better pay, all poor workers would live better under this system.

As time passed, I worked for Friedrich Cool Storage Co. loading and unloading boxcars. This job went along fine for three months, until one day a Black foreman picked up a stick to hit me over the head. I overpowered the foreman and took the stick away from him. This Black foreman was so proud of his authority over other Black employees that his job went to his head. Now he wouldn't ask his fellow workers on the job, in an intelligent way, to do things, but he demanded it to be done. I hadn't ever had to fight anyone before but knew how to defend myself.

On this job, the employees' duties were to load up boxcars with different kinds of food, to be sent overseas for the soldiers. This was in World War II. We would send barrels of whiskey also. But, the soldiers I talked with said: "We haven't ever seen any. The whiskey would be for the top brass."

One thing I haven't ever approved of was fighting on the job where I worked. It doesn't make any sense to me. Some Blacks with authority, I have seen, treat other Blacks on the job worse than any other race. When Blacks work on jobs with a little authority over other Blacks, they don't have to prove to the bosses that they are not prejudiced. Just treat everyone the same: regardless of race, color,



creed! I have seen Blacks on jobs . . . lying, harassing, trying to discredit other Blacks to get them fired. Don't they know they can also be fired? Lots of Black employees let Blacks with authority on jobs get away with a lot of mistreatment, because they are Black.

After the fight I knew suddenly that this Black foreman couldn't be trusted when my back was turned. I called the police and explained the problem. The police wanted to take the foreman to jail. I told the police there are already too many Black people in jails. I only called the police to have them tell the foreman to leave me alone on the job, and treat me as he wished to be treated. No job is worth fighting over. When I spoke these words to the police, they didn't make any arrest. The police talked with the foreman and left. Working in and out of the cold-storage kept me with a constant cold, so I soon quit.

Next I worked for Safeway Candy Factory as a janitor, which wasn't a bad job. One thing, for sure, no violence ever occurred! When I had worked for three months, one evening on my way home from work, I met two teenage girls walking down the street selling tickets. One of the girls came up and asked me if I would buy a ticket for the church. I told the girl I would buy a ticket, if she let me sit beside her in church. The girl told me her name was Thelma and, yes, she would let me sit beside her in church. I bought two tickets. Thelma said she was sixteen years old. To me she looked much younger and smaller for her age. Thelma lived with her mother and grandmother. We sat next to each other in church that night. When church was over, Thelma told her grandmother: "I have someone to take me home."



After that night, we started seeing each other regularly. We went to movies and out to dinner on my days off. Soon she started coming to my room at night and would stay until three or four o'clock in the morning. Thelma's mother thought she was in the movies, because the movies stayed open all night.

One evening we were walking down Central Avenue. A policeman called me aside and asked me to buy some tickets for the police benefit. Thelma looked so young for her age, I thought at first the police were going to question me about her age. Since it was just about the tickets I bought two tickets.

Thelma's mother and grandmother treated me as one of the family.

Sometimes I stayed all night. I slept in the same bed with Thelma and her grandmother. I slept in the middle. Every evening I would bring candy home for Thelma. Our romance was doing fine, until her grandmother started asking questions about our sex together...I was twenty at the time. Thelma and I did have sex together; but we kept it to ourselves, because she wasn't of age. Soon we stopped seeing each other. I saw Thelma on the streets several times after we parted. We only spoke to each other in a friendly way.

I still had my other girlfriend, who was much older, named Bertha. Bertha was married, but her husband was a seaman on a ship. Bertha came to my room to see me all the time.

I met a man named Sydney and his wife. They lived at the hotel. We became good friends. His wife worked in Los Angeles in a restaurant. Sydney worked in Hollywood. We drank together on our days off. I introduced Sydney to Bertha, my girlfriend. Sydney liked



her right away. Unbeknownst to Sydney's wife, she came to be his girlfriend.

One night Sydney was driving around town in his car. His wife was sitting in the front seat with him and his girlfriend was sitting in the back seat with me. Sydney had his girlfriend sit with me, so his wife would think she was my girlfriend. We stopped off at some friends' house for a few drinks. On our way back to the hotel, I asked Sydney's girlfriend if she would come up to my room. When she agreed, Sydney didn't want to let us out of the car. He got angry, but he couldn't say anything about this because his wife was in the car. However, when he finally let us out of the car, Sydney's girlfriend came to my room and stayed. The next morning Sydney and I had a great laugh about the whole thing and remained good friends.

I went to the R-K Studio in Hollywood on Melrose Avenue and got a combination job: washing dishes and busboy. I was working on this job for three months before I was told it was a union job. The employer came and told me: "This is a union job," and brought a white union man to replace me. If I had been told before this happened, I would have joined the union. Well, after all, it became clear to me that it wasn't just a union job---it was another one of those prejudiced jobs!

In less than a week I was working for Hills Bros. Chemical Company on a stock time machine. During this year, 1942, I joined the Youth NAACP and also got the President and Superintendent of Hills Bros. Chemical Company to join.

I met a lady named Miss Bass who was the editor of the California Eagle newspaper and also a member of the NAACP.



Sometimes we went to the Lincoln Theater to see stage shows and motion pictures.

One night we met at the YWCA with other actors and actresses to discuss getting better acting parts for Black people in movies. Some Black actors and actresses came that night and told the NAACP that they wouldn't play any more Uncle Tom parts in the movies. Lena Horne and Hattie McDaniel couldn't come that night but sent a telegram. The Youth NAACP had two hundred members, beside the actors and actresses. In other words Uncle Tom parts for Black actors and actresses were encouraged by film producers in Hollywood. This was one reason Black actors and actresses weren't able to show how truly great or excellent they were in their performances. The great talent they had to offer to the public was denied; Uncle Tom parts were the only kind they could get. This is why the Youth NAACP had to step in to fight for better parts in movies and on stage for Blacks, Mantan Moreland, Willie Bess, Darvin Jones, Benny Carter and Peterson were well known for playing these Uncle Tom parts in movies.

Mantan Moreland and Willie Bess often came to the YWCA and got in an argument, in a friendly way, about whose eyes were the largest, which one could roll their eyes the best, and who ran the fastest in films. Both actors came to the YWCA and talked about parts that were given to them in pictures. Everyone in the YWCA would start laughing at the way they would act.

I got a chance to meet quite a few movie stars, Black and white. Old Man Gray was a member of the Screen Actors' Guild. He



was the only Black movie star who had gray hair in Hollywood. This was one reason he got to act in many films.

Hollywood was exciting, fascinating: more so to me because I was acquainted with some of the stars, and I actually took parts in several mob scenes in pictures. Some films called for extras to play in scene parts. When this was available, I usually applied for the parts. Every day I looked on a board to find out if extras were needed .

Old Man Gray told me where to buy clothes on credit. With new clothing and a few dollars in my pocket, I started acting the part of a movie star. I wore only pointed-toe shoes, triple A's. I would often be seen at the Dunbar Hotel, drinking only Tom Collins. My hair stayed gassed back; I only let women barbers fix my hair.

The movie stars gave me a name, Cocomo, because of the jungle scenes I was often seen in. But this later became a problem. One night I took my girlfriend to the theater to see some scenes I was acting in . It was an Uncle Tom part; so , my girlfriend got real angry with me because she became embarrassed by the movie. She told me: "You should be ashamed to play in scenes that are so degrading to Black people, because you fight in the NAACP for better playing parts for Blacks. When my girlfriend spoke those words, I really felt ashamed and discouraged with myself . I stopped right then and didn't try to get any more parts. However, the director said I could act in a good religious scene, but I made no attempt to get the part.

For those interested, here are the names of two pictures in which I acted in a mob scene: "I walk with A Zombie" and "My Heart Is In Dixie", starring Darvin Jones, and others.



One Saturday night I went to a theater and got a chance to see the heavyweight champion of the world, Joe Louis. He came into the theater with some friends of his. Joe Louis was dressed in his army uniform. I didn't get a chance to meet him, but I was glad to see him. I was sitting five seats from him in the same row. The movie that was playing was "One Dark Night". Also present were Mantan Moreland, the comedian, and Pig Meat Markham and a few more actors.

One night I went to a rally at the Shrine Temple in Los Angeles. Several movie stars I was acquainted with were present : Lena Horne, Edward G. Robinson, Pig Meat Markham, Monty Holly and many more. Paul Robeson was the guest speaker. This was my first time hearing this proud, brilliant man--foremost in the struggle for peoples' rights--speak. Paul Robeson spoke on freedom for our Black people here in North America, Paul said: "Black actors and actresses should quit playing Uncle Tom parts in movies. All Black people should fight for better schools, better education, and for upgrading of all jobs."

Paul Robeson spoke on many subjects that Black people were facing. After the rally, a donation was collected; I gave my last five dollars. Paul Robeson's speech kept my heart and soul together. To keep on dedicating my life to this hard long struggle for my people. Later, I had the opportunity to see Paul Robeson in a performance on stage, in a play named Shakespeare's "Othello". This impressive actor and songster was superb!

In Los Angeles on 12th and Central Avenue, I met the creator of the familiar Johnson, "Old Man Johnson". He talked about the



conditions Black people were facing. Just about all the familiar Black people I met were speaking about the hard struggle Black people were fighting against here in North America,

So, I started buying books of all kinds. I studied these books and started educating myself on different subjects, important persons, places and things. Then one day I met a school teacher who saw how interested I was in learning. She started coming to my room every night and taught me for six months. Her husband was a detective He worked in a post office. One thing about this man--he didn't mind his wife coming to teach me classes.

During World War II, about 1942, there was a lot of racial tension against both Blacks and Mexicans in Los Angeles. One time a riot started in Los Angeles between white sailors and Mexicans, which was announced over the radio. During that time men's fashion suits were called Zoot suits. A white sailor claimed that a Mexican man wearing a Zoot suit had raped his wife. Then the white sailors started fighting every Mexican they came across. The Mexicans started organizing and started fighting back. Then the police started helping the white sailors fight the Mexicans. The white sailors made a statement they were going to come down to Central Avenue and kill all the 'niggers', and cut all the Zoot suits off them.

Then the Black Zoot suits started helping the Mexicans fight. The Black leaders called on the Mexican Government to use its influence to stop the riot. If the riot didn't stop, they would open fire. No one got killed during the riot. I personally believed this was a lie and everyone said it was (that is, about the Mexican raping the white woman). In the first place it was started to stir up hate and so the



police could attack the Mexicans and the Blacks. I was in the riot: running down the streets with the Black and Mexican Zoot suits. The riot lasted four or five days.

I met a girl on my way to work. She was standing at a bus stop waiting to catch a bus. I introduced myself. She told me her name was Alice and she was married, but her husband was in the service. We talked awhile and she agreed to be my girlfriend, until her husband returned home from the service. I accepted her agreement with open arms. I worked eight hours a day: I needed a woman's companionship. It makes life worth living, I thought to myself, as we were getting more acquainted. Alice was living with an older man. Later, she wanted to live with me. If it was possible, I would have let her move in, but my room was too small for both of us to live in. I looked every evening for a room for Alice. Finally I found a room a half block from where I was living. I moved her into the room with the help of a friend.

Alice had a sister. She was fourteen years old. We got along fine, until Alice started bringing her along on our dates. It was all right sometimes, but she wanted to come all the time. We often had words about this until Alice stopped bringing her along with us. Alice was my sweetheart for almost two years. One night after eating dinner, she told me her husband was coming back and she couldn't see me anymore. We were on the same bus together; Alice spoke to me and went on her way. I often wondered whether Alice's husband really came back from the service or whether she told me he did just to break us up. I also would have liked to have known what



happened to her sister. Well, I never did bother to find out. Just let everything between us stop.

One morning I went to the bus stop to catch the bus for work. A crowd of people were standing on the streets flagging rides trying to get to work. It was a bus strike. I had no idea how to get to work. I had only learned one way to work. I called the boss on the phone, and I told him there was a bus strike, and could he get me a ride to work. My employer said he understood the matter and gave me the direction to the red car, which was running a distance from the hotel where I lived. I walked seven blocks and caught the red car and arrived at work two hours late. The other employees came to work in cars; some walked. The Hollywood Boulevard Car was on strike for one week.

I hadn't made too many friends to visit on my days off. My days off were every Friday and Saturday. Alice wasn't around anymore. It became very lonely in Los Angeles. Theaters would stay open all night. I met lots of women who came and sat beside me in the theaters, but not one wanted to be my steady companion. Anyway my going to the theater did pass the time away on my days off. Plenty of people came to the theaters with blankets and stayed all day and night. This was how crowded Los Angeles was in those days.

I was standing on the sidewalk in front of a bar one evening when a man came out intoxicated. He wanted to fight whoever came close to him. After pulling his shirt off, this drew the attention of a crowd of people who were passing by. Suddenly a police patrol car roared up and stopped. The policemen jumped out of the car and



grasped both arms of the man. After putting handcuffs on the man, the police roughed him up. His shirt was off---the police wouldn't let him put his shirt back on. Naturally, with compassion, I went and asked the police to let him put his shirt back on. To my surprise I was arrested, put in a patrol car and taken off to jail; charged with 'interfering with police officers'. I was taken to Newton Station. after interrogation, I was put in this huge jail in Lincoln Heights. The officer led me to a cell and closed the door. I sat on a cot uncertain what would happen in court the next day. I thought to myself: this is my first time being in jail or in any trouble with the law and I shouldn't have been put in jail this time. I didn't make a phone call that day, because I didn't know anyone to call.

Monday morning a jail officer brought me into the court room. I sat restless, waiting for my name to be called to appear before the judge. Finally one hour later, I stood before the judge with no attorney to defend my case, except myself. The two officers who did the arresting didn't appear in court. However, the judge carried on with the case. I explained to the judge that this was my first time in trouble with the law and the way those policemen were treating that man, it was plain police brutality, happening on the streets. I asked the judge for a suspended sentence. Since the judge didn't have much of a case, with no officers appearing in court to testify against me, the judge then gave me six months' suspended sentence with a lecture about how this interfering could have incited a riot the same way it did in Detroit City. The judge said: "If you ever see police brutality like you saw on the street again, report it to the district attorney or a judge." When the judge got through talking, I started



back toward the cell, but the judge called out: "The case is closed, You can leave."

When I was leaving the courthouse, a Black detective driving down Central Avenue offered me a ride., I accepted the ride. When we were in his car, he began talking about the conditions and problems facing Black people, here in North America. Black people's need to start joining the struggle for better houses, better schools and to struggle around issues concerning police brutality. He continued; "Black people should get a better education in every possible way that is available. . . , on jobs, fight to get upgraded in every field. The most important of all---stop fighting and hating each other. All of these things the Black people must do. Not just for yourself, but for your children's children and for generations to come."

When the Black detective reached the hotel where I lived, he stopped the car in front of the hotel. I got out of his car and thanked him for the lift. Our conversation was very interesting. This is when I really started thinking about these poor conditions under which Black people are forced to live in North America.

Unfortunately, I wasn't in any permanent position at that time to start helping my people in this long hard struggle; fighting for the rights of the poor Black people. And I hadn't met anyone else to discuss my viewpoint with. The conversation I had with the Black detective did bring to mind about my grandfather who died because hospitals for Black people weren't close. And many more Black people



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I went to work at the Armour Packing Company, loading and unloading trucks. Meal tickets were given to all employees to eat in the cafeteria. Three white coats were given to work in. I was paid fifty-cents apiece to keep the coats clean. One morning the manager came and asked: "Do you want to join the union?" I told him "Yes."

The Armour Packing Company paid a dollar-five cents an hour. This was the highest wages I received from any of my jobs and it made me realize the importance of being a member of the union. I felt more independent with sufficient income with which to live.

Soon I moved off Central Avenue and got a room, with the use of the kitchen, at Rev. Victor's home. Rev. Victor was a quiet person. In fact, the neighborhood was quiet. Living in this pleasant environment, I got a chance to study without being disturbed.

One evening, a letter came from Aunt Betsy. The letter came from Louisiana. Before I opened the letter, I thought how did Aunt Betsy get my address. . . and what purpose could she have to contact me after all these years? Aunt Betsy was ill and wanted me to come to Louisiana to see her. Nonetheless, I never felt the same about her and I didn't go back. The last news I heard Aunt Betsy was dead.

With the different kinds of books I had collected, my room began to look like a library. The more I studied, the more knowledge and information I received from these books about what was really happening in the United States and around the world. I was particularly interested in the long struggles, suffering, bloodshed,



beatings and jailings of Black people here in the United States and around the world, and what Black people are still enduring at this present time. I made a promise to myself to continue helping my people, to the best of my ability.

It wasn't long before I began thinking about New Orleans, the city where I was born. But first I made an attempt to find my mother, half-sister, and half-brother, who were supposed to have been living in New Orleans. With no address of anyone in New Orleans, I left Los Angeles early one morning for New Orleans, Louisiana. After three days riding, finally, I arrived in New Orleans and went to the construction union, located on Jackson Avenue. I inquired about a friend, Jeff Callaghan. My relatives said he might know where to find my mother. They gave me his address on Washington Avenue.

When I arrived, I knocked on the door. My father's cousin, Doretha, answered the door. I told Doretha my name. she embraced and kissed me with happiness and said she thought I was dead, because she never heard a word about me since I was a child. Doretha and I had a long conversation about how I had been living through the years. She asked why I came to New Orleans. I told Doretha I came looking for my mother and other relatives on my mother's side of the family. Doretha explained that at one time she knew where my mother lived, but since that was a long time ago, she might have moved. Doretha said she would help me look for my mother.

Doretha and I went to the insurance company to inquire. The insurance company representative said that they would try to locate



mother and, if found, I would be notified, if I left my address. I told the insurance representative I lived in Los Angeles, California and would leave that address and telephone number. My visit in New Orleans was brief. Then, I returned to Los Angeles.

In three weeks time the insurance representative phoned. They had located my mother and gave me her phone number and address in New Orleans. I hesitated for several days before telephoning. After all, we hadn't seen one another since I was five years old. When I finally phoned, mother's voice sounded soft and warm. I told mother who I was: her son, Lee Brown! She sounded so happy and rejoiced to hear my voice. We talked about my past and my future. Mother explained that she was ill and wanted to see me. I told mother I would come to visit her and meet some of my relatives on her side of the family, because I only knew relatives on my father's side. When our conversation was over, I felt a feeling of love and respect. In the meantime, uncertain when I could leave for New Orleans, I continued working and attending the NAACP meetings. As weeks passed my mind stayed on my mother. Not really sure how ill she was, I decided to start preparing to leave for New Orleans. Before I left my job, I told the superintendent I was going to visit my mother, because she was ill and I hadn't seen my mother since I was five years old. The superintendent said that if I ever came to Los Angeles and wanted to work, a job would be waiting. I had my union transferred from Local 12 to any union in New Orleans, when the time came for me to look for work. I had one unfortunate task before me: to be separated from my books! These books were valuable to me and important, but I sold to my books 'used-book' stores.