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LEE BROWN

INTERVIEWS w/ BROWN

1994

2017/193



Lee Brown 8/25/94



Lee Brown, 8/25/94--1

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My name is Lee Brown. I was - been enacted as liaison for Local 2 in the community. A few years ago, I don't know the exact date, but we had a hotel contract convention at the Moscone Center, on Howard and Third. The seniors who had played an important part in the Lam administration and the - Shirley Key Hazel administration - the president who did not run in 1994. We as seniors have played an important role in helping to keep the union strong and work with the union for the interests of the seniors or the retirees of Local 2, the retirees' association of what was founded, and I, Lee Brown, is one of the founders. To know that it was very important to work with Local 2 membership to keep the union strong - one reason of the pension and health and welfare. So we always did work in and like to work and we used to attend the general membership meeting when we was called on by the president to come and support - cuz we know it was in the interest of the retirees on that pension plan, which is very important. They cannot afford to lose their little pension after they come up this far with it, and the health and welfare for them, which they claim now it is much better on the Medicare, the health and welfare. But I want to say I was disappointed on August 10th, 1994, 11:00 a.m. or 4:00 p.m. they had a hotel contract convention at the First Congregation Church at 495 Post at Mason. The union make us strong. That was the title. But I was disappointed that the first time that we met at the Moscone Center we retirees was honored. We spoke. We was there. We was a guest. This time on the 9th, August 10th, '94 at 11:00 a.m. or 4:00 p.m. we was not invited to this convention. On that particular day, I don't know how it happened, that the seniors had a picnic, and that could have been avoided

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so the seniors could have been at that particular hotel contract convention. Always believe after my fifty years in the labor movement working with the rank and file every union that I know, that call upon the building their rank and file movement, would be success. I raised the question about a young fellow who says that he was in charge. His name is Kevin. He say he was in charge of putting this together. And I still feel disappointed. I always say I feel that racism - I have went back. I got documented facts, proof that Blacks is still in the low membership at Local 2 hotel and restaurant and international bartenders' union. [inaudible] I went back and did research. I asked them now - I talked to the young lady now who is in charge of the community. Ah. Action. I wanted to work with her, work together to build a strong union. That you can be success. You must work with the - all members, the rank and file, even the Black, not no one or two Blacks got one setting up here and one setting up there and make a [inaudible], that's a whole, that's been did, or done for years. I say we want to put some black people in this union, break down this race discrimination. If you want to succeed in this struggle, you must break down creeping racism. I have see'd it. I have been here, and I have raised the question. When we organized the affirmative action committee against creeping racism in this union. I have held back a long time. I talked to a number of the representatives. I talked to Cherokee Hazer. But I've been patient in holding back until they get their act together before we raise any question of racism cuz I know that's what the boss's game is. That's his weapon. That's his tool, to use racism to divide the union, to divide the rank and file, to keep from having unity. I recall back a number of years ago when the - uh, late '50s - that we had a grammas and reserved the sugar refinement in Louisiana. At 1:00 o'clock I spoke at Grammas for the



- every day for nine months they had a mass rally. Both grammas and reserved. At 1:00 o'clock I spoke the other meeting at 3:00. Grammas or reserved. When we first started off in the union there, the packing house workers' union, I asked the president could I be - will I be able to come and speak at the union because I've been in meetings with them before, and anniversary meetings, and they - and I was one of the guest speakers, and they wanted me to come and speak at the strike, at the strike place. So I went. When I first went there, I observed it very closely. This is scientific facts. This - when I first observed it close, I see'd signs there - white, colored - at the drinking fountain. Looked at the restroom, white lady here, colored lady there, white men there, colored men there. And they was setting in separate - white on one side, the black on the other. And I say that I had a little experience in the labor movement, and read quite a few books and met quite a few oldtimers in the labor field, and I begin to discuss with them. Then I talked - those times they were using the phrase "pork chop." I said we all victims of the same system. We must stop the most dangerous weapon that keeping us divided, keeping bread out your children's mouth, keeping out education, keeping out decent houses, decent health needs. I'm going to show you - tell you when [inaudible]. First is yourself, because you're divided. This is not a black-white issue. This is a pork chop issue, an economic issue, call it what you will. This is your enemy. And they using that as a tool, racism, white supremacy. And I spoke every day. I hit on that. You got to get together. You got to unite your forces. Together. To fight this most dangerous enemy. To [inaudible] sugar cane. Unity. Togetherness. You showing that you're not together. Anyone could come in here from the company, you don't know, could be an informer, see all these different signs. You don't



have to be a Philadelphia lawyer to see that you're not together. You must be together. You must take down these signs. That will prove to you that you're not united. You can rid of this evil force that is keeping you economic slaves. And finally one time I went back to the - one of the union halls, and the first one was in Missouri. I did not see - walked in, I didn't see any signs up there, looked around. Again, the white ones set on their own, the black side, and the black was setting on the white side, together. I say that's a sign of victory. Go to the other meeting, the last - the 3:00 o'clock meeting, the reserved. And I see the same thing had happened. People were laughing. Blacks were shaking hands with white working brothers and sisters. And they was bringing their children out to hear me talk. To talk about the issues. The man's name was unity. Pork chop issue, the economic issue for you and your family, for health and welfare. The onliest way you can get it is with unity. The most powerful in your union is the rank and file membership, and I told them, "Don't you forget that." And that's what we be here in San Francisco. I know they've had some problems in San Francisco in the union. We had problems and still have problems in our union. I read my national magazine. Sometime I may - sometime I maybe see one, no more than three Blacks in the national magazine. And this - very important to understand. I looked at the magazine, I see'd organized, directed. I [coughs] look at the president, I look at around the table, where the people are discussing, and I don't see not even one black face. You got [inaudible] May 19- and June in '44 at the - in the - that progress report and Las Vegas delegate, out of a number of delegates there I see'd one black man in May-June, 1994 at Las Vegas delegation. One black person in that - look like was a female. One of the delegates. At Las Vegas. You do not build a union. You must - don't forget



the first hotel was built by a black man in San Francisco. That should give you - I said if you - why they're not trying to get black people hired - to fight for. I know the past practice, and the people were getting fired. The union did not fight for them. The representatives, not the union. I correct that. Some of the representatives did not fight for the rights, and this Dorothy Lane or the room cleaners. They should have [inaudible] black room cleaners, when they had Local 283. That was the room cleaners union down on Turk Street. And since they merged, I will lose a lot of Afro Americans, people. When the [inaudible] of America retired, they were not replaced by Blacks. That was disappointing to me. And I was wondering why the hell that that particular day, that the member was not informed that that was, that the retirees should have been to that meeting and been recognized because we helped to play a part. Even in this '94 administration electure, that the retirees played an important role for their vote counted. They was invited - the administration, both administrations were invited to speak before the retirees' association of Local 2. And the big event like this, 'cause it's important to the retiree members - their pension. They health and welfare activity, health needs, for themselves and for their families. And I feel as Lee Brown, individual, [inaudible] for unity and for strength, to take back to the bosses, the bosses had their informers there to find out did you - where is the weak - you know, what [inaudible]. Where is the weak chain. We're in there. That he going to raise. And he can use that question. But I want the new administration to wake up now. Going to give the boss an opportunity to use that wedge, that tactic. That's the wedge to buy [inaudible] for them to wake up. Let us see some more Blacks in that union. Even in the administration. We don't have very many - you can count on one hand, I said, and see who's



working in administration. The only one I see'd, the male and the female Afro American. But we could keep them all over, and we got people that been working a long time. I see them like come and go. I don't know why they get away, but they - when I look, and then they gone. I want to say that it's time. Yesterday on the 18, August 18, I walked the picket a while with them at [coughs] St. Francis Drake Hotel [coughs]. In San Francisco. [clears throat] Where I joined the support of these St. Francis Drake workers by joining Local 2 rally yesterday, August 18, at 4:30. The new owners came in. That is the old game. I've heard it before. And they hired all new workers. Non union. To my understanding. This is the green light to break up union, and particularly in the culinaries. The hotels, the restaurant and bars, which the union have been very weak in. After they broke up the employees, hotels association, the restaurant association, and the [inaudible] loosely, so that mean you must organize and also not only the boycott, St. Francis Drake Hotel, but we must fight hard, and I'm going to [inaudible] be knowing our voices be heard. I was there, and I said it's creeping racism. And do not let it divide the union at 4:00 o'clock it - I was - first, I went to Petaluma. Local 2, retirees' association had a picnic on that particular day. I can't under- - that's another day. I can't understand it. Why was we sent? Why did we choose that day or something I can't figure. I've been trying to find out what happened. I spoke to the fellow who claimed that he put it together. He said, "Well, I made the mistake." Well, the mistake is made now, Brother. We wasn't there. What I would like to know, and the retirees association, why that we wasn't invited at the hotel contract convention on Wednesday, August 10, '94 at 11:00 o'clock or 4:00 o'clock. At the First Congregated Church at 495 Post at Mason. And I still say the title, "The



union make us strong." Those are retirees still pay they dues. They are part of Local 2 and also part of the retirees association. They was still members. And I felt deeply that they should have been invited, invited. If you didn't get but one or two people come, be honored, at this hotel contract convention, to speak in the behalf of the strict of what the intention of the seniors feel, how they feel, how - someone should have been there to express the feeling of the retiree. And I want to know - because these retirees, the too black, too many Blacks in there, and they didn't want to - they had people - I was told this. That they had people invited, wasn't everyone was at that hotel contract convention on Wednesday. Tech. [inaudible] members [inaudible]. What reason that they could not invited the retirees and let them be honored like they in the past at the Moscone Center a few years ago. At the convention. Same time I also spoke at both session. Morning session and afternoon, speaking for the behalf of the retirees association members. Maybe some degree, but no one individual do not run, a few do not run the retires. Other people got - I want them to remember the freedom of speech. I been a trade union man ever since I was 16 years of age. And I have learned unity. You [inaudible]. The voice of the rank and file is the power of your union. Even don't have unions. I don't want to [inaudible] and Arizona, but we didn't have union. All we had - we was organized. We had unity. And had a brother replaced on the job in less than time, than a half an hour. Unity. You be the [inaudible]. And I want to say to the Local 2 staff members, let us build unity. Let us uproot racism and racist and white supremacy. And we can rebuild our unions. We have plenty of workers, particularly in San Francisco, not organized. We've got still in the culinaries, the restaurants, bars, some hotels, our job is just beginning.



Struggle. I want to say I will work with you in the community as I've been a liaison with a number of staff members and representatives who have given me authorities to [inaudible], given me a letter to become the liaison, to work with the community. But [inaudible] have not called me back, made, to make a report what's going on in the black community. Time to wake up. Wake up.

I have studied the important events in the American labor history from 1778 to 1975 on up to 1994. Studying history of labor. I have said and will say it again that I am - some people that say that you are brilliant teacher and leader of the working class, Brother Lee. I say I have a lot to learn. You are my best teachers, the people. Some have said that you a great fighter for the workers' cause. I say, "Without your strength and your support I would not be, while I try to do the best I can with what I have." I always say that the rank and file is the strength of your union. You need caucus, workers' power in the trade union. You need to organize. And set a caucus committee to keep your union strong. Educate your shop stewards. Educate your executive board members. And also have staff meetings and the staff should always meet with your shop stewards, your executive board, and discuss issue about building within your union. Strength, education, invite labor leaders, even Blacks, of all, brown, yellow, whatever you got. I've studied the history of black workers. I, Lee Brown, I want you to do that. Studying American Negro life, about the labor movement. I want to say I've also studied the black labor and the American legal system of race, workers, and law. And I want to say here again, it is a crisis in the working class. We must have an argument that we must have a new labor movement here in America for the rank and file. And I want to say I've studied and I make it my business because I'm



gain knowledge of the labor movement and earn a degree, and that degree is D.W.C. The doctor of the working class. D.W.C. Meaning Doctor of the Working Class, and organized labor and black workers from 1619 to 1973, and I've studied the labor history, black labor history. I have studied the black workers, the title "black workers." And I want to say to you now I've studied the history of Negro members in American labor unions.

Because I'm concerned that all workers get a fair chance. And I want to say to you that the black workers have been abused. They not have been following a Title VII, that not putting a - or one or two black workers. It should be much as 25 percent. We have been denied the rights. Even the AF and L and CIO program, equal rights for all members. That's including black members. Talking about Title VII, and there are things there was a federal civil rights legislatures was passed a few years ago, and we still is being behind. You want to say you can rebuild the unions. It can be done. And I want to say not least black workers and white unions, and I want to say to the white workers and to the leadership of these white unions we must have equality. We must be recognized in this union if you intend to survive in the labor movement in this country, you must wake up and call on all members and put black people and make a [inaudible] place in they fight and black workers should fight who are members of white union, fight to get rid of that racism, fight to get rid of this racist and white supremacy, cuz it's a system that rob you, your family, rob the white workers as well and any other workers. I'm going to say to you this is my report, and I still say creeping racism, which will divide your union and take bread out of your children's mouth. Deny them a decent home, a decent education, a decent health needs. This is - like I said before, you must listen at the voice of black workers of the world, who have struggled



- even during the time of slavery, black workers one who - if you know your history, black workers who [inaudible] task folks. They do so much on the plantation, some of them - some plan- - not all plantations. I never like to use the word slave. Workers was not - they was run off and hide in the swamps or the tree or wherever they could hide until it get dark, and it was too dark for them to work. Then they come out and go back to their plantation. They stood up. They was against. They organized during the period of slave, black workers. I have documented proof. I don't say nothing if I can't prove it, because I'm not going to be made ridiculous. Lee Brown is telling you, I been there. I struggled. I read. Knowledge is knowing all about a thing, knowing how is a technique. I have learned it. And I'm still learning, cuz I'm concerned. I've studied history, of my people have been exploited, have been robbed from the beginning of slavery, 1555. It was ships, a lot of my people have [inaudible] high the cost. We lost millions of people in the middle passing. Tell them to read history. Read it. Study it. This is a [inaudible] hour. You want to see a change in this country? You want to see a beautiful life, economic and beautiful and happy, a long life and healthy life? Learn the treat black peoples right. Give them justice and equality. Give them the things that they have helped accomplished and helped to make. They need justice.

Testing, testing, testing. Lee Brown is testing. Lee Brown is testing. We testing on union democracy, union, what makes the union work in - what makes democracy work at labor unions and other organizations. Testing democracy. Testing democracy. Thank you.

You can't see what's going on - injustice. Unjustice. Lit the fire on the Rodney King case. Unjustice lit that fire, and I want to say now to Local 2, it is time now that you must raise that torch light, freedom, justice,



and equality, all members of Local 2. Black, white, brown, yellow, red. Let us - cuz a lot of work need to be done in the labor movement, within the culinaries, [inaudible] them all. Bankers need to be organized. Watch [inaudible], security guards, a number of other things, but focus on culinary, that we can be. And we can be successful. And I want to say that we can win, will win, shall win, but this most dangerous pollution [inaudible] come back, will be removed, that we all will be successful and happy for our children, not for ourselves, but for our children and our children. Get rid of this most dangerous system, racism and white supremacy. That's the system that the boss uses against you.

END SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B

First, I had on the agenda to attend, which I am vice president of Local 2 retirees' association. We met at 10:00 o'clock, and I had appointment with the president of Local 2 at 11:00 o'clock, with Mike Casey, president of Local 2. But what I wanted to meet with Mike about, the president of Local 2, in 1984 we had a minority breakdown, with 17,878. Asian at that - in 1984, was 4,424. Blacks was 1,476. Caucasian was 5,672. Hispanic was 3,260. Others unknown, no code, was 360. At that particular time we had the male - was 11,383. Females was 6,236. This was unknowing. They had 259 unknowing. And what I asked the president of Local 2 to give me a minority breakdown of 1994. Not only the year of '94, but to follow up on it--'94, '95, '96 and beyond, so we can keep up. We felt at that particular time we only had 1,476 Blacks in the union. And on the staff here in 1994, the year of 1994, what I'm talking about the staff - we only had two Blacks, one male and one female. You have on the staff 30 pro, 34. That mean you have 32 people with only two Afro Americans. And I want a breakdown. I felt that we been trying to



get back to even up, to put - and not only we want Blacks on staff, we want Blacks in the union. So we can get support from the black community. That's what we need and we want. Breakdown and come back racism, and we have to help to organize the hotel and restaurant in San Francisco badly needed, needs to be organized, and to - and to organize these places we need to work together. We need to build our union. I also support that - I also told him that you need to educate your shop stewards. You need to educate your executive board members and also educate your staff how to come back and fight this racism that is very much alive in Local 2. And you can see by the minority breakdown. So we wants to have these minority breakdowns so we can move in and be, and help to organize these hotels and restaurant and bars, whatever you got, and we don't have too many even. The last time I see'd a lot of Afro American females was during the time when Local 283, room cleaners, and I fought for them to get meals, and the mistreatment and the union refused to fight hard for them when they get discharged, and these are thing that I'm, will propose. These, we wants to tighten up the rank and file, its power. Work together, and you can't have race discrimination. I told them about the grammas and reserved in early or the late '50s at Louisiana. And the packinghouse union had a strike with the sugar refinery. And the representatives of the united packinghouse workers knew me because I spoke at the anniversary, see, down south the union have every year an anniversary at someone's church in the community. Oh, they have heard me spoke, and the representative from the united packinghouse workers' union come over and asked Brother Nelson, which was the president, Andrew Steve Nelson, could Brother Brown be an assistant to us to go down and grammas and reserve. I spoke at grammas at 1:00 o'clock and



reserve at 3:00. When I first went there, we had signs, ladies here, colored ladies over here, water fountain, colored here, white there. They were setting separate in the union hall. And I know then that the boss know and anybody with any understanding, common sense, know they was not, was not together. You don't win strikes separated with signs say we separate. And the issue that I talked about to educate the striking brothers and sisters who attend the meeting, I emphasize on the pork chop issue. You need unity. If you want to win this contract, you want to go back to work, the pork chop issue is, is the economic issue. Decent food, decent houses, decent health, decent education for your kids. What did you [inaudible] to obtain that and to achieve it and become victorious you have to be together. Pork chop issue. You cannot win it when racism exists among you. And finally one day I went back and I was surprised, shocked, I looked - sign on the door - ladies' restroom. The other was no sign that it had men, women. All was setting from each other. I looked over on the white side and I saw black sisters and brothers. Looked on the white side, I saw - or looked on the white - I saw white sisters and brothers. They all was mixed in, blend in together. And it shocked me. And I went down to the next one at 3:00 o'clock, [inaudible] same thing. I say we [inaudible], we kept [inaudible] pork chop issue. I say it's not the struggle for yourselves, but it's the struggle for your children and the future of your children, and then about three weeks later the sugar refinery refine has signed a contract with united packers union, packing house union. It was - unity was the key to their success. Racism, the boss used that against the workers, and I was telling that to [inaudible] about the hotel workers here, in San Francisco, it's the culinary. It's the tourist industry, the biggest industry we got for poor working people here, and



they going to be more hotels, be more restaurants, be more clubs, but the union got to do the job within, and I say you must educate your shop stewards on the job, you must educate your executive board, and you must educate your staff. Unity, the rank and file, is the power of the union. The rank and file is the key. Talk on trade union democracy. Trade union democracy is your key. United principle. United, stand up, forefront. Build caucus within your union. Build a rank and file. Democracy, principle, trade union democracy. Together we will win. Thank you kindly.



Lee Brown

11/21/94



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11/21/94 (Hollywood Days)

Allen: OK, today is November 21st, right? November 21st, 1994.  
This is Robert Allen interviewing Brother Lee Brown about his days in Los Angeles working with the NAACP. So you were about to tell me about going to work with the, at the Dunbar Hotel.

Brown: Yeah, I met - that's where I met a lot of - I used to go by the Dunbar Hotel all the time, and it's - and be at the bar, and just drinks on [inaudible] and that's where I met a lot of professional people--actors and, you know, some Pullman porters. I met - first, I met Louis Armstrong was there, and I - yeah, I met him at the bar, setting down, and the lady was with him, a young sister was with him, and she introduced everybody coming. She say, "I want you to meet Louis Armstrong," and then I say oh - and then I told her, say, say "That's my home boy." And she told me, she say "Come on up here and meet him," and he - I went up there and I told him I was in New Orleans, and I talked, and he drank Miller Highlight Beer, and I was drinking Tom Collins.

Allen: Tom Collins and Miller Highlight, huh?

Brown: Yeah, he was drinking Miller High - oh, yeah. Yeah, because that was - pick it up. A lot would be like high - pick it up.

Allen: Close the door. OK.

Brown: Tom Collins, and he's drinking Miller, and he say he was down at the - at the theatre, they call it - [inaudible] - they called it the [inaudible] - say it was the - say the name of the studio

Allen: RKO?

Brown: RK studio.

Allen: RK studio. OK.

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Brown: Yeah, the studio's on Melrose, down in Hollywood.

Allen: Melrose Avenue.

Brown: Yeah. But the - but the theatre itself, the RK theatre was on, on Broadway, and then they used to change shows every Monday. They had the all - the guests would come on Monday, so Louis Armstrong was there.

Allen: He was perform - playing at the theatre.

Brown: At the theatre, yeah, on Broadway.

Allen: On Broadway.

Brown: He was blowing his horn and singing and whatnot, so I get to meet him at . .

Allen: What was he like?

Brown: Oh, he was very nice. Got along very nice. We got to talking about home boys. It was [laughs], and he set up there and drink Miller Highlight and Tom Collins. And I regulate - I kinda hate to leave him that day. So he say, "I got to go and get some rest. I got to play tonight." Or he told me to come on down, come on backstage, just tell them I'm with Louis Armstrong [laughs].

Allen: So did you go down to hear him?

Brown: Yeah. Oh, boy, yeah. And during that time I used to see Lena Horne.

Allen: At the Dunbar?

Brown: No. At the uh . . .

Allen: At the RK theatre.

Brown: At the RK theatre on Broadway. And I used to go backstage, shake hands with her. I knew her son Ted.

Allen: Her son Ted, huh?



Brown: Yeah.

Allen: Where did you meet him?

Brown: He was around, come around the Dunbar. Yeah, he was young, though. [inaudible]

Allen: What was he doing?

Brown: Oh, he was just walking around.

Allen: But I mean was he working in the business? Was he in acting or?

Brown: No, he wasn't acting. He was just - as far as I know. Cuz I knew him when I see him cuz he looked like [inaudible] [laughs], he looked just like Lena Horne. But I never did see her daughter. I learned that she had a daughter. And Lena was very nice too. And also Darby Jones. I knew him.

Allen: What kind of conversations did you have with Lena Horne?

Brown: Oh, just talking about how we talk about freedom. About fighting for justice, [inaudible] the movies.

Allen: You were in the NAACP then.

Brown: I was doing the time in the NAACP.

Allen: So you were organizing people . . .

Brown: I was in the youth movement during that time with Mrs. Charlotte [inaudible] of the California [inaudible]. She was the director. And we would meet and to [inaudible] 28 and Central at the Y.

Allen: 28th and Central?

Brown: At the YMCA. We would meet there and [inaudible]. The Morris, all the actors, even Hattie MacDaniel. We sent her a notice. We sent Step'n Fetchit. Although I did meet Step'n Fetchit. He tried to go with me.



Allen: You met Step'n Fetchit.

Brown: Yeah, I met Step'n Fetchit.

Allen: And what happened?

Brown: Well, when I met Step'n Fetchit, I met him at the Dunbar. And then they had a young lady, she used to dance. They called her Dunny. That was her stage name.

Allen: Dunny, how do you . . .

Brown: Dunny. That's all I call it. Dunny. Dunny. And she was talking to Step, and Step - we was all talking, and Step say, "I make a movie actor out you. Come go upstairs with me." She say, "I go if Brother Brown can go." He say, "Oh, no, I want to talk to you by yourself," and I used to laugh every time I seen her. I say, "You tried to take my girl away from me." And he laughed. He had a - but he look - he look a whole lot different when you see him on the screen. He wore that white cap, and he dressed - nice looking. I was surprised. Nice looking fellow. And he laughed. He had some understanding [inaudible], that's where I met him at. And Dorothy Dandridge's mother.

Allen: Dorothy Dandridge's mother?

Brown: No, I say Dorothy Dandridge mother - Dorothy a mother herself. I ain't talking about Ruby - Ruby was Dorothy's mother.

Allen: OK, so Ruby Dandridge.

Brown: Dandridge.

Allen: Is that the mother of Dorothy Dandridge?

Brown: The mother of Dorothy Dandridge.

Allen: So you met her.

Brown: I met her. At the Club Alabam.

Allen: The Club Alabam.



Brown: Yeah, the Club Alabam. That's when they had Art - this guy - a [inaudible] Harris. I met him there. You know, after the show they have breaks.

Allen: So tell me about the Dunbar. So this is where everybody sorta hung out.

Brown: Yes.

Allen: What kind of place was it? Describe it to me.

Brown: They sell food, drinks.

Allen: So it's a club in the Dunbar Hotel.

Brown: Yeah, it was . . .

Allen: A piano bar? Like a piano bar?

Brown: A hotel.

Allen: OK, and the club was like a piano bar? Did they have music? I mean what was it like?

Brown: I don't know exactly that they had music during that time, but I know it was a bar. And then they had a hotel. You go upstairs, you [inaudible] upstairs.

Allen: OK. Did you dress up to go there?

Brown: No, you just wear . . .

Allen: Did you style? You styling? What were you wearing? What were you wearing? What were you wearing when you'd go to the Dunbar?

Brown: I was wearing - I had on a tie, you know, look kinda neat, dressed right. I dressed right.

Allen: They call you Kokomo.

Brown: They used to call me Kokomo.

Allen: How come?



Brown: The jungle man. I played a couple parts. In the jungle.  
Darby Jones, Walk With the Zombie.

Allen: Couple movies you were in, huh?

Brown: Yeah. Not movies, but now they call it stand-in's. But during that time they called it mob scenes.

Allen: Mob scenes.

Brown: Mob scenes. That's when you get a whole lot, no name, you get nine dollars or whatever, and a fellow by the name, old man Gray. He was . . . Old man Gray. Tall, gray-headed man. He used to play in all the slave pictures, driving the buggies, and he would get \$25, but he'd take his - [inaudible] who wanted, you know, mob scenes, extra - now they call them extras. Now they call them stand-in's now. He just had to stand-in picture. Well, he [inaudible] my name down on the book. [inaudible] He come and get my grandson. And another thing that [inaudible]. Oh, yeah. Old man Gray opened a - on Central - oh. [Tape gap]

Allen: So you were talking about old man Gray on Central Avenue.

Brown: Yeah, he was - he was an actor, extra, you know, he plays in - is it running?

Allen: Mm hmm.

Brown: He plays in pictures, like the slave driving the buggies and cleaning, you know, with his tie on. And he opened up a, a, a account for me at a store.

Allen: An account?

Brown: Yeah. He gave - you know, he didn't - he didn't pay for it hisself, he just - he give me a good record for me to buy clothes, suits and whatever I wanted. And it's a clothes store on Central, right off from the



Lincoln Theatre, right there. So there was a long time before I see'd old man Gray.

Allen: Now, he was in the Screen Actors' Guild.

Brown: Who? Old man Gray.

Allen: Old man Gray.

Brown: Yeah, yeah, cuz he was sign you.

Allen: So - that's how he could get you in there.

Brown: Yeah. [inaudible] Well, I never did join the Screen Actors' Guild. He just - he just used me. I mean if I'd a got regular, they woulda followed up, you know, with why - call him. But I never had to call him to find out what was going on.

Allen: Now, you met Man Tan Moreland too.

Brown: Man Tan Moreland.

Allen: So you were talking about Man Tan Moreland. You met Man Tan Moreland.

Brown: Yeah, I met Man Tan Moreland at the Lincoln Theatre that night when they played a movie, one dollar a night, and he happened to be there on the stage, [inaudible] night, after they showed the movie. And they had him on stage. And I talked to him. He come down - I met him through Pigmeat Markham.

Allen: Pigmeat Markham, yeah.

Brown: Yeah. I used to talk to him all the time. He was - he was very - he was very [inaudible], Pigmeat Markham.

Allen: So Man Tan Moreland - you say he was from Monroe, Louisiana?

Brown: Yeah [inaudible].

Allen: [Overlapping] home boy, yeah.



Brown: He had a little girl who looked just like him.

Allen: A daughter? He had a daughter there?

Brown: Yeah, he had a daughter. She was about that tall. Yeah, that's how I met - I was surprised when I learned he'd passed. Man Tan had passed. I wanted to get back to the uh . . .

Allen: Let me just go back and pick up what you said - Joe Louis was there too.

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. I met . . .

Allen: He was in uniform you said.

Brown: He was in uni- - he was in the army, and he was - I was setting about five seats from him when the put on the light, and [inaudible]. The heavyweight champion of the world. I thought - the emcee was just pulling people's legs. And we had the guys there. He was the emcee. He was a stage actor too. Let me see can I get his name. Oh, yeah. I get his name. His name was Monty Holly.

Allen: Monty Holly.

Brown: The [inaudible] guy. He played in several pictures too.

Allen: So he was the emcee that night.

Brown: Yeah, yeah.

Allen: And so Joe Louis was there and he stood up.

Brown: Yeah.

Allen: What did he say? What did he do?

Brown: He . . .

Allen: He lifted his hand up and just . . .

Brown: Yeah, his hand, and the people applaud, clapping.

Allen: Did you say anything to him?



Brown: When he got - when he get ready to leave out, I say, "Hello, Champ," and he smiled [laughs].

Allen: And he had these two women on his arm, huh?

Brown: No, he didn't say nothing. No, they were right behind him.

Allen: Right behind him.

Brown: Yeah, two - I was surprised - with him. [inaudible] that must have been . . .

Allen: You said also - who was sitting next to you there?

Brown: That was up at the - at the other - where Paul Robeson was.

Allen: Oh, OK, that's right.

Brown: [inaudible]

Allen: OK, so then you went - Paul Robeson appeared at the Lincoln Theatre.

Brown: Not the Lincoln Theatre.

Allen: I mean at the uh . .

Brown: At the uh - it's a big auditorium. What they call it? You had it down.

Allen: The RK?

Brown: No, it's some big - we had it [inaudible]. Paul . . .

Allen: Oh, the Shrine Temple.

Brown: The Shrine Temple, yeah.

Allen: He was at the Shrine. OK, he spoke there.

Brown: Yeah, they had a big [inaudible] out that night. They had uh - not only Paul Robeson, they had Peterson, Darby Jones, the one give me the ticket to go there, cuz I see Darby Jones all the time. And also we had Edward G. Robinson was there, and who else? And then - and then [inaudible] Butterfly Queen.



Allen: Butterfly McQueen was there.

Brown: Butterfly McQueen. I wasn't sitting but a couple seats from her, and one fellow I asked him if he was talking, you know, when they had intermission, and he looked over and says, "You know who's sitting next to you?" I said, "No." He said, he said, "That's Butterfly McQueen, the one that played in [inaudible], I mean Gone with the Wind," and I looked at her and smiled, and asked, "Are you the one that played in Gone with the Wind?" She said, "Oh, yeah. Yeah." [inaudible] because I reckon she was like I was [inaudible] Kokomo. Yeah. And now that I wanted - that night I told you about the one I give her my change, my money, a five dollar bill, and I told the lady, I said, "Take one dollar," because I know that Monday I was going to get paid. I was working [inaudible], getting my food, all I had to do is pay my rent. And, and she gone to the lady. I said, "Come back here, Lady," and I jumped up. People were laughing. Some of them give me [laughs], I was putting on a better act. [inaudible]

Allen: You needed that change, huh?

Brown: Yeah. Get me on a couple [inaudible] on the way home. Yeah, so I wanted to get back to the Y. I didn't finish. [inaudible] We sent a letter to all the actors we know - not me, but the staff, the secretary, Mrs. Charlotte Bass. She was the director of the NAACP youth movement. So we sent a letter to Hattie McDaniel. We sent a letter to Lena Horne. She didn't come, cuz she had [inaudible] she had a [inaudible] that she had - she didn't want to get tied up with [inaudible] whatever it was they call. Darby Jones came. Man Tan Moreland. Yeah, Man Tan Moreland came, and this guy we called Step'n Fetchit. Willie Best. We had another little guy with a whole lot of hair on his - what the hell was his name? I used to



talk to him all the time. I used to meet him different places, down at Central or at the Dunbar. Benny Carter.

Allen: Benny Carter.

Brown: Yeah. He had a lot of hair. He was a jungle, I believe he was a jungle man too [laughs]. And there were Benny Carter - no, it was Man Tan Moreland and Willie Best that night was organizing at the Y. We had a meeting there to [inaudible] once a month, and they was all [inaudible]. I say, "I'm the first man," [inaudible], buck in my eye. They give him bug in the eyes. Man, we had a show there at the meeting. Man Tan would kind of be Willie Best, bugging the eye. "I'm the man, [inaudible]" [laughs]. We had a show there. Then we used to go to the Lincoln Theatre once a month, free, all us [inaudible] on the committee, the committee, so that was [inaudible]. Oh, yeah. Now, [inaudible] theatre, when - what do they call it - was saying that [inaudible] - his name was - his daughter - Nat King Cole.

Allen: Nat King Cole.

Brown: Yeah. I - we was there that Friday night, myself. It was four of us in the party. We went and Nat King Cole's on the stage, we want to - and he played that record, I mean he made that, sing that number, he was setting sideways on the piano, straightened up [inaudible] "Cool on, Papa, [inaudible], straighten up, fly right." And we went backstage, and that's when I find out his food, the people bring it up [inaudible].

Allen: They'd bring up his - for Nat King Cole. They'd bring his food backstage and prepare it and fix it up there.

Brown: Yeah. [inaudible] And after that my wife told me, she met him here. She works in - you know, he was at the Fairmont, and she used to serve him in the room. And she told him the next day when she sees him that my husband saw you when you made that, hit that number,



"Straighten up, fly right, [inaudible] papa gonna blow your top," and we went backstage and talked with him. And also met Whoopi Goldberg, Whoopi Goldberg here. What did you say? [Somebody in background]

Allen: Now tell me. Now, speaking of making movies, let me ask you about that. You played in these - you played in the movies and you got this nickname, Kokomo.

Brown: Right. Two, that's all. And I ain't played in them.

Allen: But you was in the mob scenes.

Brown: I was in mob scenes.

Allen: In mob scenes, OK, or group scenes whatever. What kind of scenes were they?

Brown: Well, they was just - one was jungle.

Allen: A jungle scene.

Brown: A jungle scene. That's where I got the name Kokomo. On Central. for L&M, called me Kokomo. When they see me coming, I'll go in - and then I have [inaudible] say, "Along come Kokomo." And I tell them, "Set 'em up. Set 'em up," [laughs].

Allen: Now, was that the movie called "I Walk with the Zombie"?

Brown: No, that was a different one. I'm trying to think. That's the one with . . .

Allen: I have two of them down here: "I Walk with the Zombie" and "My Heart is in Dixie."

Brown: Yeah.

Allen: Those are the movies you were in.

Brown: Yeah, "Walk with the Zombie," and that was with Darby Jones, "Walk with the Zombie." "My Heart in Dixie," with old Clarence Muse.



Allen: Clarence Muse.

Brown: Brother Clarence Muse.

Allen: "I Walk with the Zombie."

Brown: No, no. "My Heart is in Dixie."

Allen: That was with Clarence Muse.

Brown: Clarence Muse, yeah.

Allen: And "I Walk with the Zombie,"

Brown: With Darby Jones.

Allen: with Darby Jones, all right. Now, which one of those - and the one, the jungle scene.

Brown: Huh?

Allen: The one with the jungle scene?

Brown: That was Darby Jones.

Allen: "I Walk with the Zombie."

Brown: Yes.

Allen: All right.

Brown: Now, at least I call it here, that was the . . .

Allen: That was the jungle scene in that one.

Brown: I don't remember playing with two stand-in's, with what we call stand-in's.

Allen: Now, how did you - now, here you are organizing people to get these more dignified roles and all, and here you are in this mob scene .

..

Brown: Well, I done did that - well, I did that before I got connected fighting for rights. I was trying to get into the movie then because I working at the R and K studio.



Allen: But you told me earlier about your girlfriend, what your girlfriend said about it when she found about . . .

Brown: Yeah. Mildred.

Allen: Mildred, what'd she say? [laughs]

Brown: [laughs]

Allen: When she found out you played those roles?

Brown: Yeah, she say, she brought her sister that Sunday, we went to the [inaudible], I said, "I want you to see my part in the movie. I want you to come on," getting her ready. She's getting ready, and her sister, shit. I went [laughs] [inaudible]. I was picking cotton. [Sings] Amen, Amen.

Allen: You was picking cotton and singing.

Brown: Yeah [laughs], and trying to sing. But people ain't paying it no mind.

Allen: This is "My Heart is in Dixie" then, it must have been, huh?

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. Clarence Muse was there.

Allen: So you end up picking cotton and singing, and she comes in and sees you in this . . .

Brown: No, I takin' her to the movies.

Allen: You took her . .

Brown: On a date, yeah. Her and her sister. Taking them on a date. Man, I thought I was - [inaudible] sits down, "Oh, no, no, thank you," cuz one director told me, says "Brown, if you get to study," he say, "you can become a good actor, because you can pay a part, a religious part, you can be a minister," which I know. Right? You can [inaudible] be a minister. So I didn't follow through. I didn't study to try to stop the studying - I didn't. I go [inaudible] the hell away with it. I ain't going through all these



changes [inaudible]. You know, when I start to working [inaudible], then I started fighting for better parts. But [inaudible]. I got interest - you know, I said, "Well, I'm gonna . . ." I see they wasn't doing nothing cuz I see how they were fighting over there the movie parts, Man Tan and all these things, Willie Best and Step'n Fetchit. But Louise Beaver came that night. She say she will not make no more mammie pictures, you know? [inaudible] Well, she didn't. She play her last part, she played was on TV. I forget the name of that guy. I ain't never seen him before. He must have passed too. Yeah. That was all with Hattie McDaniel. Who else [inaudible]? Oh, yeah, this guy - Hubbard and Jeffrey brothers played in a western. I used to go to their club, the [inaudible] Club. Rex Angler, I see Rex, I told you Rex used to come in.

Allen: Who? Rex?

Brown: Rex Anglin.

Allen: Rex England.

Brown: Yeah, you know [inaudible] - beard. He played in some movies. And I just go in and at the [inaudible]. With Herb Jeffrey. Name is - he named his bar. He made a song. He written a song about it too. What the hell that bar was named? I know you heard of Herb Jeffrey.

Allen: Herb Jeffrey.

Brown: He had two brothers, who were light - basically, western parts.

Allen: Westerns.

Brown: Yeah, I used to meet them on Fifth Street in Los Angeles. They call the Morris Hotel. They have a bar over there. I - that's where I used to meet Herb Jeffrey, brothers, two brothers. They played in westerns. You know these [inaudible]. But I knowed Herb Jeffries. I used



to go to his place. His place was named, I believe, Black Damango or something, cuz he written a song Damango. Yeah, he - the song. I used to go there. So that's where I met Rex England and his girl, two [inaudible] come there. Sometime I - he get there before I would. I used to go over to him, and I talked with him. He had that long hair, sitting up there [laughs] jungle man. I'd try to meet all the actors I could, you know? But if I'da followed up, I probably would have [inaudible], so I didn't . . .

Allen: You could have a career in the film, the films.

Brown: After I met Mrs. Bass . . .

Allen: She changed that, huh? Let me turn this tape over then.

END SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B

Allen: Now, tell me about the actual organizing that you did in the Y with the, with the black actors and actresses there.

Brown: Oh, I . . .

Allen: What were you actually trying to accomplish?

Brown: Where, in Hawaii you say?

Allen: No, in the Y.

R Oh, in the YMC . . .

Allen: The NAACP . . . you met at the Y there.

Brown: Yeah. This is something to do about parts, better parts. Yeah, that the - that black actors should have a better part and oppose against, against racism. I think I got it all [inaudible].

Allen: Well, just summarize it then for - in terms of . . .

Brown: Well, we fought - the main thing we fighting that, and I felt, I felt that it was racism in Hollywood, because none of the black actors, actors or actress, did not have no kinda progressive part [inaudible]. They either laying Tom's or Aunt Sally's and whatnot. We had one guy called a



[inaudible] meat, and I didn't like his part, I see, playing pictures

[inaudible] meat, and

Allen: Salt meat?

Brown: Yeah, that what they call him in the pictures, all that stuff, you know? I didn't like that. Then Hollywood is just, to me, it just for, you know, for racism. Racist. All the pictures at R & K studios, they made it - and that was the only place that you see a few Blacks in pictures.

Allen: RK studios.

Brown: RK studios on Melrose Avenue.

Allen: So when you were - what did you do? Did you go down and picket? Did you have a picket line, or how did you . . . ?

Brown: We tried . . .

Allen: Or did you get up a petition? Yeah, how did you actually do . . . make it known?

Brown: Well, Miss Bass was working through the NAACP.

Allen: Right, and she was the publisher of the Eagle newspaper.

Brown: Yeah. You call the paper. The paper was the California Eagle.

And she as working, and we was on the committee and we bring in our proposals, what we should see. Now I told him to keep the homes and the [inaudible] and all that kinda stuff there. And we wanted actually better parts, and then from now, from then on, what we're talking about now is still hasn't improved none [inaudible]. [inaudible] But we only have a few Blacks, if they have pictures, we only have no more than three Blacks in one picture. You understand? And they pick Blacks and put one this picture, that picture. We still ain't got justice and equality in the motion picture industry yet. We should be proud of Black folk. We still have - that go for the entertaining field, on stage, TV, in the motion picture



industry. We still put - because that makes a lot of pictures with hundreds of actors, and you only may find no more than three Blacks into a movie, unless'n it's just all black. [inaudible] prostitute, things like this, not saying anything. If they make a whole big movie or white, you only may find one Black. Just like we had this uh - this picture - Freeman. "Driving Miss Daisies." That wasn't saying nothing to black folks. And another thing, the motion picture was produced by white - this is my opinion. They do not teach the history of black folks. They do not tell what black folks did, the time have done in the past. Everything is something that come down on Blacks. They don't [inaudible] like we should have black westerns, like Sidney Poitier and he played in a picture with a - the guy that sing - come from the islands.

Allen: Harry Belafonte.

Brown: Harry Belafonte. Now, they . . .

Allen: They made "Buck and the Preacher," those kind . . .

Brown: They made good pictures.

Allen: Well, tell me then. You said it was also when you were in Hollywood at this time, in Los Angeles, did you say you started reading and educating yourself?

Brown: Right.

Allen: How did that happen? How did you get interested in . . .

Brown: Well, . . .

Allen: building your book collection?

Brown: Well, I just - like I was working 'round - not working 'round - every time I was at this hotel . . .

Allen: What hotel were you working at?

Brown: No, I didn't work at the hotel. I was living there.



Allen: Ah.

Brown: At the hotel. Miss Maude Williams and I got to talking, and Mr. Williams, he was telling me about, you know, he was Pullman porter. He used to work for 25 dollars a month. And he told me after - he was doing all that work, he [inaudible]. I think he was six or seven hours. Service station in Watts. Then he was buying that hotel at 1217 South Central. And he was setting down and talking like I was his son, you know? That's when I first got to the hotel. So I got interested in it. And then she had a niece, Mrs. Maude Williams, and her husband would go - he's working at the post office at night. And he would stop and leave her there, at Miss Maude Williams, until he come back and - and Miss Maude Williams was starting to tell him, said this man was very interested. He's a race pride man. And she was - I think she came from Louisiana too, her and her husband both were light-skinned people. And she say, "I can teach you in one year." I said I want to learn how to read. She say, "I got time. I be glad." And so she started teaching me, taking up - taking her to my room. She teach me, teach me. Or we can stay down in the lobby. You know, it's according to how much we had to do. She wouldn't disturb Mr. Williams in her business. I starting to study.

Allen: Now, who was teaching you? It was Miss [inaudible] Williams, or it was the niece?

Brown: No, Miss Williams' niece.

Allen: It was her niece who was actually teaching you then.

Brown: This young lady.

Allen: The young lady. OK, so she would come by there . . .

Brown: Yeah, because her husband were working at the post office at night. He was something like a detective.



Allen: Oh, yeah. And this is the husband of the niece.

Brown: Yeah.

Allen: He worked at the post office. And Mrs. Maude Williams' husband was a Pullman porter.

Brown: Yes. Maude Williams was a Pullman Porter, uh, Mr. Williams.

Allen: Mr. Williams.

Brown: She happen to die, never was sick, and I was living in Room number 12, and I heard Miss Williams hollering, calling, hollering, "Brown, Brown," and I didn't know what had happened. I thought Mr. Williams wasn't there. I thought might have tried to rob her, because she be down renting room, and I would run down there when she told me, "Old Williams' dead." I couldn't believe it. In the bed and heart, doctor said he had a heart attack.

Allen: How long was that after you moved in that that happened?

Brown: Maybe about two, three years.

Allen: Two, three years, oh, I see.

Brown: I stayed - I stayed in number 12, just like I - me and another fellow was the oldest roomers there.

Allen: The oldest roomers.

Brown: Yeah, because he - this fellow here had went to - he Nigeria. You know how the first - when they had [inaudible]. He traveled there. He was [inaudible] going back to Africa. He was an old fellow.

Allen: What was the name of the niece?

Brown: I don't know. I forget her name. You know, that's been a long time, Brother. We can just call her - give her a name. Moms. Alice.

Allen: But she would work with you like every - every week then, or every?



Brown: Every evening.

Allen: Every evening.

Brown: Every evening, when he'd bring her. Except holidays and things like that.

Allen: So you would just practice reading then.

Brown: Practice reading. I . .

Allen: Reading newspapers, reading books?

Brown: No, books, newspapers, always - cuz reading I had that in mind. One guy told me, a professor out of Texas, [inaudible], he say, because I was telling him I was interested. He say, "You can educate yourself. Main thing you learn how to read, you can educate yourself." He said, "It's always better for you to pace yourself, you don't have nobody to tell you." But he was something. He was from Texas University. Yeah, and so that's why she - she helped me, and I still - and go to the, go to the dictionary, where you can find - and then if you can't get it, you can underline, then you call [inaudible] tell you, or you can - for example, you can get it, you put it on your tape [inaudible]. I think this is broke. [inaudible] I'm going to have to - this is a good one. This is beautiful. I've been had this for two, three years. Yeah.

Allen: So, OK. So you lived there at Mr. and Mrs. Williams, two, three years.

Brown: Yeah, about two, three years.

Allen: And during that time . . .

Brown: Right in that area.

Allen: Yeah, OK, this you - this was during the period when you actually - you had some parts in movies, these two movies.

Brown: Two parts.



Allen: You were organizing for the NAACP.

Brown: I was working, you know, on the committee.

Allen: OK, and then what other - what other job did you have? You talked about those [inaudible] . . .

Brown: I worked in some hotels. I worked in the RK area, [inaudible], bus boy, like that.

Allen: So actually you always had got - this is where you got your first experience in hotel work then.

Brown: Yeah, [inaudible] around restaurants, things like that. And, you know, not only [inaudible] like that. I was working on the Union Pacific in Los Angeles, I mean on the [inaudible], and I first started as a 40. That's a good number.

[Tape skips]

Allen: So you started out as a 40, which is the dishwasher.

Brown: Dishwasher, right. It was a better deal. You wasn't getting but 45 cents an hour, plus the, the waiters would give you tip.

Allen: A tip.

Brown: A tip for your [inaudible]. But they kept why, because you was keeping dishes for them. You was fast, they call it pearl diving in them days. Diving pearls. And I had it made. I didn't have to go to the commissary one way or the other. Just wait on my 45 cents an hour [laughs]. And I - and I got back, the old fellow, he laughed and talked me, talking about, "Oh, he up to something," I never believed old Pop would do me that. "Oh, you're a good man, there, Brown." He come to find out [inaudible] "Well, I want you to be a 30. You know too much about kitchens to . . . " [Both laugh] Cuz he was - I was - but he was hanging on that [inaudible]. But he was a good man.



Allen: Good man. But he say you know too much. So he wants you to be a 30, which is the server.

Brown: Yes. Dish up . . .

Allen: Dish up the food.

Brown: Yeah.

Allen: OK. Now, what was the name of the town in Nebraska were you'd go to. You were saying the name there. What was the name of it?

Brown: Omaha.

Allen: Omaha. Omaha. OK. Omaha, Nebraska.

Brown: [inaudible]

Allen: So that was the regular run, from Los Angeles to Omaha.

Brown: Yeah, but the doctor - see, I have to get [inaudible] - sound funny, but even my horoscope say I'm born on an air sign, and I have to have some oxygen come in. But every time I go to the doctor, the doctor say, "You have to have oxygen," so that's why [inaudible] couple months on there.

Allen: Yeah.

Brown: Yeah, I got some money on the railroad [inaudible], but I never did apply for the early retirement. Yeah, so I got [inaudible]. My health is the most important thing. [inaudible] dining car [inaudible]. Before you had the cooks in there, and then you had the dishwasher, and you had the dish up man. So that was too small. Maybe about that long.

Allen: Just too, too tight a space, huh?

Brown: Yeah. Too tight - you didn't have no air. The thing was tight, you know. Maybe let a little air - [inaudible] little oxygen. Get a little air through there. [inaudible] So that - the railroad - they even give me a little book. Say you a dishwasher [inaudible]. A dishwasher [inaudible]



called a future chef [laughs]. A future chef. They give you a little book, telling you, "You're a future chef." Old chef tell me, "Yeah, Brother, you gonna make it. You gonna make it long as you [inaudible]," helping him out [laughs]. The way he had you come in there, make up the menu [laughs]. Yeah, Brother, that was what happened that time on that Union Pacific. That's when they bus all them boys were taking, during the war they were taking all these bus. [inaudible] eggs, bacon, see, that was [inaudible]. They had another boy. We call him String Bean. String Bean went to washing dishes. I been having hard [inaudible], talking [inaudible]. To myself, you know? I couldn't prove it. I'm just thinking. Shit. Come to find out String Bean let them run about two, three months. When they started getting down. Little bags full of ham and eggs and bacon, butter, and I said I wouldn't touch that stuff. [inaudible] I always had a pretty good idea, an idea I was paranoid. I was cautious. But I know I have no business messing with [inaudible]. I didn't care what they did. That's they business. They left there with chickens and all that shit, the chef. Not the chef, the cooks. The second cook [inaudible].

Allen: So a bunch of them got caught, got busted.

Brown: String Bean told, line up - the dishwasher. He always talked to me, but I kinda kept my own [laughs] [inaudible]. They [inaudible] how long you been on here, Brother? I say, "I been here a long time, Brother." I told him any kinda lie, [inaudible]. I didn't figure he was a stool pigeon or FBI or whatever he was. But, man, they came - all that broke out in the papers, in Los Angeles paper. [inaudible] them people been lose food, and [inaudible] found out. I mean they couldn't [inaudible], showing it, [inaudible] them brothers [inaudible]. That's when I was lucky. [inaudible], Man, he say, "You are lucky, Bro, you didn't . . ." I said, "That's



not my game. I don't do it. I don't take no chances like that." But not stealing or taking - I know I ain't no - I don't raise no chickens, got no chickens [laughs]. I'm not running a supermarket. What the hell I'm doing? [inaudible] Say, "What supermarket are you running, Brown?" [laughs] Now what the hell can I say? Hey, man, people got - people don't think. I ain't the smartest man in the world. But I'm not the dumbest. But I been around. I seen quite a few - and I don't know that I'd tell you about my friend I met, Goldberg, or Whoopi Goldberg.

Allen: Whoopi Goldberg, yeah.

Brown: Yeah. I [inaudible] were playing Moms Mabley.

Allen: Moms Mabley, yeah, you said that.

Brown: Moms Mabley, right there, yeah . .

Allen: You told me that, yeah.

Brown: I said we don't need . . .

Allen: OK.

Brown: We actually got her notes, still, but like I said, anything you want to ask me to verify, because a lot of these things, Robert, you know, I can't - you know, I'm a 73-year-old man, and I can't . . .

Allen: But you've got a good memory.

Brown: I can't pull all of them out of the damned hat.

Allen: You've got a good memory. Let me turn off the tape recorder here, so this is the end of this tape.



Lee Brown 2/3/94



LEE BROWN TAPE 2/3/94

I was working at this brickyard about 25 or 30 miles out from Houston, at a place called Green's Bayou. I was known as a mud brick maker, working with my hands and doing a combination of jobs at the brickyard.

There was an old fellow about 60 or 70 years of age who lived in Houston but he would come out and work during the days at the brickyard and go back home on the weekends. We called him Poppa Hinton. That was the only name I knew him by. He would sit down and talk about the NAACP. My cousin, Joseph, and I listened when he talked about this NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He said, "I'm gonna bring you guys some membership cards. I want you to join it." He was talking about freedom, about fighting for the freedom of Black America. My cousin and I was very much concerned. That sounded good to my ears. I wanted to get involved; I wanted to know more about it. He brought us some membership cards. I think at that time it was fifty cents or a dollar between the year '38 and '39. I joined it.

When I left the brickyard I went back to Galveston, and I signed up to go work on the railroad. I went to work in Gila Bend, Arizona. I got involved working with what they called the extra gang for awhile. Later I left there and went to work on the section gang. I worked there for about three months.

I wanted to work my way to Los Angeles. I had heard so much talk about it and I wanted to go there and find me a job. By then I was in Basto (?), California, working on the section gang. Two of the brothers who came from Los Angeles gave me a lot of information, so I said that was where I

Brickyard

Los Angeles



was headed. I didn't have to buy a ticket; I got a pass because I was working on the railroad. So I taken the train on a Saturday afternoon, after I made two, three paydays.

I remember stopping in San Bernardino, and the conductor told me the next stop would be Los Angeles. I got into Los Angeles around four or five; we wasn't too late. I asked a brother I saw to tell me how to get to the Black community. He said you can take the U car to Central Avenue. It cost seven cents. When I got off the car at 12th and Central I saw a lady sitting on the street. I walked over to her. She was signing people up to register to vote. I said, "Lady could you give me some information if you please." She said, "Yes, son." I said, "I'd like to find a hotel, a reasonable, nice hotel here. Do you know one you would recommend?" She said, "Yes, I have a friend. Her name is Maude Williams. She got a hotel at 1217 Central. I gonna write a note to her and you give her this note." I told her my name was Lee Brown and she said her name was Brown.

I went to the hotel and rang the bell. A short, brown-skinned lady came and said "What can I do for you?" I reached her the note. I told her Mrs. Brown told me to come here. She read it and said, "Yes, I know Mrs. Brown. She's a very good friend of mine." I told her I would like to rent a room for two weeks, and I asked how much it was. She said, "A room here is three fifty a week, and I can put you in room twelve." I thanked her and paid her and put my stuff in the room. Then I decided to walk downstairs, catch some fresh air and look around.

I walked up to a fellow a standing at a small newstand and started talking to him. He was a tall fellow wearing long-toe shoes. I told him that I was looking for a job. He bought a paper called the Sentinel and marked the address of an employment office that was open on Sunday. He said, "You'll



have to pay, but you can go there and get a job." That was a little before 1941, before the war. He told me which bus to take, to go catch it on Vernon Avenue.

That Sunday morning I got up and went down on Vernon and Central about 10 o'clock. I got the Vernon car, which was the "B" car and I told the driver where to put me off. The brother had wrote down the address for me and I showed it to the bus driver.

I walked into the employment office which was in a private home. I told the man I was looking for a job. He said, "What can you do?" I said, "I'll take anything, but I would like to get a restaurant job so I can get some food." He said, "Where you from?" I told him I was born in New Orleans and partly raised in Texas. I said I had been travelling through Arizona and the last place I stopped was Barstow, California. He said he was from New Orleans, too. He said he would help me get a job. He got on the phone and called a place out of town. The little town of Corona, on a ranch. He talked to a lady named Mrs. Fuller. He told her, said, "I got a young feller here, and I'll vouch for him. He just got into town." She said I could start Monday

I went out there and I worked for awhile, but I found out it was too far from town. And wasn't too many people out there, only four blacks, a man and his wife and two others.

Mrs. Charlotte Bass, the publisher of the California Eagle, was the director of the Youth Branch of the Los Angeles NAACP. We used to meet at the Y on 28th and Central. We would meet once a month. Actors and actresses came to our meetings, people like Hattie McDaniel Louise Beaver, Peterson, Mr. Gray, Darvey Jones, Willie Bess, Mantan Moreland. We were talking about getting better parts for black actors. Every Friday night they gave us free passes to the Lincoln Theater on Central.



I worked at the R-K Studio there on Melrose Avenue and a restaurant there. We didn't have a union there at the restaurant but the black and white employees worked together. (Tells story of party that came in with one black person whom white waitres wouldn't serve. Protested to Mr. Davis, the owner. LB was in delegation chosen to talk with Davis.

#### LEE BROWN'S FIRST LABOR ORGANIZING ACTION

200 - When I was working on the railroad in Gila Bend, Arizona, I fought against an attack on a young brother named "Stringbean." One day when we got off work, we put the handcar on the track to go back to the camp where we were staying. When we put the barrel of water in the car, a lot of it wasted onto the seat. So on the way back Stringbean was standing up in the handcar. The foreman told the driver to stop the car. The foreman told Stringbean, said, "You sit down. Don't stand up in the car." Stringbean said, "Man, I'm not gonna sit down in that water," and he still stood up. The foreman said, "You're fired."

When we got to the camp we called a meeting. The men said they wanted me to be the spokesman and speak to the foreman in the morning. We decided we weren't going to put the handcar on the tracks unless he reinstated Stringbean.

In the morning the foreman came out and blew his whistle to signal us to put the handcar on the tracks so we could go to work. He blew. Nobody moved. Now the foreman and the timekeeper were the only whites there out of over a hundred men. I walked up to the foreman and told him, "We're not going until you reinstate Stringbean, because that was wrong what you did." He said, "I'm not doing it." I said, "We're not going to work." He said, "Then you're all fired."



Well, we stood around for about thirty minutes. Then I said, "You still not gonna reinstate Stringbean?" He said no. I said, "Well, I guess there's only one thing for me to do, and that is to go over to that little store and use the telephone to call the roadmaster out of Yuma." The foreman said, "Come back, come back! We can settle this." He didn't want me to call the roadmaster, who was a fairminded man who used to come out and talk with the fellas. So the foreman reinstated Stringbean. We won, and we all went back to work. That was my first experience organizing an action on the job.

END TAPE



Transcribed interviews  
3/2/94 3/2/94



Interview with Lee Brown, 3/2/94

My name is Lee Brown. I'm going to talk about my case when I was brought before the Un-American Activities Committee in New Orleans in the early Fifties. I'm first going to begin back in Los Angeles, California, when I was working for Armo<sup>✓</sup> Packing Company. Worked there about four or five years, up until 1944. I was a member of Local 12 there, and Los Angeles was an open shop. Those who wanted to join the union could join, and those who didn't want could still work. 013

As I being a trade union man and very trade union conscious, I decided to join Local 12 there because my first union I joined in Galveston, Texas in 19-- - around 1939. I was working at the Todd Johnson dry dock, and I joined the union there. I was young, and my uncle had me get the books, get my books and join me up with Mr. Springen, which was the president of the labor union in Galveston.

But I want to say this. When I left Los Angeles in 1944, I talked to the superintendant of Armo Packing and told him that I had to go. My mother in New Orleans was ill, and I felt that she needed me. I only had one sister and a brother was there, and I wanted to go also so I could help with her. 030

So I told the shop steward, and he say, "I will give you a withdrawal card, a traveling card, so when you get to New Orleans, you'll see a Local there that you can go, you can join with them, cuz you're a union member. You can go any place, any union there, in New Orleans." 036



So when I got to New Orleans, I looked around, and some of my sister's friends came over next door and talked to me. We made friends. And I told them that I was a trade union man. I came in from Los Angeles, from Local 12. He said that, "I'm also is a union man, Local 207 at 420 Gravelus Street," here in New Orleans. He say, "Come down and bring your traveling card. We may can find some work for you there. Go see the president." He give me the address and the name of the president. The president's name was Andrew Steve Nelson, a brother. 047

So I'd taken his word a few days after I got some rest, got myself [sounds like soopalup] from that long bus ride from L.A. to New Orleans in Louisiana. So I went down on 420 Gravelus Street, and I asked for Brother Andrew Steve Nelson, the president of Local 207, and the secretary say he would be in a few minutes. I went kind of early, about 9:00 o'clock, and he hadn't got in yet. And he say, "Brother Nelson will be here in a few minutes." So I - "You're welcome to wait, Sir." I said, "Thank you kindly." 057

So when Brother Nelson came in, a tall brother, she say, "That is him there." And I introduced myself. I said, "Brother Nelson, I just got in from Los Angeles, from Local 12, and I have a traveling card with the Packing House Workers' Union." He said, "Oh, yes. I know about that union too." But I say, "I'm looking for a job." He say, "Yes, we may can help you. I have a place down here on the docks. It's not the deep sea work with the ship. It's barge line work, loading barges, box cars, whatever come in on the barges and ship back and forth all - from St. Louis on to Cairo, Illinois, Vicksburg, Mississippi, it's barge work, not - but it will help you - we may can find you a



place." He say, "I'm going to send you out on the docks." The Galve Street Wharf--that was the name of the place, the barge line there. It was known at that time as the Federal Barge Line. 075

He give me a notice. He give me a job slip to go out. He said, "When you get on the Galves Street dock," he give me direction to go, what bus to take, "and go to the end of the line. You cannot miss it." And I taken the slip. He said, "When you get there, ask for the shop steward. His name is Brother Orange Dickey." 081

So I happen to go there, and I got off the bus. Where the bus stopped, that was the end of the line. And I walked on the docks there, and I - the first person I met, I say, "Would you direct me, or show me the shop steward, Brother Orange Dickey?" He says, "Yeah." He point him out to me. He say, "You see that fellow on that tractor?" He said, "That's Brother Orange Dickey."

So I went direct to Brother Dickey, and I spoke to him. I says, "My name is Lee Brown, Brother Dickey. I was sent here by your president, Brother Andrew Steve Nelson from Local 207." I give him this slip that Brother Nelson had given me. He say, "Yes, we may can find you something to do here. And I want you to take this slip, give it back to you, and you go upstairs and ask for the time keeper. Tell him that Brother Dickey sent you up there. See if he has something for you to do to put you to work." 096

So I went upstairs, and I asked for the time keeper, and the time keeper, I said, "Brother Orange Dickey sent me here. See if you have -" And he looked. He say, "Yeah, we may can place you here." He say, "I like first to get your Social Security number and your name and your address here in New Orleans." And I told him where



I was staying. I was at that time living with my mother across the [sounds like Duffadwinelle] on LaSalle Street. So he taken my Social Security, my address, my age, whatever, and he say, "You come back here tomorrow morning, and you come up these steps. Follow the line. The people that checks in." He give me a number, say, "When you get to that [inaud.-107], you call your number. It will be someone to check you in, check your number. You follow those men up the steps." 109

So I say, - say, "Come in the morning. Be here before 8:00." I say, "I will." And I was there the next day a little bit before 8:00. When they start the checking in, they blew a whistle, and all the men started up the steps, and I followed through. When I got to the person that was checking in, he called my number, and he signed it, put it down on the paper. So I worked there a long time, about over a year or so. I attended meetings every month. They would have meeting on a Sunday at 420 Gravis Street, with all the barge line workers would go there. There was about maybe 150 of employees belongs to Local 207. We will have meetings. And I attended meetings. I was a union man for a number of years before I got there. And I would talk. 126

When I first attended the meeting, I was introduced by the president, and I made a talk there, give them some of my experience. And I continued back on the dock working, working in the barge, on the barge, in the box car, loading sugar. The biggest work there was sugar from the refinement. You ship the sugar. You take it out of the box car and put it on, on the barges. It go across the dock. We had tractors, dolleys, buggies, and whatever to transfer the sugar on



the box car off the track to the docks into the barges. And other products, like beer, oyster shells, and other canned goods would come and ship - you would take some off the barge, put it onto the box car on the rail. That was I . . . 142

We went back to the meeting again, and one brother got up, say, "We ordered - Brother Lee Brown, I want to nominate him for the shop steward down on the docks. He seem that he has - [inaud.- 146] has some experience in the union. He would be very helpful and can help us share some of his experience with us in our Local here in New Orleans."

So I accept. And I was shop steward there for a long time. And I attended meetings, and they wanted me. They nominated me for to be on the Executive Board. The Executive Board also meet once a month. So I was on the - got on the Executive Board in time. From them I got on the negotiating committee. Then from there I got nominated and elected for the vice, for president of Local 207. Then also I was appointed by the president on the Political Action Committee. I was the chair of the Political Action Committee there. And I served a long time, and Brother Nelson one time asked me, he said, "Brother, I see that you're very concerned," which I were, "of working with people, help to better the condition," cuz I learned my first union is I was was in Galveston, Texas, the labor union. And I learned from the oldtimers there. 170

He says, "I want you to meet me, and I'll pick you up at a certain place on the night I want you to go with me to a meeting." I says, "Yeah, Brother Nelson," cuz him and I was very good friends. We made friends, and we would talk about politics, trade unionism.



And he take me to a place on Canal Street. They called the Gottschalk Building, or the Goutshow building, whatever. When we got in there, he introduced me to the people there. It was a Party meeting. 180

And I - he asked me to say a few words, my experience. I didn't have no knowledge of the Party, but I - when the shop steward at the packing house in Los Angeles was talking about it and asking me to become a member, I never did become because I didn't have no knowledge of it. 186

So I talked that night, and they asked me to come back, asked the Brother to bring me back, and I was very interested. I liked the way they talked, but I was very much concerned about building up its strength, the working people, that we will have better working conditions, health, better houses. When I went over there to my mother's, she was living in a department, and it wasn't such a good condition. And that also made me think that I wanted to not only that, but to help particularly the African American workers to fight, because we was in non-skilled jobs, common labor, and what else at low pay. 201

So I - a few more months I attend the meeting, Party meeting. I joined. And I learned a lot of things. I began to read books, political action, the paper they called The Worker, the magazine and other publications of the Party, listen at them talk. First, they assigned me to the French Quarter Club. After I got in tight in the union, strong [inaud.-210] meeting, they say, "No, we're going to put you now in the Trade Union Club, so you can work with other members of the union and other unions, which was in New Orleans."



Transport and other - food - food and tobacco, and oil, sole leather, [inaud.-217] and other trade union members, in different groups.

So I worked very hard. We worked very hard to fight for better working conditions in the - also the cotton compress, the textile, the feed mills, rice mills. And they did have the little small [inaud.--sounds like Armo] Packing House there, had a strike there. And we - we served notice - I was working closely with the president, very closely - that we couldn't reach agreement, couldn't reach agreement on the contract that we would walk out. We would pull the members out, the employees of the packing house. 232

So he decide he wouldn't sign the contract, so we walked out. We stayed out about a couple weeks, find out they was taking the meat to the ships. And we - we called a meeting, Brother Nelson and I and a few more people, that we was going to throw a picket line up by the ships. The union with the marine cooks and stewards. So we went out there one Sunday. A lady, a young sister who was a member of the union, she worked in the feed mill. We throwed up a picket line. And one of the union representatives on the ship come down and talked with us, Brother Nelson and I and the lady was named Sister Della, Della Burton. 248

So we, we explained why we was there. We tried to get a contract signed with this packing house company, and they said, "I'm going to tell you something, Brothers, we're not going to sail this ship with no scab meat on it." 254

So he went back, and he happened to call up his union there. His union were there in the same building, at 420 Gravis Street. Marine cooks and stewards. Marine cooks and steward union. So



they say, "No, even the representative, field representative come down. I want to talk to the brother." And he told the Armo<sup>WV</sup> Packing, say, "We want you to come down and pick up your meet because we're going to load it back on the docks. We taking it off the ship. We're not going to sail," he repeated again and told the representative that we came down to from Armo<sup>WV</sup> Packing, say, "We're not going to sail no scab meat, with no scab meat on this ship. And we all are union members." 269

So the Armo said, "Well," Armo representatives say, "I can't say nothing. You all are union men. And you all - as long as we got that picket line there," he say, "you all brothers," and the next day we sent out some more pickets to picket the ship. Kept - say, "As long as you all keep these pickets here, we're not going to accept the meat." So we did. We kept the pickets on it, on till Armo signed the contract, cuz we was holding up the ship, and the ship wasn't going to move till - not with no scab meat on there. 278

So we settled that. That's one of my experiences in working there, working with the union. Unity. Where there's unity, there is strength. And I began to learn more about the trade union movement.

Later on, when they - they passed the Taft Hartley law - that was during the time of - during the time of President Truman. Congress then passed the bill they called the Taft Hartley law, anti-labor bill. Truman vetoed it. But the House of Representatives - I don't know exactly the Senators or the Congressmen overrid the President's veto, and the Taft Hartley law was in effect, which was



designed to destroy unions, in my opinion it was - it did destroy them. 298

They had the rules and regulations that you could not belong to certain organizations, and the specific organization they named was the Communist Party of the United States of America. You had to sign a oath, some paper, pledge. You had to go before the National Labor Relations Board and state and sign a statement that you were not a member or affiliate with the Communist Party of the United States of America. 309

So we were not - we stopped paying dues at that time, which I will not stop paying dues to the Communist Party. We withdraw the Communist Party. We was not members of the Communist Party when Brother Nelson was brought before the court, indicted him, the grand jury, federal grand jury indicted him that he was a member of the Communist Party. They tried Brother Nelson in about a week. I went to court with him. Every day the brother was very sick. He suffered with asthma, and I go with him every day. He gets so sick in the court we had to bring him out and let him lay out on the bench. And the judge will not recess the case. The court, would not adjourn the court so the brother could go to the hospital or try to do something for hisself. He was abused by the judge. 330

They find in a week trial that Brother Nelson - on the last day was a Friday, I believe - in the early '40s and the late '40s. He was fined guilty. Got ten years concurrent, which he had to serve five. So before the brother could start his serving, the brother passed. Andrew Nelson died in the late, early Fifties, somewhere in that time.



Brother Nelson passed, and the next thing I was subpoenaed. I was working at a cotton compress, and the marshall, U.S. Marshall, served me one day with a letter, a subpoena, to appear before the Un-American Activity Committee, which was a Friday. Between those years, the early Fifties. And I appeared that Friday before the Un-American Activity Committee, and they asked me over fifty questions. And I refused to answer them. I told them, "Until I be able to make a statement," and they asked me - one of the committee members asked me, say, "What is your statement?" I say, "Before I - first, I'd like to ask you a question." 362

"Was Senator Eastland a member of the Klans?" And he said, "Nah, we ain't got you here to ask question. We have you here to answer question." They refused - when I asked them that question, they refused to let me make my - I say, "I would like to make a statement." I was before Judge Scally Wright for November the 4th. Scally Wright court. Facing the possibility of ten years, Brown say, "And I want to say again, "I refuse to answer any question," and I say, "Until I make a statement." 379

And we went on with that. And I didn't answer none. They recessed. And I thought it was all over-with. I happened to go to the lawyer's office, one morning passed by, and I was in that area, and I stopped. And they say, "Brown, you walking around here. You have been indicted," cuz he used to kid with me a lot. James Mac, McCain, and I said, "Been indicted, Brother?" He said, "Yeah, you indicted by the grand jury. They gonna bring you before court and try you for being a member of the Party, the Communist Party of the United States, as a trade union." He say, "When you sign that

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affidavit, that anti-Communist affidavit, you was a member of the Communist Party. You were at the National Labor Relations Board." I said, "I was not." 398

So they finally brought me to trial on November the 4th, said that I was the member of the Communist Party. I was indicted, March the 7th, 1957, served with a subpoena, was mailed to the wrong address. On March 29th, 1957, I reported the, to sign up my unemployment insurance. I was served there at the office to appear before the judge the same afternoon to post bond. I was unable to obtain bond. I was held until Monday, April 1st, 1957, and reject my claim, Division of Unemployment. My being not available, they claimed that I was not available for work March the 29th. So I told them what happened. I was picked up, the Unemployment office that morning, March 29th. I were arrested later that same day. Continued to harass me. Attempt to frighten me because I was a militant labor leader. 429

I was proud to be a member of the ILWU, one of the two, few unions which Negro had full emancipation, share leadership responsibility with white workers, anti-Communists did nothing but excuse that, the Eastlands, to frighten the paid informers. All important to take over and destroy the union. I fought to the best of my ability, with some support from unions, individuals, church members, some other trade unions, even from the Catholic priests, helped me. Some black Catholics helped me. Some visit where I was in jail before I went to trial. 449

So I went to trial back November 4th in front of Judge Scally Wright. We had only one black American and the District Attorney



had three District Attorneys, I think. I know it was two. Refused to set on the jury. Was a, was a female. And they got her off, and it was an all-white jury. I was in court a whole week from testimony. They brought in a Chinese guy, and I never had see'd but one Chinese in New Orleans, and that was on the dock while he was running a restaurant. And I know - and they find some young Chinese, about in his thirties, to come to testify and say that I tried to get him to join the youth Communist Party. Never see'd him before.

375

And they brought in a sister by the name of Sister Clara. Said I was a member of the Communist Party. I used to go to her house and sat down, we talked, we had a few drinks, but we never did discuss political affairs. We always discussing - she was asking me about the Nation of Islam. We were talking about Elijah Muhammad, black history, but we never did bring up the political issue or any issue or discuss the American Communist Party. And she said that I was a member of the Party. 491

I knew her husband a long time ago. He belonged - he was belonged to the Progressive Party during 1948, with Henry A. Wallace, which I worked. I was also working with the Progressive Party, getting people signed up, registered so they could vote. We would go out in the rural area and from the - we had one from the [inaud.-502] tobacco workers, a representor, one from the leather [inaud.-504] workers. We went out in the rural area at night, and one night that we were shot at. We was on a [coughs] the way coming back to New Orleans, and the man by the - one of our friends was driving the car, and he was shooting. He said, "Oh, I forgot. I got



a pistol in here," so he opened his drawer, glove compartment, and he shot back about three times in the back while he was going. And they turned off. We didn't have no more trouble with them that night. 516

That's what was happening. We was very active, getting, organized people at the feed mills. We had a place out in Souzberry because it was fertilizer plant. We had the - a number of other - cotton compresses, textile, Blenko Company, which we had close to fifteen hundred employees at, at the um Flenko Plant in New Orleans, on Gravis Street dock. We had the rice mills, the fertilizer plants, and other mills. We was making some progress. 535

We also got - we got a trophy. One Labor Day parade is when labor used to parade in New Orleans. We got - the mayor was standing on the steps, and we stopped, and I made a few, said a few words. And that year we got a trophy. The mayor presented Local 207 with a trophy. 547

They find me - find me guilty, and Judge Scally Wright - when I went before the Judge November, they - they find - I have to stay about that - I stayed in jail a whole year before they brought me to trial. They find me guilty that week, and I was - the judge say, "I'm going to give you five years." They had give me ten, but I say, "I'm going to run them concurrent. You only have to serve five." This was Judge Scally Wright. Was the - he give me five. And I say, "This is an order." I was struggling, and I was indicted, find guilty. They sent me back to the parish prison there in New Orleans, and I stayed there a while till they come got me, and I was speaking through the bars there to the rest of the inmates. In the night, the word got



around that I was going to leave that morning. The old buzzer was around, pulled around my cell. I was in a cell all alone. They didn't allow no one, even when I go to the shower. 589

They would clear the day room to put fright into the people that I was some dangerous character. By being a Communist you are dangerous! Even if you're black, you're dangerous! I want to say I spoke that night all the, a lot of the inmates. I made quite a bit of friends cuz during the time when I was going to trial, it would come on the radio inside the jail. And all the inmates there was, would clap for it, wish me good luck cuz I was standing up fighting for the rights of my people and working people as a true trade unionist. I wanted to see better conditions. I wanted to see better health meetings. I wanted to see better houses, better hospital, better schools, better education for our people, and particularly for the seniors, the retirees. I wanted to see decent homes, homes and public domain, that we all could live in peace. We all could have decent food, decent health, decent houses, decent education, in particular to study our history, black history. As a matter of fact, I'd like to see all nationalities have knowledge of their history. That's what I was fighting for. 631

And I went on after I talked that night, had one little guy, he kinda couldn't understand too much. He didn't know what he wanted to say. Sometime he'd start off right, and then he'd forget. He was there. I told him, I said, "Let him talk. Let him bring it out." He clapped his hands after he couldn't get out what he say, he just, he clapped. Other brothers in there clapped with him. I learned. When they picked me up in Houston, I, I happened to - to leave,



jump bail. I was on the bond. I left there. I went to Houston. And I met some people there, and I talked. I raised funds. And they picked me up. They put me in Houston about - I was there about five days, and I was talking to the brothers the place I went out. Made friends. When they find out that the black folks, the young black folks, were not scared of the word "Communist." They'd read it in the paper. They'd say - some of them ask me what do it mean? What are they saying? I'd say to them I was fighting for the rights of my people, fighting for the rights of working people, trade union, decent home, decent education, decent jobs, and definitely get rid of race discrimination. 670

In those times we would call it segregation and Jim Crow. And I made friends, and they hated to see me go that morning, when the marshalls come to get me. It made me feel good. The brothers was clapping, saying, "Good luck, Brother. Good luck." And I used to talk to them, and some of them wanted - they come to Houston. They let them come in my cell's open after - they would come in and talk and one by one ask me questions. Some guy was in there for - I met all kinds. Murder, all kind of - talked with them. And they accept my advice. To give me strength, give me courage, and give me experience. And bit of the love and the respect from my people and the trade union as a whole, true trade unionists as a whole. 701

I want to say I learned much. I understood when I went. They taking me to Galveston, laid me over a night and a day in Galveston, and I also . . . 708



Lee Brown Tapes

3/17/94 3/31/94



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

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prison



think the job that I got to do. The kid was living in the project. And he was growing up - I don't know, Brownie may have been around going on nine years of age, or a little older. And I was wanting him, that I stayed around a while, trying to get me a job. 052

I went back, our Local 207, had merged with the packing house workers' union. So I went there and talked to the president of the packing house union, which our union had merged with him. And he said that "Brown, we don't have anything here, but I will give you a letter, give you a traveling card, to go to other places," which I said I would go to--California. I'd written a letter to, to Bill Chestnut, the ILW representative. He was the director at 450 Golden Gate, at the, the National office there, to William Chestnut. And he sent me a letter back and say, uh, "We can't guarantee you a job, but if you want to come, you're welcome, and we'll see what we can do for you." "See what we can do." 068

So the packing house representatives there, one of the business agents that we was, you want to go to California, San Francisco? I says, "Yes, I'll have a better chance of getting the job." And he say, "We would make sure we'd give you the proper identification." And they - one of the uh, representatives, the business agent, bought me a ticket. He say, "Get you clothes and things, whatever you want to take with you, to, to San Francisco." And I was talking to a fellow there, named Mr. Preston Holmes. An old trade union, an old longshoreman with the ILA there in New Orleans. And he say, "Brown, I heard you say . . ." He used to come over and visit - uh visit Mrs. Poplars there, and I was talking, and Mrs. Poplars what we call Marmese. Well, Marmese said, "Mr. Holmes, you have a son in

Mommie



San Francisco, don't you?" He says, "Yes." He said, "Well, Brown is going to San Francisco, and . . ." 085

And Mr. Holmes say, "I'm going to give you my son's address and phone number. When you get there, you call him." So he say, "You tell my son when you call him so he, he can identify you, cuz I'm going to give you - tell him that he sent me two shirts named initial JH, and he will know, meaning Joe Holmes. And tell him my name, tell him so he can know you, my name is Preston Holmes. Tell him his father, Preston Holmes, told him to identify the shirts, JH." Just Joe Holmes. 097

So I left. I had my few clothes, and I take it, and I left some of my books up on Drive Street. Like it was 2717 Drive, in New Orleans, Louisiana. And I told <sup>Mrs.</sup> Miss Poplars to take care of my books and my - I left my trunk there with my books in it, and some of the newspapers from the trial. And I told her I was going, and all of them greet me, those in the house who knew me, all of them greet me. Prepared me food. All of them got together, give me a donation. And I was - made me very proud. And I was going on to continue, coming into San Francisco to continue my struggle, continue to fight because when I was in the institution in Texarkana, Texas, I begin to learn. I talked to people there, made friends. And all nationalities. Trade unionists. I met religious brothers, some of them from different religious beliefs, some talk with from the Nation of Islam. And I got along fine. 120

One of the officers talked with me there. He was very friendly. He was telling me that he had been to all the institutions. He - kind of old - he says, "I'm fixin' to retire." And I was talking to him about

For only one prison experience



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 <sup>Also</sup> knowledge of ~~[inaud. 158]~~, I understood that symbolic talk, that symbol talk. That mean that somebody was in there that was talking <sup>Masonic</sup>



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

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prison  
Lee Brown



He had complete - had the write, he knew how to use the typewriter and everything. He says - I asked him would he put these, type these notes up for me, what I marked off and what I printed. I wasn't a good writer, but I could print a lot of stuff. I put it together. And he taken it and typed it up for me. And now - when I got ready to go, you had to bring your notes - it tells you right in the little book for me what they give you that you can bring out notes or even your life story. When I went back before the warden, he looked at it. He said, the way he looked at all my certificates, what I received, and he said, "You can't take this one with you." That was my notes. And he said they cause trouble if you take this out and begin to study it, because I had - I went back in the books and research on that religious movement, political movement, labor movement, in that, in the books. 252

And I studied more, find more about different things, the political issues, than I had read on the outside. So he say, "You can't take this." I don't know what he did with it. So I came on, left there, as I before say, come on to Texarkana, left Texarkana and come on to Texas, left there and came on, came on to New Orleans. Talked with the packing house representatives, and I'd written a Bill Chester letter at the ILU here in San Francisco, and Bill told me that you can come on and we'll do what we can for you, the best that we can. So I left. I get back over there again. They put me on the bus and ticket, and give me some ~~inaud.~~ <sup>food fried chicken & a little money</sup> 265] and were very nice. And I came on into San Francisco on the Greyhound bus. And I got in San Francisco, I had Joe Holmes' telephone number, his address what his son, what his father had given me to call him when I get to San Francisco. 270



So I went to the telephone there in the bus station. It was around 4:00 o'clock that morning, maybe a little later. And I called his home, and his wife answered the phone. I said, "May I speak to Brother Joe Holmes, please?" And she say, "No, he's not here at the time. He works at night." Then she say, "Hold it just a moment. I think I hear him coming him." He had to raise up his garage door. She says, "Yes, that's him." She say, "You stay on the phone, and I'll call him come to the phone." 279

"And I call him." Come to the phone, and Joe came to the phone and I told him, I give him the information, what his father had told me to tell him. And he says, "I'm coming right down to get you at the Greyhound." I said, "Correct." 282

That - the station was on 7th between Market and Mission Street. So about thirty minutes, maybe not that long, he drove up. He says, "Are you Lee Brown?" He walked in the station. I was setting in the seat with my suitcase. I said, "Yes, I'm Lee Brown." He say, "Well, I'm Joe Holmes, Preston Holmes' son in New Orleans." He say, "Come up." 289

He even wanted to take the suitcase. I said, "I can take it. Thank you, Sir." So he brought me to his home and told his wife, said, "Get up and fix this brother some breakfast." I said, "No, I can wait. I'm not that hungry. You all rest." He said, "But I works at night," but he went on to bed and say, told his wife to - and he had an extra room there, and say, "You go to bed and get ready, finish drinking coffee, whatever. The wife can cook breakfast for you if you want it." And I stayed there. 299



The next day it was an holiday. I think it was Thanksgiving, if I'm not correct, but it - and they went over to a friend called Della. She was a member of the ILWU Local 6, the warehouse workers. She worked there, coffee factory here in San Francisco. We went over to her home. They taking me over there. They had something like a party, Thanksgiving dinner. People laughing and she knew - all of her friends, her neighbor was there, and come around. 310

And I was very nice. When I got there, they started to introducing me to people, their friends, and whatever, and telling them why I came. Or [inaud. 312] most of the people there was from the South and New Orleans. I was from New Orleans, and they had Soothsbury, over across the river. But not - I was very happy. And they started talking in loud [inaud. 317]. Even - they say we're going to pick up donations for this brother. They passed the hat. Say, "We heard about his case also." 320

So that made me very proud. Or successful, and I learned through these struggles. That's why today that I want to share this knowledge, this information, that my life can be a guide, a history, and I feel that the people, working people, poor people, [inaud. 329] regardless of who are, what's your religion, what's your philosophy, or what's your political belief, have a right to know. 331

I learned, and I refer the day that the world I live in is the university of learning. And the people are teachers of the best teachers at the grassroots level. The labor movement I've learned many things. I learned a lot in the struggle. From the year that I joined the labor movement I was young, 16. My uncle knew the president with the labor, common labor union, knew Mr. Springen. I



never will forget. At the top, was a member of the union. Worked at Todd Johnson dry dock in Galveston, and he - and they taken me to the meeting on a Saturday. And I was the youngest kid. I was a young man, a young 16-year-old kid, and they - and I signed for my book, paid for my book, and they accept me that Saturday as a union member, swore me in, and gave me - I'll never forget. It was a black book. 352

Labor union man. And I struggled. I worked. And I want to say that I had learned the best education, the proletarian education, me, a trade union, rank and file education, grassroot education, from the labor movement. And I learned from other peoples there. In Texas at the dry dock. I struggled. 362

The history of a struggle. I also am - there when I got in to New Orleans, I was [inaud. 366], I went into the - I was a member of the Mason, Masonic. And also I begin to learn about Islam. I've studied - I learned the history through Mason, through Nation of Islam, through the labor movement. I begin to educate myself. I learned. These things that I learned were the benefit not only for me, but for the masses of working people to share my wisdom, my knowledge, and experience. I want to share a guideline, struggle a better way of life. I learned. And I want to share it with not only the young, but with the elderly and all who are willing to learn. I learned. 382

I worked in the hotels there, Fairmont, during the time of the Jack Tarr Hotel, I was knowing that the St. Mary [inaud. 387], the hotel is [inaud - 388] hill, the old Jack Tarr Hotel. And I began, and I [inaud. 390] so many things, see. Put together my life story to tell so



many things that I could say here today. In my struggle I was the first shop steward [inaud. 395]. They had it in the contract, but nobody had thought about putting it into reality. It was a contract that [inaud. 398], but nobody did it. 399

When I was on the night shift, the night porter, I began to talk, after we sat down to lunch. We had about thirty minutes to lunch. We begin to talk, and we begin to look over our union book, our [inaud. 404] discussion. And I said, "We need shop a steward. Some things . . ."

I enrolled in the Nation of Islam. I was living at 2017 Jackson Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana. I sent the letter to 5335 So. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. July 31st, 1959. And I was accepted. Mr. Lee X Brown, 1730 LaSalle Street, Avenue, San Francisco, California. 1730 LaSalle Avenue, San Francisco, California. And 1962, July 27th. "Thank you for your sending me the newspaper clipping and always keep alert and [inaud. 428] the best wishes for success. You believe and enter," and so for on. 431  
END



Interview with Lee Brown, 3/31/94

My name is Lee Brown. I am going to talk about the activity and the day that I was released from the Federal Institution of Correction in Texarcana, Texas on July 12th, the year 1960. 008

I'm going to talk about that, the things that I can remember. I will try to do the best I can with what I have. I was released - repeat - I was released on that day. A total of good time I had 263 days. That's C. O. Anderson, Chief, classification and parole officer. Released me that day. On the 12th day of July, 1960, I was released on parole. I were released in Texas, a little town by the name of Hitchcock. 023

My cousin there, before I were released, they wrote and asked them would he take me in. He wrote back and told them yes. Then I was released. I was released on the term I had about 180 days, the tenth and third 1960. I had to do that on the outside. My cousin accept me. Say that he would see to me surviving, and that day that I was released I was given a ticket to Hitchcock, Texas. I think it was on the Greyhound bus. I was released from the institution on that particular day, as I said before, July 1960. 040

When I got to Hitchcock, Texas, I went over to my cousin's house. Was not too far. Where the bus put me off, it wasn't a bus station, but he put me off at Hitchcock. And I knew why it was, cuz I had been there before, and I got off the bus with my little belongings they give me. They give me a suit, a shirt, hat and a pair of shoes,

Released from prison



and one dress of work clothes. It was khakis or cotton, whatever.  
050

And I went on into my cousin's house, and I knocked on the door. They was so glad to see me. But that's the one, my cousin's wife, cousin Seely, the one that taken a stroke. They supposed to come up to the institution on that Saturday, and that Friday my other cousin [inaud. - 058] had an accident, an automobile, and got killed. When she was told they was very close together relation, she had a stroke and did not say another word. She was - that was my cousin's wife, cousin Seely. 063

And I went there, and they asked us, say, "Do you know who this?" She began to laugh and smile, began to smile. Indeed, she knew who I was cuz our family was very close. I was staying at her house with my cousin, Boss. We called him Boss. When I was picked up and taken back to Louisiana for trial. So definitely she knew. She was going to come to the institution in Texarcana, Texas to see me, [inaud. - 073], my cousin from Galveston [inaud. = 074]. Unfortunate, he had an accident, and he got killed. But when she learned - they told her, and she had a stroke, and did not speak anymore. 076

So I was - stayed with [inaud. 078], put my clothes, cousin say, "You're welcome," and they prepared a dinner for me that evening, and we set down and talked. The next morning I went around to see my other relatives that was living close by. I had some in Galveston, some in Hitchcock, some in Lemar, some in Texarcana. I went around, and I see'd those I had scattered all over Texas, Port Arthur, Houston, Beaumont, and also I let them know that I was back, and all of them was glad to see me. 088



So I stayed there a while, about a month or so. I worked and helped cousin Boss with, and cousin Seely, cuz they need help. I prepared her food. She had to eat electric - liquid food, I'm sorry. Liquid food. And whilst he was gone to work, he was glad for me to be there to help her [inaud. - 094] cuz they had helped me. And I stayed there, and I prepared it because she had relatives and friends and next door neighbors in the little area would see about her, or I would be there sometime to fix her food. Sometime I had another cousin, lived further down. I don't know if you call it a road or whatnot, street. It was just something like a little gravel road. I would go and stay with one of my cousins were called - most of our people were called aunt and uncles. 102

Aunt Bernice - I call Aunt Bernice. Sometime I'll go there and stay, and I'd come back, cuz cousin Seely had quite a few friends and relatives, would be there all the time. Her daughter would stay there at night. And I would go and back and forth, to help take care of her, cuz I was released there, and I was going to do the best I can with what I had. 109

So I stayed there and finished out my parole, and I decide - I say I would go down to New Orleans, see my son, because that was - his mother was my common law wife, which was named Rose, and that's the only son that I was the father. And I say, "I must go down there and see about Brownie." I called him Brownie. I don't know Brownie's about eight or ten years old then, maybe. I'm not quite sure. I went down and - went down to New Orleans, and I went over to some friends of mine house there, and I say, "Well, I'm going over and see Rose." And also I went to my brother's house, and I called



Rose. She had a telephone, and I called her, asked her could I come over and see Brownie. She said, "Sure." 126

So I happened to go over. My nephew or named late nephew Skeet, was alive then. He was a musician. He played with Fats Domino's brother in a small band. Fats' brother played in a little local band there in New Orleans. His name was Freddie Domino. 136

My nephew was named Skeet, and he blow saxophone or trumpet, played in Freddie's band. So he happened to be at my brother's house that day, and he says, "I'll take you, old Uncle Lee," so him and I got in the automobile. And one thing about Skeet - he happened to have in his glove compartment a little paper bag, a small bag of quarters. He say, "Here, Uncle Lee. This will help you some." And I thanked him very - I say, "Thank you, Skeet, for being so nice to your uncle." 148

This is hard to remember, hard to talk about. It's emotional. Cuz the struggle I went through and the struggle I experienced from the depth of my heart when I talked about it. I went there and I met Rose, and she was glad to see me. And Brownie was setting outside. He - maybe like I was like when I was young. Setting always alone, by myself, alone. And she called him, said, "Brownie, come here." [inaud. - 160] Wanted to holler to loud about your daddy here, and he come and he saw who I was. He was young when I left, but he had grew up, and he knew me. He called me Lee. He ran to me, embraced me, hugged me. He was glad, very glad to see me. 167

And I was glad to see him. I was emotion. Sometime I get very emotion because it come depths of my heart. [inaud. - 172] is



real. And I set there and talked. So Skeet say, "Uncle Lee, I'm gone." And I thanked him cuz for the gift of quarters, thanked him for bringing me over, and he says, Skeet say, "You in good hands now, Uncle." And I say, "So long, Skeet, take care of yourself." 180

I talked, and I was so glad to see Rose and Brownie, which I call him. We set down and talk, and I talked to him. Cuz I remember when he was young, I bought a set of encyclopedias. They called "The World." A set of red books. "The World Encyclopedia." And I told him to study, to read, and I picked out a subject dealing with Islam, and I told him, "You study that. Learn about and study your history." 194

I even bought him a few books - that wasn't too many books before I left in New Orleans on black history. I don't even think they had a black bookstore in New Orleans, not to my knowings. But I say, "You get what you can, and study your history," because before I left I was in the Nation of Islam. 202

I sometime I used to buy the Pittsburgh Courier, an Afro-American newspaper, and I began to read it. And I kept seeing a picture of a man talking about freedom, justice, and equality. To me he looked like a Chinese. And I kept wondering, I said, "What the Chinese is so concerned about black folks?" And what he was saying - he was talking about my history, talking about my freedom. And I was very much concerned, and finally on one day I had my play sister - people thought that we were sisters and brother. We resembled each other, and I got, I say, "Levoya, I want to - Levoya, I want you to write to this place in Chicago. 5335 So. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago 15, Illinois." And I finally got an answer. 225



Lee Brown, 3/31/94--6

Back during that time, it was - I received the answer. I was living and Mr. Lee Brown, they called me, at 2017 Jackson Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana. And he was telling me about the Nation. And the name of the law, the beneficial, the most merciful, the lord of the world. And in the name of his divine messenger, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. 238

The next letter I received, Mr. Lee X Brown, 1017 Jackson Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana. And he told me, sent me another letter, and I received your letter, he told me. "I received your letter October the 26th, 1960. It is my hope by this time you have find a job. I am very much sorry to learn your difficulty in finding a job. Continuing to strive hard and pray to Allah, and you will be successful. I returned the clippings of notice of your trial. I thank you, like to keep them. I pray to Allah for your success and blessings. A salaam alechem. Your brother, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the messenger of Allah." 258

The next letter I received from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, out of 1730 LaSalle Street in San Francisco, California. He was greeting me and wanted to know how was I was doing, was I was successful in finding work there. The letter was very short and right to the point. He say, "Seek [inaud. - 270], brother." He sent me greetings of [inaud. - 273], love, and peace. 274

When I begin, he sent me another letter, say that now, December 16, 1960. I'll say Mr. Lee X and Neptune, San Francisco, California. "A salaam <sup>allex</sup> alechem. In the name of Allah, the most merciful and [inaud. - 284] master of the day of judgment. I submit to him and seek his divine guidance." He say, "Now you are a

Elijah Muhammad



Lee Brown, 3/31/94--7

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.

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Not very much. But I studied labor history was there. Not the kind that I was able to buy on the outside and get. Political history. I studied about communism, socialism. 339

And it was very interesting. I learned a - learned - study hard. I went to school. Some of the inmates was teachers, and some of them was very good. They would take their time with you and help you, and I was concerned in that institution that I learned. I talked to people there. I learned from people. We sat down and had discussion with each other. And it was very good, that I learned many things. 350

And I want to say I put it on both tapes that I was able -

When I was - I stayed a while there. When I was in San Francisco, I was thinking about the Party here, and I was advised to go to the bookstore - at that time it located on Market. I forget the title of the bookstore at the time, but it was the Party bookstore. One time is on - that's when I find it was on Market, and again it moved on Turk Street between, I think, Masonic and Jones on Turk. I went there on Market Street, and I happened to talk to the fellow, and I introduced myself to him. And he talked to me, and he asked me about the condition. We was discussing the condition, and I had some Party literature with me. But that time I told him I was not in the Party, on account of the - you know the - he knowed the story on the labor, under the - the Taft Hartley law, McCarren Act, and the Smith Act, and particular the one that struck labor. It was the Taft Hartley law. That they had brought me up before the Un-American Activity Committee, and also later on I refused to cooperate with them, and they brought me to trial under circumstantial evidence



and tried to give me the, the attorney, the U.S. attorneys, which there were three of them, were fighting for the jury to give me twenty years. But they finally the jury come back and find me guilty as charged, being a member of an affiliate or associate with communists, with the Party, or affiliate with communists period. 401

And that judge brought me back to sentence me. He say, "We'll give you ten years, running concurrently," meaning you'll only do five. And the behavior on [inaud. - 410] however three, because I have did a year in jail before I went to trial. So we discussed, and he introduced, told me to contact some people there, was I - I'd got into the culinary union, Local 110, but I brought my traveling card and recommendation, a letter from New Orleans from the packing house union. And I happened to go up on Sixth Street during that time. That's where the culinary union was located, Local 110. And I joined that, and I begin to learn by talking to people, meeting peoples, which I begin to learn. I - going to the bookstore, and I started going to meetings, and I met with those people who were from the culinary, the culinary union, which was about five or six Party members used to meet and discuss the issues in the culinary. That's the one I was instructed to contact by someone else I know very well, and I started going to that meeting, and they soon began to, to break up and go into other groups. And I went into the - the started to attend meetings with all the groups. 441

Why we did not meet anymore, I - culinary Party group. Then I started to going to meetings, different meetings concerning the - about jobs, or fighting racism, or issues around, how [inaud. - 448] issues that benefit the people. And I happened to go to different

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*Kenrid Alexandra*

meeting. I happened to meet ~~Kenrid~~ Alexandry. She was seemed very nice. I would go to meetings where I would hear her talk, and I was very much concerned of her talk. I liked the way she talked. I was concerned. I learned a whole lot from her. She was, inspired me very much. And I liked very much - repeat that - I learned something by going to Party meetings there and listening to her talk. And I say it was very important, very good. 465

And I began - then the bookstore moved on Valencia. At 522 Valencia Street. I happened to meet another person. I told them I was not going to get into that, back to the Party. He begin to talk. He said, "Long as you had [inaud. - 474]," and I was saying there were some things I didn't agree with. And he kept - I said, "I will [inaud. - 477], I will support the issues. I have faith in the program. I have faith in the Party, the principle, but some of the people, some of the leadership I cannot understand." I begin to read Party literature, when every year - I think it was every four years they have convention and they pass resolutions, resolution on top of resolution concerned with Afro-America, and I still couldn't get the understanding what was going on. It created doubt in my mind. 491

Sister Kenrid, I should say the late Sister Kenrid - I went to the memorial when she passed, a tragedy death, and I went there that Saturday to the place, Congress Church of Oakland, Saturday, 29th, May 29th, 1993, at 3:00 p.m. I was on the program. And I said what inspiration. I told about, tell about the labor movement, tell about when they have trade union conference somewhere. I would speak at meetings. She was the chair of the Party in northern California,



and I would say that she will be missed. I never believe that we would find anyone to take her place. 523

I want to say I learned a great deal. Sometime when I be saying things, go there to get advice, to get some understanding because I know she had experience about people, and she understands people cuz she was down to earth. She was a grassroot teacher and leader. I would go to talk to her, and I would say, "Kenrid, I got a problem." And she'd say, "Well, tell me about it. Talk to me." And I'd start talking, and I'd have my opinion about it. She'd say, "Now, Lee." Now, when she say, "Lee," I had a chance. But when she rephrased and say, "Now, Lee Brown," I knew I was in trouble. 544

But [mumbles]. In her opinion. I respect her opinion. Cuz I loved her very much. Her family. Her, her husband. I said, "Definitely" [inaud. - 552], her husband, Franklin. Her was dedicated to the struggle of freedom not only for the Afro-American, but for the working people as a whole. She was dedicated, was willing to help people who was in trouble, who were lacking of understanding. And I'd listen at her and Franklin on the floor many a time, and I - it helped me, give me inspiration, political inspiration. And I read about her. Read about her in her struggle in the southland. I would say Kenrid at a time when, was the state chair of the Communist Party in California. I say she will be missed. My struggle - I struggled - [inaud. - 574] long time socialist died in the blaze. 576

I want to say this thing's I wrote an article to the Daily World in New York City, 2239 W. 23rd Street, New York City, a letter to the editor. My views on Kenrid Alexandry and the like. I, Lee Brown, a



member of the Party for fifty years. I have a fifty-year-old pin. As I read Kenrid article, pertaining to social and the U.S. Left, August 1990. Enclosed I will come to not only in California, but nation to read the article. I also encourage everyone to read this article by Kenrid, one the report on January 27 and 28, '90 at the two-day conference, and the article from the conference, "Equality," '90 October 6th and 7th, '90, Winston, at Winston Unity Center. I got in and I got a lots out of the three articles. They encouraged me to move forward, that among the masses. 620

After reading these articles encouraged me to get involved, get involved in more mass organizations, work with retirees, senior groups, national, in homes, about houses. The reason I encourage other comrades to read, study Kenrid's writing, because it is very encouraging, very encouraging. It is extraordinary work, comrade Kenrid is doing during this period. 637

I, and my opinion of her today, to me and my views of her, that she is a Mary, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and Harriet Tubman, and I will always remain her brother in struggle. Keep up the good work, [inaud. - 649], Lee Brown. Mark well.

I will be waiting for the trial case to come out of Texas, and also wait on the file that come from the FBI. Then I have a lot of articles, a lot of letter to the editors, and may have other things that the author can interview me, talk with me about, and I can bring on more about myself in the labor movement in the struggle for peace. I had articles when I went in, went to the conference in New York City in 1981, and I met a number of peoples from all over the country, including young brothers and sisters from the southland,



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

727

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